Arranging your child’s funeral

A guide for bereaved parents, families and carers
Arranging your child’s funeral
We would like to offer you and your family our deepest sympathy at this difficult time. The thought of arranging your child’s funeral can feel very daunting. Unless there are particular religious or cultural reasons for holding a funeral quickly, there is usually no need to hurry. You can take all the time you need to make sure that the funeral is arranged in a way that will be meaningful to you and your family.

Your religion, culture or family traditions may guide you in the many choices that are available, but arrangements for a baby or child’s funeral are often quite different from the way adults’ funerals are conducted. This is the final physical act of caring for your child. It is a time, amid profound grief, when you can acknowledge your child and the meaning their life holds.

It is important to do whatever feels right for you and your family. Do not feel pushed or rushed to make decisions you are not comfortable with. This booklet contains information about the choices available, and suggestions of other things you may want to think about. We hope you find it helpful.

Help with the arrangements
There are different ways to organise a funeral. Most people find it helpful to use a funeral director to make the arrangements on their behalf. You might already know a local funeral director you would like to use, or family and friends may have recommendations. It can be useful to speak to different funeral directors to get an idea of their services, and any costs involved, before making a decision. You could ask a family member or friend to help make these initial enquiries for you. Details of the main professional associations for funeral directors can be found at the end of this booklet.

Alternatively you may decide to make some or all of the arrangements yourself or with the help of family and friends. The Natural Death Centre and Good Funeral Guide websites have useful advice and information about how to do this (see end of booklet for contact details).
How much does a funeral cost?
Many funeral directors do not charge for arranging a child’s funeral however there may be costs such as a burial plot (or “lair”) and headstone, flowers, a celebrant, a notice in the newspaper or a reception after the funeral. These costs can vary considerably. When arranging the funeral, be sure that you understand any costs involved and the help that may be available if you need it.

Help with funeral costs
If you need help with funeral costs and you (or your partner) get benefits or tax credits, you may be entitled to a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund. To be eligible, you must receive a qualifying benefit such as:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- A disability element of Working Tax Credit
- One of the extra elements of Child Tax Credit
- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit

You must also be the child’s parent, close relative or have parental responsibilities. You may not qualify if there is an equally close, or closer, relative (e.g. an absent parent) who does not receive one of the qualifying benefits.

The Funeral Payment will only cover the actual burial or cremation costs and some travel costs, plus up to £700 for any other expenses, e.g. a funeral director’s fees.

You can claim a Funeral Payment from the date of your child’s death up to three months after the funeral. To claim, either download and complete form SF200 from the www.gov.uk website and take it to your local Jobcentre Plus or phone the DWP helpline on 0345 606 0265. A funeral director can also give you information about this.
Decisions about your child’s funeral

Funerals and memorial services can be held in a number of different settings, for example a place of worship or at a cemetery or crematorium. A funeral director can give you detailed advice about facilities in your area but the following information may be helpful in thinking about the choices. One of the main decisions you will have to make is whether to organise a burial or cremation.

**Burial**

If you decide on a burial for your child, you may already have a family connection with a particular area or cemetery. If not, it can be helpful to visit local cemeteries to choose one you feel is suitable. Some cemeteries have special areas for babies and young infants. Lairs in these areas are often provided free of charge but you would still have to pay for any marker or headstone you may wish to add. If your child was older, then you may need to pay for both the lair and the headstone. Cemeteries have different rules about the type of headstones and memorials that are allowed. There may also be restrictions about what you can place on the gravesite. A funeral director or cemetery manager can talk you through all the options. If your child is to be buried you have some choices:

- You could have a ceremony in a place of worship before the burial
- The burial can form all or part of the service with everybody attending
- You can arrange for the burial to be private or for close family only.

**Cremation**

There are several crematoriums in Edinburgh and one in Livingston, however other areas may not have a crematorium nearby. A funeral director will be able to advise you about facilities in your area. If you decide on a cremation then you have some choices:

- You could have a ceremony in a place of worship before the cremation
- The ceremony can be at the crematorium with everyone attending
You can arrange for the cremation to be private or for close family only.

You also have a choice about what will happen to your child’s ashes. Ashes are all that is left in the cremator at the end of the cremation process, once any metal has been removed. Crematorium staff will make every effort to ensure that ashes can be gathered following the cremation, however in the case of babies and infants there may be rare instances where it is not possible to recover any ashes.

After the cremation you can ask for your child’s ashes to be scattered or buried at the crematorium or ask that they are kept so you can make other arrangements. Some people bury their child’s ashes in a cemetery or scatter them in a place that is special to them. Others choose to keep them at home. A funeral director can talk you through all the options to help you reach a decision that feels right for you.

