



The  
Compassionate  
Friends

## Preparing Our Child's Funeral

A nationwide organisation of bereaved parents and their families offering support after a child dies.

# Preparing Our Child's Funeral

---

Arranging our child's funeral is probably the most difficult task any parent can face. If you are in this position, then we offer you our heartfelt sympathies for the death of your child.

**Those of us who make up "The Compassionate Friends" (TCF) are all bereaved parents and siblings. We would like to offer you, from our collective experience, some ideas of how to manage the funeral and the different options you might find available. We hope these suggestions will be helpful. You may also have your own family traditions that will frame the decisions you make regarding your child's funeral. Conversations with the funeral director, other family members, your child's partner, friends and possibly religious leaders at your place of worship may also provide you with some guidance. Please do follow your heart in all of this, as far as you are able. You are surely going to be doing the best you can for your child at a time of utmost difficulty.**

In writing this leaflet, we recognise that there is a variety of cultural and religious customs. Please do select from the following only what is appropriate for you.

## Decisions to Make Before the Funeral

### Choosing a funeral director

The National Association of Funeral Directors is a good place to start if you are looking for a funeral director. You are able to contact more than one funeral director before making a

final choice. Funeral directors will answer whatever questions you have, so we should not hesitate to ask, even if it means calling or visiting them several times. See: [www.nafd.org.uk](http://www.nafd.org.uk) You could also contact the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors at [www.saif.org.uk](http://www.saif.org.uk)

## Costs

If our child was under the age of 18 and we live in England, a children's funeral fund is becoming available through which all fees will be waived by local authorities and met instead by government funding.

In addition, many funeral directors do not charge fees for the funeral of a child under the age of 18, although there may be other costs, such as crematorium or gravedigger fees. This website gives an example of a service provided, although there are others: [www.co-operativefuneralcare.co.uk/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-choices/childrens-funerals](http://www.co-operativefuneralcare.co.uk/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-choices/childrens-funerals)

If our child was 18 or over, we or our adult child's partner will need to manage the funeral costs, and this can cause additional stress. We, or someone on our behalf, should ask for an itemised estimate of the cost of the funeral from the funeral director.

If we are receiving certain allowances or benefits, we may seek a Funeral Payment from the government. If so, it would be wise to ask the Benefits Agency for advice before finalising any funeral arrangements.

For further information, see: [www.gov.uk/funeral-payments](http://www.gov.uk/funeral-payments)

We should remember that whatever funeral package we choose, and whatever the cost, we are doing right by our child in the way that is possible for us.

# Choosing between burial and cremation

We may already have a preference, or our child may have expressed their preference, but if we do want to choose between burial or cremation, the following website provides useful information about those options: **[www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/organising-funeral/burial-cremation](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/organising-funeral/burial-cremation)**

Burials can take place in churchyards, public cemeteries, natural burial grounds and other places, depending upon local regulations. Local councils will likely have a list of cemeteries. Here is a link with information about natural burial grounds: **[www.naturaldeath.org.uk/index.php?page=choosing-a-natural-burial-grounds](http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/index.php?page=choosing-a-natural-burial-grounds)**

Following cremation, ashes may be kept, buried or dispersed. There is no need for an immediate decision, as ashes can be kept by the family for as long as desired (although they may be presented initially in a biodegradable box, so if there is a plan to keep them, a more permanent container will be needed). The funeral director should be able to give time to consider all of this, along with what we want to do next, such as arranging for a permanent memorial, an insertion in the Book of Memory, or a plaque on a bench, stone or garden.

## The preparation of our child

We can choose how our child is dressed, if possible. We may need to decide whether this is something we want to do ourselves (with help), or would prefer others to do for us. If the funeral director is doing this, it will be helpful to give them a photograph of our child that clearly shows their hairstyle. We may wish to have a permanent record of this time; we (or the funeral director) can take photographs, a lock of hair and possibly a baby's hand or footprint.

We may, where appropriate, want to place one of our child's favourite possessions or a message in the coffin, or our other children, the grandparents or other family members may wish to do so; this can be arranged with the funeral director.

## Visiting the funeral home

There is the question of whether we want to see our child at the funeral home, and whether others would too. This is entirely a matter of our own personal wishes.

