What to Do Next When Someone Dies: A Comprehensive Checklist

Guidance for Navigating Loss with Practical Steps and Compassion

Losing a loved one is one of life’s most profound and challenging experiences. Amid the emotional upheaval, it is essential to take certain steps to ensure legal, practical, and personal matters are handled with care and respect. This guide provides a detailed checklist to help you navigate the days and weeks following a death, covering immediate actions, legal requirements, arrangements, and ongoing considerations.

**Your funeral director will be able to guide you through all of these steps, so if you are not sure, reach out to them so they can help.**

# Immediate Steps: The First 24 Hours

* **Confirm the Death**: If the person died at home and the death was expected, contact their doctor or healthcare provider, they will come out to verify the death. If the death was sudden or unexpected, call emergency services. An official declaration by a qualified professional is necessary before they can be taken into the care of a funeral director.
* Contact Immediate Family and Close Friends: Inform those closest to the deceased as soon as possible, both for emotional support and to arrange the next steps together.
* Secure the Property: Ensure the deceased’s home is secure, pets are cared for, and valuables are protected. If the person lived alone, arrange for someone to stay at the property if necessary.
* Establish if the deceased has a pre-paid funeral plan in place, this may determine which funeral director you appoint. Although with companies like Golden Charter, you can switch funeral directors if you choose to.
* Arrange for Removal of the Deceased: If the death occurred at a hospital or care facility, staff will handle this. If at home, contact a funeral director who can arrange respectful and legal movement of the body to their private place of rest.

# Legal and Administrative Steps

* Register the Death: In the UK, they say a death must be registered within five days, this is just a guide. We recommend that you contact the registrar within a couple of days, and hand across all of your details to them. When they have the necessary documentation in place, they will contact you in order to make an appointment for you to register the death and attain the death, or “green” certificate.
* Find the Will: Locate the deceased’s will, if one exists. This document is crucial for understanding funeral wishes and managing the estate. If there is no will, the rules of intestacy apply.
* Notify Relevant Authorities: Inform government agencies, such as HM Revenue & Customs, the local council, and the Department for Work and Pensions. You may use the UK’s “Tell Us Once” service to notify multiple agencies at once, which will be explained to you during the registration process.
* Inform Banks, Insurance Providers, and Pension Companies: Contact all financial institutions with which the deceased had dealings. They will require a copy of the death certificate to close or transfer accounts and policies.
* Cancel or Transfer Services: Cancel or transfer utilities, subscriptions, mobile contracts, and other ongoing services.
* Arrange for Mail Forwarding: If the deceased lived alone, contact Royal Mail to redirect their post to the executor or next of kin.

# Planning the Funeral or Memorial

* Review Funeral Wishes: Check the will or other documents for any preferences regarding burial, cremation, or other arrangements. Honour these wishes where possible.
* Contact a Funeral Director: A funeral director can guide you through all arrangements, including collection of the body, ceremony planning, and paperwork.
* Decide on the Type of Service: Choose between burial, cremation, or alternative options. Consider religious or cultural traditions, and confirm details with all involved parties.
* Work with the funeral director to book a Venue and Inform Attendees: Choose a location for the service and notify family, friends, and colleagues. Consider using online tools or social media to reach more people.
* The funeral director will help you to arrange Flowers, Celebrant/minister, and Transport: Coordinate any necessary logistics for the day, including transport for attendees and the deceased, flowers, music, and charitable donations.
* If you wish to, the funeral director can help you write and publish an Obituary: Prepare an obituary for local papers or online platforms to honour the person and inform the community.

# Managing the Estate

* Obtain professional advice to ensure the correct handling of all financial matters of the persons estate.

# Supporting Family and Yourself

* Seek Emotional Support: Grief can be overwhelming. Reach out to family, friends, or professional counsellors for support. Many organisations offer free or low-cost bereavement counselling.
* Take Care of Practical Matters: Attend to ongoing needs, such as caring for children, elderly relatives, or pets. Make time to rest and look after your own health.
* Memorialise and Celebrate: Create opportunities to remember your loved one, such as photo albums, charitable donations, or memorial gatherings.
* Manage Social Media and Digital Accounts: Decide whether to close, memorialise, or transfer digital accounts. Most platforms have specific procedures for dealing with deceased users.
* Return Medical Equipment: If the deceased borrowed medical equipment, contact the NHS or supplier to arrange collection.
* Consider Long-Term Arrangements: Plan for ongoing responsibilities, such as property management and the care of dependents.

# Additional Considerations

* International Issues: If the death occurred abroad or the deceased owned assets outside the UK, consult legal experts for guidance on repatriation and foreign estate laws.
* Pet Care: Ensure pets are cared for and rehomed if necessary. Check the will or speak with family members about long-term arrangements.
* Organ and Tissue Donation: If the deceased wished to donate organs or tissue, contact the relevant organisation immediately, as timing is critical.
* Inform Employers: Notify the deceased’s employer and arrange for final pay, benefits, and pension entitlements.
* Halt Unnecessary Payments: Review direct debits and standing orders to stop payments for unused services.
* Gather Important Documents: Collect birth, marriage, and death certificates, insurance policies, property deeds, and any other legal papers you may need for future reference.

# Summary Checklist

* Confirm and register the death
* Notify close family, friends, and authorities
* Secure property and care for pets
* Locate the will and executor
* Arrange funeral or memorial
* Contact financial institutions and cancel services
* Apply for probate and manage estate
* Seek emotional and practical support
* Handle digital legacy and long-term matters
* Plan for the future, honouring the deceased’s wishes

Grief is a journey, and every person's experience is different. By taking these practical steps, you can bring order to a difficult time and ensure that your loved one’s legacy is honoured with dignity and care. Remember, seeking help is not a sign of weakness—lean on those around you and take each task one step at a time.

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