

Arranging a funeral for a child or adolescent

A funeral is a time to honour your child and celebrate all the wonderful things about them. It is a time to share their story, your memories, and sorrow, and an opportunity to acknowledge their life with family and friends. This information sheet is to help you make some decisions regarding a funeral for your child. Knowing some of your options can be helpful to plan what is important to you during this difficult time.

Selecting a funeral director

Although there is no legal requirement to use a funeral director, most families choose to use a funeral director rather than take on the arrangements themselves. Funeral directors are there to help families bury or cremate their child in a compassionate way. Different funeral directors vary in the services they provide. It can be very helpful to get a recommendation from a friend or family member, or to call a number of funeral directors before deciding on the one you feel most comfortable with. They can talk to you about choosing a coffin, burials, cremations, the burial place/cemetery and the type of ceremony you would like for your child. If cost is an issue, this can be discussed with your Care Team, who may be able to advise on possibilities for assistance with funeral costs.

What to ask a funeral director?

Below is a list of questions that may be helpful when you are choosing a funeral director:

- If I want to see my child, can we have as many viewings as our family needs? Do we need to make appointments?
- What assistance can be provided if I wanted to take my child home after they have died?
- What are the charges and which services are optional?
- What styles of coffins are available? Can I choose a special colour or decorate the coffin?
- What is embalming? Is it necessary? What is involved? Why would I need to think about this?
- Do you routinely use makeup? (Some parents have been unhappy that makeup has been used on their child without their permission).
- Can I bring in my child's clothes, toys or other items that were important to my child?
- What is involved with either burial or cremation?

- Can the coffin be open or closed?
- What about flowers and other items? Am I able to organise these if I wish?
- I have some cultural and religious beliefs I would like taken into consideration- is the funeral director able to respect and accommodate my needs?
- How long will it be until I can have my child's ashes?

What type of ceremony?

Every service for every child is different. Some are formal, some are informal. Some are religious or have prescribed traditions or rituals and others have no religious or cultural rituals at all. Some are a celebration and some are a sad remembrance. Some families choose not to have a service. There is no right or wrong way to conduct a funeral. Each individual ceremony is a memorial to a much-loved child's life. When planning a ceremony some things to think about include:

- What kind of service you as a family may want. For example:
 - A celebration full of your child's favourite songs or stories
 - Having a slide show with pictures of your child's life
 - People dressed in your child's favourite colours or characters
 - A formal service with clear rituals or everyone wearing black
 - A religiously prescribed format
- Who should speak? Examples are family members, friends, school teachers or other significant people speaking about your child's life
- Is it important for the family to have a display of your child's favourite items?
- Is it important to have your child's siblings involved in the ceremony or just be there with family?

- Are activities like releasing bubbles as a final goodbye after the ceremony important?
- Should it be a big ceremony with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances or a small family memorial?

There are many ways to conduct a ceremony to remember your child and whatever you choose can be very individual to your family. There is no right or wrong and if you decide to hold a service, what matters most is that the service represents how you would most like your child to be remembered and celebrated.

Children and funerals

Some parents worry about their children attending a funeral, especially if it is for their sibling. It can be helpful for children to attend the funeral but it is important that they are given the choice as to whether they wish to attend, as some may not.

Funerals can help children participate in the family ritual of saying goodbye. It is, however, important to explain to children what will happen at the funeral and what takes place in a burial or a cremation. If you are not sure how to have this conversation with children, please speak to your Care Team as they may be able to offer some guidance and resources.

If your other children are attending the funeral, it may be helpful to organise another trusted adult to look after them. It can be hard to feel connected to your child's funeral whilst also having to support their sibling/s during the ceremony. If a sibling wants to leave the ceremony, possibly because they are finding it too hard or are feeling restless, another trusted adult can support them to do so.

Grief and funerals

Attending the funeral of your child can be very hard and you are likely to be still feeling numb and in shock. This may still be felt even for an expected death. It can also be overwhelming to spend time with so many people who are also grieving for your child and your loss.

Sometimes it can feel as though you end up having to comfort others.

Ensure that you take your time during this day, even giving yourself space away from everyone.

For further guidance regarding your feelings following your child's death, please see the information sheet:

- Understanding your grief
- Siblings and the last days of life

