



Telephone Help Line: 1300 767 022

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Accidental or sudden death (including suicides)

If a person dies suddenly or accidentally, it is a legal requirement for the police to be contacted, who in turn will contact the coroner. The coroner is magistrate appointed to oversee the police investigation into all sudden or accidental deaths. Under these circumstances a government pathologist will conduct an autopsy to determine the cause of death. The Government Funeral Director will carry out the transfer of the body from the scene to the coroner.

Organ donation and autopsy

It is important in this early stage to consider whether or not your loved one wished to be an organ donor and if this option is open to you. You also need to consider whether or not the autopsy is something that you wish to occur. You do have the right to request that an autopsy not be performed in the case where the cause of death can be obtained otherwise. If you object to an autopsy, talk to the police and funeral director about this.

Making the arrangements

Many funeral directors are on call 24 hours a day. When death occurs we suggest you contact them immediately, or as soon as is practical, and they will begin to take care of all the details involved. This can give you a sense of relief that their services have begun and allows you the time to mourn your loss. If you are not in the position to deal with this, then the police, a family member or close friend can make this contact for you.

They can:

- Obtain the necessary certification ensuring the funeral may proceed with minimum delay.
- Attend to even the smallest of details to ensure that your wishes are carried out. i.e. selection of flowers, wording of newspaper notice (if required) etc.
- Contact clergy or celebrant regarding the time, venue and type of service.

If the wishes of the deceased are known beforehand, arrangements can be carried out accordingly.

You will need to discuss your requirements with the funeral director, who can then make all of the arrangements.

What about costs?

The costs of any funeral depends upon the extent of the services provided and the quality of the merchandise selected by the family. The person who is responsible for the funeral account is the one who signs the authorisation for the funeral to be conducted.

The three main components in the cost of a funeral are:

- Disbursements. These represent payments made on behalf of the family for such items as flowers, church, celebrant fees, medical fees, the issuing of a cremation permit, press notices, cemetery or cremation fees and catering (if applicable).
- Cost of the coffin or casket. There is a large and varied selection from which to choose.
- Funeral Directors' service and facility fees. This is designed to cover all of the overhead costs as in any other business. They relate to items such as providing trained personnel, use of facilities, supplying motor vehicles and all other administrative costs.

Preparation

We all know that death is a fact of life. Yet, when a suicide occurs, the shock, the fear and dread that surrounds a loved ones passing is such that most people don't even want to think of it. As a result, when one does die by suicide, the family and loved ones are totally unprepared for the important decisions and arrangements which need to be made.

It is our suggestion that you choose a funeral director wisely, and then rely on them to guide you through what decisions you need to make, and then allow them to make the arrangements.

Choosing Your Funeral Director:

Choose your Funeral Director the same way you would choose your Doctor. Look for someone who is understanding, courteous, respectful, prompt and efficient and with whom you can communicate.

Your Funeral Director Should:

- Be of good character and reputation.
- Be available 24 hours a day.
- Give you good value for their fee.
- Provide Suitable premises, motor vehicles and equipment, etc.
- Do they provide a qualified grief counselor?

Decisions you might need to make:

Some decisions will need to be made by you at this time, some of these might include:

- Private Service or public service. If your loved one has specifically requested a private service you might want to hold a memorial service at another time so that friends and family can also say their goodbyes.
- Cremation or Burial
- Funeral notice – whether or not you advertise the funeral
- Music / Readings and Poetry
- Wake – whether or not to hold one, where and other arrangements
- Flowers and/or donations to charities

NB: We'd like to thank Kim Rodda and Bruce Jarvie from Traditional Funerals for assisting us with compiling this fact sheet.

QLD Helplines

Standby Brisbane 07 3250 1856
 Standby Response Service 0438 150 180
 (24 hour mobile crisis response to suicide bereavement)
 Sunshine and Cooloola Coasts 0407 766 961

National Helplines

LifeLine: 13 11 14 (24 hour)
 Mensline: 1300 789 978 (24 hour)
 Suicide Callback Line: 1300 659 467 (24 hour)
 National Hope Line: 1300 467 354 (24 hour bereavement support)
 Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
 Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 (24 hour)
 SANE Helpline: 1800 18 SANE (M-F 9am-5pm)

Photo by Pia Koskelainen