

Holding a funeral when you cannot meet

- Ideas for families

Trying to arrange or attend a funeral during the restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic is likely to add strain and distress, at an already difficult and painful time. However, funeral services already have great expertise in supporting families, and may be able to offer creative ways for holding a funeral within the restrictions. They can also advise about funeral options and costs.

Here are some further ideas for ways to hold a funeral, or special ceremony, while at a distance, and why finding a way to say goodbye is important.

Acknowledging feelings

Managing grief in this time of isolation may mean trying to cope with feelings such as anger, blame, guilt, confusion and fear, in yourself and in others around you.

It can help to acknowledge such feelings and reactions. Tell someone, or write down, how you feel, as this can help you to think more clearly and feel more in control.

Children learn about grief by watching the adults around them. It is helpful for them to learn from you that having their own mixed or sad feelings is OK, but be aware that they will tend to pick up on your tension, and copy your behaviour. If possible, be open with children. You might say:

"I'm very sad that we can't go to Nanny's funeral. That's why I'm crying today. It's OK to be very sad sometimes. I'm OK."

The need to say goodbye

Saying goodbye, at the right time, and in the right way, is an important part of grieving:

- You begin to face the reality that the person has died, which is key to starting to grieve.
- A ceremony of some kind provides a focus for grief.
- Rituals (actions in a pre-arranged order) give a sense of structure and order at a time which may otherwise feel chaotic and out of control.
- The chance to express who the person was, and what they meant to you, is helpful for building meaning around their life, their legacy, and your memories.
- Saying goodbye with others means being included in a shared experience which can bring comfort and a sense of peace.

Restrictions on visiting chapels of rest and funerals

Although guidance may vary, the following is likely to be the case during the pandemic:

- Funerals should be arranged over the phone or via electronic means, wherever possible. This means needing to trust others with the very important event that you might normally wish to plan together in person.
- Funerals cannot be held in a place of worship, only at a crematorium or graveside.
- The number of people attending a funeral is limited to the smallest group possible. Government guidance states that this may include members of the household, close family members, or in the case of no family members, a small number of friends. Your funeral director or celebrant can advise you further.
- People should not attend a funeral or any gathering if they are self-isolating, have symptoms of the virus, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Funeral directors may ask you not to disclose where and when the funeral is taking place, to deter additional mourners.

If you do attend a funeral in person, keep to the [government guidance on social distancing](#).

Funeral companies and crematorium policies may vary depending on their set up, and staff availability, the cultural beliefs and needs of families, and the age ranges and needs of mourners. Some may allow visiting chapels of rest, some may not. If it is not possible for family members to carry the coffin, a trolley may be used instead.

People who can't attend the funeral in person may feel excluded, hurt or angry. Some may ask where the funeral is, and try to attend anyway, which could cause additional distress. Others may not be able to help you with arrangements in the way they, and you, would have wanted.

Professionals in the funeral industry are likely to appreciate how devastating these restrictions may be for families. However, the guidance is to keep families, and them as key workers, safe and well, so you can all best manage this difficult time.

Ideas for an online ceremony

A funeral director or celebrant can help you to plan an online ceremony for family and friends to attend at home, or you can arrange it yourself. Here are some ideas:

- If you are holding a funeral in person, ask whether the funeral director or celebrant can arrange for the ceremony to be streamed live, or recorded. A recorded ceremony can then be sent to others. It may also be useful to have if you plan to hold another memorial event in the future.
- You may want to liaise with the celebrant or funeral director yourself about the technical arrangements, or you could ask a family member or friend who is comfortable with technology to help you with this.
- Ask family and friends to send you a written memory of the person, or something that is the person's legacy. For example: *"She inspired me to do..."* You can use this as part of an online slideshow in your ceremony, or perhaps the memories could be made into a book to be printed for the family, an online memorial page, or written on squares of cloth that are then sewn into a quilt.
- Include different elements, such as reading tributes, memories or poems, lighting a candle, showing photos and listening to music.
- Ask family and friends to take part in the ceremony, by reading a poem or a tribute, or show pictures drawn by children. Different voices and different elements may help you to feel supported, and help those watching to feel connected.
- Online memorial sites often have facilities to share stories, messages and photographs. Your funeral director may be able to recommend a site.

