



What can you do... for a good funeral?

A funeral can be whatever you want and need it to be. There are no rules or laws about where it's held, who takes it or what it includes. The most important part of a funeral is to make sure that it does what it needs to do. It shouldn't feel like a formality. The aim of this factsheet is to provide information whether you are planning your own funeral or someone else's.

A good funeral can be profound and transformational in helping the people left behind to accept and acknowledge the death of someone they know. A funeral doesn't have to be like the ones you've been to in the past; you can create a funeral that works for you and helps your grieving process.

Arranging a funeral is much more involved than choosing the music. There are many decisions to be made from how the person who has died is handled to what the funeral service will be like. Traditionally, more emphasis has been placed on "funeral hardware" – coffins and cars. It may be beneficial to emphasise "funeral software" – the ceremony itself and how the difficult emotions around someone's death are handled.

There are three elements to consider:

- 1. Who will handle the funeral?*
- 2. Where will the funeral be held?*
- 3. What will the funeral include?*

Who will handle the funeral?

Funeral Directors

You can appoint a funeral director to take care of the person who has died and to make arrangements for the funeral.

Not all funeral directors are the same. There are funeral directors who have a modern approach to undertaking and can offer the services you want rather than selling a package. Do your research. Call at least three funeral directors. Are they friendly? Are they prepared to be transparent about costs and service? Do they work flexibly?

You don't have to let the funeral director handle all the arrangements. You might want to wash and dress the person who has died. You may wish to create your own orders of service, have members of the family carry the coffin or put together flowers from your own garden. If the funeral director says no to any of your requests, consider changing funeral directors. A good funeral director will facilitate what it is you want to do and work flexibly. You're in charge.

DIY Funeral

Using a funeral director is not a legal requirement, even if funeral professionals tell you otherwise!

You may want to handle the arrangements yourself – from collecting the person who has died to taking care of them at home, arranging the burial or cremation and transporting them to the funeral.

If you'd like to handle the funeral arrangements yourself, talk to the [Natural Death Centre Charity](#). They will be able to provide support and guidance and advocate on your behalf.

Direct Cremation

This is when a person who has died is collected from the place of death and cremated with no ceremony and no mourners. You probably won't be able to see the person who has died if you decide on direct cremation and you may not know when or where the cremation is taking place, depending on the provider you choose. You may wish to hold a memorial service after the cremation has taken place.

Direct cremation is carried out by some funeral directors and all of the Good Funeral Guide recommended funeral directors offer a direct cremation service.

Where will you have the funeral?

There are no rules concerning where funerals can take place. You're not restricted to churches, graveyards or crematoria.

Crematoria

Standards differ between crematoria. Some are beautiful spaces, others are more like a conveyor belt. Have a look around and decide if the crematorium that's suggested to you meets your needs. Crematoria have time slots from 30 minutes up to an hour. If you know that there's going to be a lot of content, you can book a double slot.

Natural burial grounds

Natural burial grounds are often set in beautiful and peaceful locations that you can return to over time. Some have ceremonial buildings on site where the funeral ceremony can be held without the pressures of the crematorium. Some natural burial grounds will allow a simple marker at the grave site whilst others encourage the idea that the person who has died is becoming part of the landscape.

They're all different. Visit them and have a look around.

Other venues

There are no laws about where a funeral can be held. Community halls, cafes, theatres and historic houses may work well for you but check that they will allow the coffin to be there, if that's what you want. You can even hold the funeral at home or in your garden.

What will the funeral include?

If you decide to have a funeral service, you're going to need to make some decisions about the kind of ceremony you'd like and who you'd like to take it.

Will it be celebratory? Solemn? Upbeat? Informal? A good funeral reflects the person who has died, how they have died and serves the needs of those left behind without glossing over any difficult emotions.

Religious Services

If you would like a religious ceremony you should discuss this with your religious leader or the person who will be leading the ceremony. Different faiths – and traditions within faiths – may have prescribed forms of ceremony which need to be followed; others may have more flexibility. If there are particular rituals, prayers or music that are important to you, or other forms of observance, you can discuss those as well.

Celebrants

Funeral celebrants will facilitate the funeral that you'd like to have based on your beliefs, not theirs. There's a whole spectrum of celebrants with different styles and offerings. Some celebrants are brilliant, others aren't so good. Some will include religious elements such as prayers and hymns, others won't. A good celebrant will visit you at home and spend time talking about the life of the person who has died before putting together the funeral. A quick Google search will reveal celebrants in your area. Call them and have a chat about what you want.

Humanist Celebrants

If you're looking for a funeral from an *entirely* non-religious and non-spiritual perspective with no mention of God, contact a Humanist Celebrant from the [British Humanist Association](#). Most Humanist Celebrants won't allow any spiritual content so if you're looking for something more flexible, you're probably best choosing a celebrant.

Blended faith

Belief systems in families can be complicated. Mourners may have differing needs, and they don't need to be contradictory. For example, a Rabbi worked with a celebrant to put together a funeral ceremony for a young man who had died. His family were religious, his friends weren't. The resulting funeral met everyone's needs.

Family/ friend led

You can lead the funeral service if you want to do so. You can put together the funeral yourself or appoint a flexible celebrant to support you in putting it together. Funerals don't need to be in any particular structure or format. You could play a favourite song on repeat, tell stories about the person who has died or just sit in silence.



This guide was written by [The Good Funeral Guide](#) - an independent resource that exists to help consumers get the funeral they want. It has a list of accredited independent funeral directors who have all been scrupulously inspected. If you use a GFG recommended funeral director, you're promised a funeral professional who is emotionally intelligent and has a flexible approach to funerals and is transparent about prices.