

What to do when someone *dies*

If you are holding this because someone died, we are sorry. It is a map, not a schedule. Almost nothing has to happen as fast as it feels. Check things off, and let the rest wait.

THEIR NAME

KEPT BY

STARTED ON

HOURLY

In the first *hours*

You may sit with them for a while before the funeral home comes. There is no rule that says you must hurry.

- ☐ **Call hospice if they were on hospice**, 911 if the death was unexpected at home, or let hospital or care home staff handle the pronouncement.
- ☐ **Call the one or two people** who should not hear this news secondhand.
- ☐ **Choose a funeral home**, or ask for time if you are not ready to choose.
- ☐ **Arrange care for any pets**, and check on anyone who depended on them each day.
- ☐ **If the home will now sit empty**, lock it, take out anything perishable, and ask a neighbor to keep an eye on it.
- ☐ **Look for any written funeral wishes** or a prepaid arrangement before decisions are made.

DAY BY DAY

In the first *days*

Burial or cremation shapes everything else. Decide it before you talk about prices, because it decides what you are pricing.

- ☐ **Gather details for the death certificate**: full legal name, date and place of birth, Social Security number, and their parents' names.
- ☐ **Decide burial or cremation**, guided by any written wishes.
- ☐ **Call two or three funeral homes and ask for prices by phone**. Federal rules require them to tell you.
- ☐ **Tell their employer if they were working**, and ask about final pay and benefits.
- ☐ **Ask someone to help field calls and messages**, so it does not all land on one person.

WEEK BY WEEK

In the first *weeks*

This is a season of paperwork, not a sprint. Each item is a phone call and perhaps a letter. None of them has to happen today.

- ☐ **Order certified death certificates** through the funeral home or from vital records. Many families order around ten.
- ☐ **Confirm the funeral home told Social Security**, then ask about any survivor benefits.
- ☐ **Notify banks and credit card companies**, one account at a time.
- ☐ **Contact life insurers** and ask what they need to start a claim.
- ☐ **Cancel or transfer subscriptions**, memberships and recurring charges as you find them.
- ☐ **Forward the mail if the home is empty**. The mail will show you what else exists.

TRULY NOT URGENT

What can *wait*

If someone is pressing you to decide something big, it is fine to say you are not deciding anything this month.

- **Selling or clearing out the house.**
- **Sorting clothes and belongings.**
- **Most estate and financial paperwork.**
- **Thank-you notes.**
- **Any decision someone else is rushing you toward.**

KEEP IT WITH THIS LIST

The phone *list*

NAME	PHONE
Hospice or doctor	
Funeral home	
Family	
Close friend	
Their employer	
Clergy or celebrant	

General information, not legal advice.