

# The Natural Death Centre charity

Impartial funeral advice since 1991

[www.naturaldeath.org.uk](http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk)

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To all Hospice staff and Palliative care providers.

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When families are looking for guidance following a death, they need to know what the next steps could be and what is legal and possible in the UK.

Rather than answering the 'what do we do now?' question with 'Appoint a funeral director' remember that there may be a more suitable or affordable alternative for that family.

Equally, when writing leaflets, many Hospices now use 'If you are going to use a funeral director....' rather than 'call a Funeral Director' in their advice.

For those with pressing financial constraints, an understanding of what a Direct, unattended funeral offers may be an appropriate solution. (these cost one quarter of the regular funeral price ie. £1000 instead of £4000 for cremation [direct funerals](#)). A direct, unattended burial will also save around £2,500.

As you know, not all next-of-kin will be eligible for financial help from the DWP. Even if successful, applications take time to be approved and paid out. See funeral poverty section in this document. ([Hot Topics](#))

Some families and friends might be able to carry out the funeral directing themselves; a DIY funeral. (again a fraction of the price but with the advantage of being able to hold a ceremony with the coffin present [DIY Funerals](#)).

Even if finances are not stretched, some families might want to retain control and simply care for the deceased themselves. There are a few flexible funeral directors who will offer a collection and storage service only, enabling the family to make all the other arrangements if they cannot face those nitty-gritty tasks.

Employing an undertaker is what most families will do. However, understanding that funeral directors vary hugely in mission, standards and price is crucial. Our advice is always:-

Decide what you want and definitely don't want. Then, shop around.

If your hospice does not have refrigerated facilities, collection and suitable storage of the body is more urgent. If a family have been able to discuss, investigate and get prepared before the situation becomes acute, it will serve them well. We therefore kindly ask that you encourage discussions about funeral options rather than simply taking the name of an undertaker. This link takes you to our funeral wishes form ([funeral wishes form](#)) using this might help families discuss the subject.

There is nothing to stop an organised family collecting the body from the hospice and returning home with the deceased for a short time whilst the death is registered and arrangements made. If the person has died at home their body can remain there for a few days. DIY families need a healthy dose of common sense and awareness of the natural processes of decay. Please signpost them to our helpline. Again, preparedness is key.

Most coffin suppliers listed on our website will deliver a coffin within 24 hours if both off-the-peg and ordered before midday. There are no laws requiring a funeral director to be employed and a body can be transported in any suitable vehicle without specialist insurance.

Please note that delays in booking funerals are usually a myth, an excuse by many funeral companies who cannot facilitate an earlier funeral due to sharing vehicles and staff between branches. Families should always contact crematoria and cemeteries directly to find out about available 'slots'.

Most crematoria and cemeteries will support families booking themselves. The natural burial grounds in particular will supervise and guide families once they reach their gates. Most natural burial grounds are better value for money than local authority cemeteries especially compared with those in urban areas.

Burial on private land is very straight forward in the UK. No official permission is necessary or approval needed. Please print off and pass on these guidance notes ([Home Burial](#))

Our charity has advised and supported families through all these types of funerals for the last 30 years. Please be aware of all the possibilities and guide your clients, with knowledge, towards a positive and suitable option. For us, there is nothing worse than hearing that professionals have given poor, incorrect advice or for us to hear the words:-

“Why did no one tell me”  
“If only I had known”.  
or  
“But they told me I had to do this...”

We have many other information sheets and guidance notes which we are happy to share with you. Everything from 'how to dig a grave' to 'what is a funeral celebrant'. If you are not sure about anything, please get in touch or signpost families to us.

Keep up the good work. Thanks for reading this and passing it on to all your colleagues.

We hope that you will choose, like the NDC, to support those who often receive incorrect or misinformation about funerals, at a time when they are least robust! Don't be the professional that places obstacles in the way of funeral choice... know your facts!

Together we can increase awareness and help the general public realise all of the funeral options available to them and how to proceed.

Kind regards  
Rosie Inman-Cook

Manager, NDC charity.