

Planning a funeral when your relative has died from COVID-19



If someone you love has just died as a result of COVID-19, we at Irish Hospice Foundation send our heartfelt condolences to you and your family.

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. COVID-19 has meant newly bereaved families and individuals have had to make very difficult sacrifices. It is important to remember that in these exceptional times, people are willing to help in different ways.

You may have questions and concerns about what will happen at a funeral during this COVID-19 response period. 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.



Where can I get advice on current regulations?

The most current advice for funerals and the regulations involved are developed by the Irish Health Protection Surveillance Centre and the Department of Health <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f43301-covid-19-coronavirus-a-guide-for-the-bereaved/> HSE.

Planning the funeral

Unfortunately, COVID-19 and social distancing requirements make this bereavement and funeral even more difficult.

Following the death of someone you love, here are some immediate steps you can take to plan the funeral.

- Do contact your preferred funeral director as soon as you are able. The funeral director will be equipped with the most up-to-date information and procedures in place during the COVID-19 response period. They will guide you through the process, and ensure you are supported and informed as you make decisions.
- Do think about nominating a person in your family, who is not considered a close contact of the deceased, to be the family spokesperson to work with funeral director. This will make it easier for them to meet the funeral director if required. However, if you would prefer to do this yourself, most of the organisation can be done over the phone.

- Do ask questions about what will happen, or whether the aspects of the funeral you would like are allowed under the new restrictions. It is important to know as much as you need to in advance. While some choices – eg a burial or cremation are at the discretion of the family, some traditional practices are not allowed – eg carrying the coffin.
- Do remember the funeral director will take care of the preparations of the body of your loved one. Rest assured they will treat your loved one with care and respect. This will include removal of his/her body from the care setting and preparing them for funeral or cremation. To protect yourself and others, you are advised not to kiss the body of your loved one and to adhere to very careful hand hygiene at all times, especially if you have touched the body.

In order to manage the spread of any infection, the coffin will be closed and, only in very rare circumstances, will it be opened for viewing. This is to protect you and others. You can discuss this with your funeral director.

- Do remember the funeral will be planned as private and for close family. The current guidance is for up to 10 people to attend the funeral.
- Do let people know of the death. You can still place a death notice, but no times or venues of the funeral may be published online, by radio or in print. You can let those who are to attend know privately. 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.

Remind family and friends that people with respiratory illness including those who have known or suspected COVID-19 are being asked to self-isolate and to avoid public gatherings including funeral services.



On the day of the funeral

- Do remember everybody will understand how difficult a funeral is at this exceptional time – people will respect and support you as best they can.
- Mourners should follow the advice on social distancing when travelling to and from the funeral gathering, and should avoid any handshaking or hugging. They should also continue to practice good hand hygiene and sneezing etiquette.
- Do take time to mark this moment and go gently with yourself and others.
- 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.

What can I do to mark this moment?

As it's not possible during this time to have public repose 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.

In a time when so much is out of your control, there are significant elements you can choose - you can still choose readings, hymns, and poems to remember your loved one by, even if the service is much smaller.

- Allow yourself to grieve in your own way. You may find it useful to refer to our Grieving in Exceptional Times resource.
- Do ask people to send you a letter with their memories of the person who has died.
- Do seek to keep in contact and try to be open to others contacting you - we can still feel and be connected even when we are not together. Technology can help. Videoconferencing (Google Hangouts, WhatsApp, Zoom etc) can be used to come together with special people who cannot physically be with you.
- Do involve children and young people and keep talking to them, we have listed some resources below.
- Do talk about the person who has died, within your household and beyond through telephone calls with friends and family.
- It is best at this time, not to use actual books of condolences. The RIP.ie online condolence book can be used to leave messages of sympathy, support and appreciation.
- You may wish to host a memorial service or an event to remember your loved one at a later time. You can make this known and plan an event for a time when you are able.

Can I honour someone who has died when I cannot attend the funeral?

Yes. Our culture is rich in traditions and ways to honour our dead. We are already seeing examples of how Irish people are finding new ways to support each other – some of the 'old' ways are also being revived.

Here are some ways you can help remember the person who has died:

- Be the person who organises friends and neighbours to stand at their gates as the hearse passes by. At this time of social distancing, we are asked not to line the road for a funeral.
- Be the person who organises friends and neighbours to leave food and meals for family members (adhering to social distancing).
- Do post condolences and messages of support online on RIP.ie or on social media.
- Do take time to write letters of support and condolence – expressions of solidarity can be meaningful and helpful to the bereaved.
- Do phone/text the bereaved person to keep in touch – not just at the time of death and immediately afterwards but in the weeks and months ahead.
- Do share photos memories and stories virtually with each other.

Useful Resources

- [Bereaved.ie](https://www.bereaved.ie)
- [Children and grief](#)
- [Citizen information](#)
- [HSE](#)
- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f43301-covid-19-coronavirus-a-guide-for-the-bereaved/>

As part of our [COVID-19 Care & Inform](#) series, we have also developed [Grieving in Exceptional Times](#).