

Planning a funeral in exceptional times



If you're caring for someone who is very sick and are worried they may die, or someone you love has just died, you may have some concerns about what might happen at a funeral during this COVID-19 response period.

In Ireland, funerals are how we celebrate and commemorate those who have died. As you navigate this new reality please remember death ends a life, not a relationship and your connection with the person who has died will remain.

We send our heartfelt condolences to you as you enter this different journey. In these difficult times, people are willing to help in different ways. We have prepared this leaflet to give you some ideas as you plan a funeral for a loved one, but also to remind you to reach out and ask for help.

What you should do

We appreciate that physical distancing requirements make this bereavement and funeral even more difficult but there are immediate steps you can take to plan the funeral of someone you love or care about.

- Do contact your preferred funeral director as soon as you are able. Your funeral director will be equipped with most up-to-date information and procedures due to the COVID-19 response period. They will guide you through the process, and ensure you are cared and minded for.
- Do ask as many questions as you need to. It is important to know as much as possible, for example practices such as carrying the coffin may not be allowed. Ask your funeral director to explain the current restrictions.
- Do let people know of the death – you can still place a death notice, to be published online, on radio or in print. If the funeral is being streamed (broadcast from the church/

crematorium or other setting) the link can be provided to people at home and abroad.

- Do remember the funeral will be planned as private, for close family only. However, you can organise readings, poems or eulogies, even if the service is short.
- Do remember that everybody will understand how difficult a funeral is at this exceptional time – people will respect and support you as best they can.
- Do know that you may not be able to gather with others in a restaurant or someone's home after the funeral. Plan within your own household what you are going to do after the funeral, e.g. having a special meal, plan some exercise or agreeing just to rest. Some family and friends may decide to come together after the funeral for a virtual gathering over Zoom or a similar platform.

Where we can no longer reach out with our hands, we must now reach out with our hearts. Keep our distance but keep in touch, stay apart but stay in contact.

Government of Ireland



As it is not possible during this time to have public wakes or wakes in funeral homes, there are ways you can keep the funeral personal and beautiful, and to involve others in remembering your loved one.

- Do make use of RIP.ie online condolence book to record messages of love and appreciation. In the death notice you can invite people to leave personal messages.
- Do think about hosting a memorial service at a later time, and plan that, in time, when you feel able.
- Do ask people to send you a letter or write you a card with their memories of the person who has died.
- Do encourage children to draw pictures or write poems.
- Do talk about the person who has died, within your household and beyond through telephone calls.
- Do seek to keep in contact and try to be open to others contacting you. We can still be together when we are not together.
- Do seek out the latest technology to help. You can use videoconferencing (Google hangouts, WhatsApp, Zoom etc) to come together with special people who cannot physically be with you.
- Do stay in contact. But be mindful of the amount of contact you are able for.

How can we honour someone who has died without attending the funeral?

We are a nation of great culture and tradition and we can honour the person who has died in many ways. We are already seeing examples of how Irish people are finding new and innovative ways to support each other, some of the 'old' ways are also being revived.

Here are some of the ways you can help

- Be the person who organises friends and neighbours to stand at their gates (observing physical distancing) to show support to the grieving family.
- Do post condolences and messages of support online on RIP.ie or on Social media.
- Do take time to write letters of support and condolences, expressing your thoughts is very meaningful.
- Do phone/text the bereaved person to keep in touch – not just immediately but in the weeks and months ahead.
- Do share photos, memories and stories virtually with each other.

'One of the greatest gifts a person can give another is support'

Useful Resources

- COVID19 (Coronavirus): A Guide for the Bereaved
- HPSC Guidance for Funeral Directors/