Working with online platforms

If you choose to hold an online ceremony using a group sharing platform, here are some ideas for preparing this and helping it to go smoothly:

- Think about where to place your own laptop or device, so that those in your home can see, hear and take part.
- If you are hosting an online ceremony, look at the background you will be seen against, especially if you would like the event to be recorded. You could display flowers, or a picture, or something else that represents the person. Or, on most online platforms, there is an option to blur your background or choose an alternative image, for example a beautiful landscape.
- Be clear with others when the event is happening, what time it starts, and whether there is a dress code. Encourage attendees to try out the link beforehand. To allow for people to greet each other, you could ask people to log on to meet initially online, for example at 12.45 and then be ready for the ceremony to start promptly at 1pm, when all will be asked to mute their microphones.
- If others are taking part, ask them to place a sticker, such as a smiley face, next to their device's camera, to remind them to look at the camera, not at other's faces on the screen. This will improve the visual experience for those watching.

- Ask all attendees to switch off their own self-image, so they are not distracted.
- If possible, you or the person hosting the online event could mute all attendees' microphones ('Mute upon entry'), to eliminate background noise from each person's home set-up. Or ask all attendees to mute their online microphones when they are not taking part. You can explain that this will be like being quiet when attending a funeral in person.
- Be aware of the possibility of a time-lag for those watching and listening. This will be distracting if you have music to listen to or songs to sing, because the music will be out of synchronisation with other people's devices. If this is likely to happen, you can avoid this by asking people to mute their microphones.
- Prepare a back-up ceremony in case attendees at home have technical problems with live streaming. This could be a slideshow presentation, or a written document, with photos, the words of songs or poems, and tributes written out. This may help people watching and listening to feel connected.
- The beginning and ending are important in providing a structure. A celebrant, you, or someone else who feels confident to 'lead' the event, can help by introducing each section, and explaining what is coming next. An 'Order of service' distributed by email beforehand can also serve this purpose.
- Try to end on something uplifting, such as a message about the person's values, or some inspiring music. Include a message about meeting again with those who attended, or keeping in touch.

For you and your household, think of what you would like to do afterwards – perhaps go for a walk, have family time together, eat together or have some time that helps you all to unwind.

Other ways to share an act of remembrance

- Plant a shrub or tree together in memory of the person.
- Start a memory box with a child or together as a household. You can gather some mementos and significant items to help the child (and you) to keep and share memories.
- Share written memories together and place in a 'memory jar', after which you can pull out a memory at any time.
- Find pieces of cloth or ribbons in colours that remind you of the person. Ribbons can be woven together or cloth cut out into shapes to make into a simple badge or decoration.
- Photo albums, or online memorial sites can help families feel united in grief, even during isolation.

For further ideas for making memories together, see our information on [Remembering](#) or our short guidance film [Remembering someone who has died](#).

Make time for you and seek support if you need it

Child Bereavement UK's free national Helpline provides confidential support and information. We can respond to emails and Live Chat via our website. Our website also provides a range of information and resources for families:

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Live Chat via [childbereavementuk.org](https://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Email support@childbereavementuk.org

Further information around arranging a funeral

- Quaker Social Action
[Down to Earth – Coronavirus: organising a meaningful funeral](#)
- Cruse Bereavement Care
[Coronavirus: funerals and memorials](#)
- GOV.UK
[Stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#)
[Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK](#)

Further information and guidance around financial support for funerals

- GOV.UK www.gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages/death
- Quaker Social Action www.quakersocialaction.org.uk
- The Money Advice Service www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
- Child Funeral Charity www.childfuneralcharity.org.uk