



FAMILY LED FUNERALS

There is no legal requirement for a funeral director to be involved in the funeral of someone you love. We can assist and facilitate this journey so that you are in total control of the funerary proceedings – as much or a little as you want to be.

If you are asking any of the following questions, you might be interested in a Family Led Funeral:

- Do we need to have a funeral director? • Can we make our own coffin? • Can we keep our person's body at home for a while? • Can we wash or dress our person's body? • Can we dig the grave ourselves? • Can we decorate the coffin? • Can we use flowers from the garden? • Can anyone conduct the ceremony? • Do we have to have a funeral?

What is a Family* Led Funeral?

A family led funeral is a term used to describe a funeral practice where the person who has died is cared for *by the family and community from the moment of death, through to the delivery of the funeral ceremony, and up to the disposal of the body*. This encompasses everything from a complete do-it-yourself approach (where there is no, or minimal, involvement from funeral professionals) to a blended approach where the care and organisation are conducted *as a shared arrangement* between the family and their chosen professionals. This is distinct from the contemporary or current western process of funeral and ceremony where families are 'directed' entirely by a funeral business. In a family led funeral, the *family* directs if and where they want the support of a funeral business.

In some respects, a family-led funeral is not a new concept as only a few decades ago this was the norm. However within the current way of death, this reclamation of the dead by the family is considered 'unusual' or 'new'.

For a family who chooses a completely DIY approach, the family retains not only control of their deceased, providing the home-based death care for them (see our info sheet on Home Based Death Care), but also takes an instrumental role in the organising of any ritual or ceremony, and responsibility for ensuring that paperwork is lodged. Effectively they *LEAD* the funeral. The family set the pace and decide on what their farewell will look like. They become the designers of what is a very personal and meaningful time.

However, there are many steps between death and the disposal of a body. From collecting a body from the place of death, to lodging the requisite paperwork, to caring



for a body at home, to selecting or building your coffin, to encoffining and transportation to a cemetery or crematory, and up to the moment of disposal there is a myriad of decisions that need to be made.

The point is that a family or community **CAN** do all of these things (in most states) or **CHOOSE** a range of duties they would like to manage themselves. There is an increasing number of funeral companies, end of life douglas and independent funeral celebrants who offer support for family led funerals.

For a family choosing to do a family-led funeral, the level of involvement from professional death workers in deciding, carrying out, organising and implementing anything outlined in the stages above, needs to be very clearly communicated and a plan of action set in place. Just as it takes a village to raise a child -you will need a supportive and well-organised team to undertake a home funeral if you intend to have no outside assistance.

Below we outline what the *general* steps are in a Family Led Funeral. The family and/or community of the deceased chooses to take on the responsibility of as many of these as they wish.

Between Death and Disposal... what needs to be done?

The most important starting point is to ascertain... *Are they really dead?* This might seem obvious but what happens next depends on whether the death was expected or not. The steps involved are:

1. Confirmation of death by a medical professional.
2. Documentation (different names in different states) confirming that the person is dead. This is required before a body can be moved.

Assuming a coronial inquest is not necessary...

3. If the person has died in a hospital or care facility, their body can be transported to a family home or the home of a nominated community member or to a mortuary.
4. Body care happens in the time between death and ceremony. This can be over several days and can occur wherever the body has been taken.
5. Body disposal method is confirmed (burial plot is purchased, cremation is booked)
6. Death needs to be registered with the State Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages



7. Permission for disposal needs to be obtained on the State based documents required. In the case of cremation, this generally requires a referee signature from a second independent doctor.
8. IF a ceremony is chosen, the funeral ceremony or 'event' is arranged. Like various other events, there are many moving components but unlike others, a funeral ceremony is usually organised in a short space of time. The ceremony can be large or small, formal or informal, simple or a massive blow out. It can be anywhere you are permitted to take the body of the deceased - in a church, a pub, or in your backyard and conducted by yourself, a celebrant or by your next-door neighbour. Alternatively, you could choose to have no ceremony at all. Whichever you choose there are usually many things to consider. See our info sheet on funeral planning for a checklist of some components for a ceremony.

NB. In Australia, it is considered that a 'funeral' is a ceremony where the body of the deceased is present. If the body of the deceased is not present at the ceremony this is referred to as a 'memorial'.

9. The body is placed into a coffin, "encoffining", for transportation to the funeral ceremony.
10. If there is no ceremony or it does not occur at the place of disposal, the body will need to be transported to the cemetery or crematorium.
11. Disposal of the body: (see our info sheets on Natural Burial and Shrouded Cremation)
 - i. BURIAL - the coffin/shroud is lowered into the earth and then backfilled.
 - ii. CREMATION - the coffin/shroud is pushed into a retort. Cremains/Ashes are collected, ground down and put into a container such as an urn before being collected. It is worth noting that the funeral process for burial and cremation are the same up until the point of disposal. _

If you would like to know more about Family Led Funerals, below is a list of articles, groups and organisations as a resource for you to find answers to your questions. We also have a wide range of skills and experience among our member base so please take a moment to peruse them.



LINKS: FAMILY LED FUNERALS

FURTHER READING:

1. Choice. Do you need a funeral director? Investigation into the funeral industry, Choice looks at DIY funerals and cremation.

<https://www.choice.com.au/health-and-body/healthy-ageing/ageing-and-retirement/articles/funerals-investigation-do-you-need-a-funeral-director>

2. Choice. The future of funerals.

<https://www.choice.com.au/health-and-body/healthy-ageing/ageing-and-retirement/articles/funerals-investigation-the-future-of-funerals>

3. Natural Death Movement

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-27/natural-death-movement-hashtag-no-coffin/6981946>

4. Natural Burial

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/hobart/programs/statewideweekends/natural-burial/10597116>

5. Home Funerals

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/627256/3774617-family-centered-death-care-in-tasmania>

**Please note that NDAN uses the term 'Family' to indicate kinship bonds and relationships of mutual love and support. These relationships may or may not be biological or legally recognised. However, if your family sits outside of the nuclear unit, it is imperative that your advanced care directive and funeral wishes be clearly communicated so that your values are upheld.*