If family and friends want to see our child, they should be told of any significant change in their appearance. We may choose to have the coffin resting at home in the days before the funeral; this can provide some comfort that he or she is in our care until we say goodbye.

Our other children, even the younger ones, should be encouraged to take part in the discussions and arrangements; this will be helpful to them in their grieving, both now and later on.

## The passage of time

The amount of time that passes from our son or daughter's death until their funeral can vary considerably.

For some, the funeral takes place almost immediately. There may be a religious requirement for this.

For others, there can be a long wait until the funeral. If our child's death is followed by a post-mortem, we will have to wait until their body is released.

Sometimes a funeral will be delayed because of a waiting list at the church or crematorium, or even due to the weather.

Waiting for a delayed funeral can be an anxious time, whereas a funeral that takes place immediately might feel hurried.

In any event, the funeral is a significant marker in our grief for our child.

# Planning the Funeral Service

Discussing the possible alternatives for our child's funeral, and making the choices that are necessary, can reduce the feelings of helplessness and loss of control that arise at this time. Our involvement in these decisions, painful as it is, will ultimately help us in mourning the death of our daughter or son.

We can plan the funeral that we want for our child, and the time to be given to it. Crematoria generally allocate 20 or 30 minute sessions for a service, but the funeral director can book two or more sessions if needed. Forms of service, both religious and non-religious, can be made available to us by our funeral director.

A religious funeral can be conducted by our own minister, priest, imam, rabbi or other religious leader; if we do not have one, the funeral director can contact one for us. If we would prefer a nonreligious ceremony, we may wish to ask an officiant of the British Humanist Association to lead the funeral. For more information visit: [www.humanism.org.uk/ceremonies](http://www.humanism.org.uk/ceremonies). You can also contact the Fellowship of Professional Celebrants for a personalised funeral service: [www.professionalcelebrants.org.uk/find-a-celebrant/funeral-celebrants](http://www.professionalcelebrants.org.uk/find-a-celebrant/funeral-celebrants)

People who have been important in our child's life may be invited to officiate. This could be a friend, a teacher, a leader in a voluntary service or our child's employer. A non-religious funeral in a crematorium chapel or at the family home can be followed by burial or cremation.

Music and readings can be of our own choice, to reflect our child's interests and personality. We will need to check if a sound-system is available and who will operate it. Order of Service sheets can be printed for use on the day, to be kept afterwards, and these can include photographs of our child.

Sometimes the officiant will provide a transcript of the address if asked. We may also wish to record the funeral service: sometimes our distress during the actual event may hinder us from taking away a clear memory of the farewell to our child, and a recording could provide a unique solace afterwards.

Some of us might like to livestream the funeral. Our funeral director may be able to arrange this, or a friend could take care of it.

We may like to ask members of the family or friends to be coffin bearers, or we may wish to do this ourselves. If bearing the coffin is too difficult, acting as an escort is an alternative, or holding a cord. At the crematorium, it is helpful for some people to accept the painful reality of what has happened if the coffin disappears from sight before the conclusion of the service; for others this is too traumatic, and we can arrange to leave the chapel while the coffin is still present. The funeral director should be able to explain the options beforehand.

## Our surviving children

If we have surviving children, we will need to decide whether they should attend or take part in the funeral service as well as any planned memorial ceremonies at a later date. This will to a large extent depend upon the age and emotional maturity of the child/ren, but may also be determined by our own religious and cultural preferences.

Where appropriate, we may want to offer our child/ren a choice about attending, but if so, we should explain to them beforehand what will actually take place at the funeral, and not assume they will know this.

If our children choose not to attend, or being there is not possible for them, we can consider other alternatives. We could have a private family farewell or arrange other special events later on to remember their sibling who has died.



Our religious leader may give us advice about talking to our children. This website also has useful suggestions:

**[www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supporting-a-bereaved-child](http://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supporting-a-bereaved-child)**

## Preparing a memorial booklet

Many of us will produce a memorial booklet that includes photographs and stories about our child. Friends or family members may like to write short dedications that we can include. We may want to work on this ourselves, or a friend or professional could help us. This could be combined with the Order of Service or a separate booklet.

## Gifts and announcements

Some of us prefer to have floral tributes from close family only, and ask others to give a donation to a chosen charity instead.