**Planning the service**

If you would like to arrange a religious ceremony you should contact the appropriate person from your faith or belief group. Alternatively you can have a non-religious ceremony conducted by a humanist or civil celebrant. A funeral director can help you find a suitable person to conduct the service.

The hospital chaplains can guide you as you plan an appropriate service for your child. A chaplain can also conduct a religious or non-religious funeral service if you wish.

Whoever you choose to conduct the funeral service for your child, this person will want to meet with you. They will ask you to think about the service, and to decide if you would like music, poems, readings, hymns or songs. They may have suggestions but you can choose the readings and music. They will also ask you about special things you may wish to be said about your child. Members of your family or friends of your child can take part in the service if you would like this.
Other details to think about...
Where your child is cared for before the funeral - Upon your instructions, your chosen funeral director will contact the hospital to take your child into their care. You will be able to visit and spend time with your child at the funeral director’s premises if you wish. It may also be possible for your child to be brought home before the funeral.

Choosing a coffin - You can have a ‘traditional’ wooden coffin for your child or choose something a bit different. Coffins are now available in a wide range of materials, designs and colours. Some families choose a plain coffin and then have it decorated, or invite family and close friends to write messages on it. A funeral director can offer you a range of options but if you prefer something different, just ask. Alternatively there are companies that produce coffins for babies and children and sell directly to the public. The Natural Death Centre and Good Funeral Guide websites have lists of recommended companies (see end of booklet for contact details).

Thinking about clothes and special items for your child - You may want your child to be dressed in a particular outfit or wrapped in a special blanket for the funeral. You may also wish to put special items into the coffin such as a soft toy, a letter or a poem. If you have other children they might like to draw a picture or write a message to put in the coffin. If your child is being cremated you should ask the funeral director or crematorium about any restrictions on what you can put in, as there are strict rules about what can be cremated.

Transport for the funeral - A funeral director can arrange suitable transport for your child and close family members on the day of the funeral. For a baby or younger child, they may have a car that can carry a smaller coffin and also have space for the family. There may also be alternatives to a traditional hearse so you should talk about the options.

What to wear - Black is often worn at funerals but any colour can be appropriate for a child’s funeral. Some families invite people to come dressed in their child’s favourite colour or sporting team strip, or simply ask for ‘bright colours only’.
Your personal choice and comfort, whether informal or formal, is the most important factor. It should feel right for you.

**Flowers** - You can choose whether or not to have flowers on or with your child’s coffin. Most florists have a selection of flower arrangements appropriate for children, or you can provide your own. You can also decide whether or not you want other people to send or bring flowers. After the funeral you may want to take some of the flowers home to press and keep as mementos. You may also want to keep any message cards that are sent with the flowers.

**Putting a notice in the newspaper or online** - This can include an announcement of your child’s death and details of the time, date and place of the funeral service.

**A printed order of service** - You may decide to have a personalised order of service with a photo of your child and details of the ceremony such as the words and music that are used. If you are inviting people to meet up after the funeral you could also include the address and directions to the venue. A family member or friend can often make these for you, or a funeral director can arrange to have them printed although there may be a small charge for this.

**Service attendance cards** - This can be a good way for people to leave their names at the service, along with a message if they wish. As you may not see everyone at the service, these cards can act as a reminder of who came on the day and the messages can bring comfort.

**Donations** - You may decide to ask for donations to a named charity. Families sometimes request this instead of flowers. A funeral director can help organise a collection plate and ensure the safekeeping of donations to give to you later.

**After the funeral** - Some families invite people to meet up for a reception or tea after the funeral but you may prefer to be alone with your close family. There is no right or wrong thing to do. It must suit you and your family.
Useful contacts

The main professional associations for funeral directors in the UK are the National Association of Funeral Directors and the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors. Members of these associations must operate under a code of practice and have an established complaints procedure.

**The National Association of Funeral Directors**
Phone: 0845 230 1343
Website: www.nafd.org.uk

**The Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors**
Phone: 0845 230 6777
Website: www.saif.org.uk

The following websites have useful information about organising a funeral yourself, including natural funeral options, purchasing an alternative coffin, etc.

**The Natural Death Centre**
Website: www.naturaldeath.org.uk

**The Good Funeral Guide**
Website: www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk

Help with funeral costs may be available from:

**Department for Work & Pensions Bereavement Service**
Phone: 0345 606 0265 (or Textphone: 0345 606 0285)

**REACT** is a charity which offers financial support to families of children with a life-limiting illness. They may be able to help with funeral and memorial costs.
Phone: 020 8940 2575
Email: react@reactcharity.org
Website: www.reactcharity.org

This booklet is checked regularly and we do our best to keep the information up-to-date.

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