

Funerals and Burials

The funeral and burial of your deceased elder are practical matters that you, along with other family members, will have to attend to. Arranging these practical matters might be the last thing you want to do in this period of grief—but the arrangements can actually help the grieving process.

Deceased's Wishes

When making these last arrangements, try to consider the wishes of the deceased. She or he might even have made their own funeral plans already; look through his or her papers or safe deposit box. If there are no written instructions, talk to other family members to see if they know anything about what he or she wished for a funeral.

Burial

A traditional burial—called interment—involves the body, either embalmed or not, being buried in a casket in the ground, generally in a cemetery.

Entombment

If your family has a family tomb or mausoleum, entombment might be an option. In this case, the casket is placed in a mausoleum, which is a marble, stone or concrete structure with rows of crypts or rooms for caskets.

Cremation

Cremation is becoming an increasingly popular option to a traditional burial. When a body is cremated, it is placed in a crematory furnace where, over the course of several hours, it is reduced to ashes and bone fragments. These are then placed in a special urn or other container and given to family members. The remains can be buried in a cemetery, kept by family members or friends, or scattered in a meaningful place.

Services

With a funeral you'll want to arrange a place, speakers and attendees. With all of these choices, consider both the wishes of the deceased and what will be most meaningful for the people still living.

Donation

With a few exceptions, the organs of elderly people are generally not accepted for donation. Some medical schools, however, will accept entire bodies for research and study. If your relative expressed an interest in body donation, contact medical schools to expedite this process.

Obituary

When writing an obituary to send into the local newspaper, you'll need to have all of the basic facts about your deceased relative—birth and death dates, education and career information, and the names of surviving relatives.

Costs

You might not want to—or be able to—think clearly about costs at a time like this, but if possible it can be a good idea. Costs for different funeral and burial options can vary significantly, and you don't want to make decisions that you'll regret later. Consider the wishes of the deceased and the money available for a funeral, and remember: your love and devotion cannot be measured by the amount you spend on a funeral.