Flowers can offer an opportunity for those present to become participants, rather than spectators. We may like to suggest that people bring a flower from their own garden, or a single flower from a florist, to contribute at a particular moment; or we may provide a flower for those present at the service, either to contribute or perhaps to take home with them.

Funeral directors can organise newspaper announcements, though we will want to agree the wording with them. If asked, they will list the names of those attending the funeral; supply cards for people to fill in; collect the cards accompanying the flowers and give them to us later; and receive cheques to forward the final sum to our chosen charity.

Some people choose to announce the death of a loved one on social media, however, it is crucial that close friends and family are informed privately before a public announcement is made, which could otherwise be quite upsetting. If we decide



to post details of the funeral or other relevant information on our social media accounts, it is important to check the privacy settings to limit who will be able to access this.

Social media can be a great way to connect with others who knew our child and who wish to offer support or share photographs. In time we may want to create a memorial page for our child. For more on this, see the TCF leaflet *Our Child's Digital Legacy*.

## The reception or “wake” after the funeral

The reception after the funeral should be what is most comfortable for us. It can be held at the family home, at the house of a relative or friend, or at a hotel, pub or restaurant.

Sometimes, a friend will offer to stay at the place where we will hold the reception, to be ready with drinks when everyone arrives. Preparing food can be one way in which relatives and friends can be helpful, but outside caterers can also be employed.

The main speaker at the funeral, if asked, can let people know if there is an open invitation. Information can also be included in the Order of Service. We may want to be with just the immediate family, or to invite everyone who attended the funeral. It is our choice.

## After the Funeral

It is common to feel exhausted following our child's funeral, through both the physical and emotional effort of the occasion. If we find ourselves regretting things that were said or done, or things that were missed, we should remember that we did the best we could. We can always arrange a memorial or thanksgiving occasion to take place at a later date, giving ourselves more time to consider additional tributes for our child.

Getting ready for the funeral might have been the focus of our thoughts and efforts for some days or weeks. Then, when the funeral is completed, we might feel quite deflated. The reality and permanence of our child's death may hit us very hard.

Our child's funeral is an act of love, one of many in our lives as parents, but one that we never would have wished to be necessary. With the funeral complete, we can keep on honouring and cherishing the memories of our sons and daughters in a variety of ways.

For more on this topic, you may like to read TCF's leaflet, *Living with Grief*.

**Other useful links:**

**[www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies](http://www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies)**

**[www.funeralzone.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/arranging-a-funeral](http://www.funeralzone.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/arranging-a-funeral)**

# Who are the Compassionate Friends?

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) was founded in 1969 by a hospital chaplain and a group of bereaved parents who recognised the lack of support and understanding they were receiving from those who had not suffered in this way. This leaflet aims to share the experiences of all of us bereaved parents and most especially those aspects which came upon us so suddenly and, sometimes, with no warning.

The reading of this leaflet may be your first real contact with TCF. We hope it has given you a little comfort, perhaps showing you that your pain and worries are shared by others. TCF publishes over 30 leaflets, on different aspects of grief which follow the death of a child. All of them are available at no charge to bereaved parents and siblings (but a small donation is, of course, always welcome).

If you would like to hear more about our work and access further support, you could ring our Helpline number on the back page of this leaflet, and you will be able to talk to one of our volunteers, all of them bereaved parents. He or she could give you the number of a Local Contact and details of any Local Group which may meet regularly in your area. You could also find out from them details of our occasional retreats, when a small number of bereaved parents meet and talk in peaceful surroundings. Most years there is a weekend gathering, to which all members are invited.

Our website at [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk) has more information about our services, how to join TCF as a donating member, private Facebook groups, and support forum where bereaved parents can 'talk' online. We also publish a quarterly journal, *Compassion*, containing articles and poems written by our members about their own experiences. And, if you would also like further reading, please contact our Library for details and recommendations of books on all aspects of bereavement.



The  
**Compassionate  
Friends**

UK Helpline:  
**0345 123 2304**

Northern Ireland Helpline:  
0288 77 88 016

**General Enquiries**

0345 120 3785  
E: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

**TCF Library**

0345 120 3785  
E: [library@tcf.org.uk](mailto:library@tcf.org.uk)

**[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)**

**Founder: The Revd Canon Dr Simon Stephens OBE**  
**President: The Countess Mountbatten of Burma**