

A Practical Checklist for Planning a Natural Burial

This checklist is intended to help guide you through the practical steps of arranging a funeral. Every situation is different, and not every step will apply to you. Please treat it as a starting point rather than a rigid process, and remember that we are always here to help if you are unsure about anything.

In the First 24 to 48 Hours

- If the death was expected, contact the person's GP to arrange verification of death
- If the death was unexpected, the coroner may become involved. Hospital or emergency services staff will guide you through this
- Check whether the person left a will, as it may contain funeral wishes or instructions. If a will exists, let the named executors know as soon as possible
- Check whether the person had a pre-paid funeral plan. If so, contact the plan provider as early as possible, as this will affect which funeral director you use and what arrangements have already been made
- Allow yourself time before making any major decisions if you can
- If a hospital or care home asks you to nominate a funeral director immediately, it is fine to ask for more time
- Let close family and friends know
- If you have a trusted friend or family member who can help coordinate things, ask them to do so

In the First Few Days

- Register the death at the local Register Office, within five days in England and Wales, and within eight days in Scotland
- Obtain the Certificate for Burial or Cremation (the green form) from the registrar. The burial cannot take place without this
- Order several certified copies of the death certificate at the time of registration. Many organisations, including banks, insurers, and pension providers, will require an original copy, and it is cheaper and faster to order them now than to request them later
- Use the government's Tell Us Once service to notify all relevant government departments of the death in a single step. This covers HMRC, the DVLA, the Department for Work and Pensions, and others. The registrar can give you access to this when you register the death
- Notify banks, building societies, insurers, employers, pension providers, and utility companies. Services such as Settl'd or Life Ledger can help manage this process
- Place an obituary or death notice if the family would like one, either in a local newspaper or via an online service such as funeral-notices.co.uk
- Decide whether you will use a funeral director or arrange the funeral yourselves. See our guide on Family-led Funerals if you are considering the latter

- If using a funeral director, speak with more than one before deciding, and look for someone with experience of natural burial
- Contact us to discuss plot options, availability, and costs at your chosen burial ground
- Request an information pack from us if you would find this helpful

Arranging the Plot

- Complete a plot application form, or ask your funeral director to do this on your behalf
- Confirm payment arrangements, either in full or by deposit and monthly payments
- Complete an interment form so we can prepare the grave in time for the funeral
- Provide us with the exact external dimensions of the coffin or shroud as early as possible
- Confirm the date and time of the burial with us
- Ask us about memorial options, including plaques and, at some sites, memorial trees

Planning the Ceremony

- Decide where the ceremony will take place, at the burial ground, at a place of worship, or both
- Decide whether you would like a celebrant, minister, or family member to lead the service. See our guide on [Choosing a Funeral Officiant](#) for help with this
- Plan any readings, music, or tributes. See our guide on [Creating Your Own Funeral Service](#) for ideas
- If you are playing recorded music, prepare a playlist in advance and nominate someone to manage it on the day. Remember that our sites have no mains electricity, so you will need to bring a Bluetooth speaker
- Think about whether you would like to involve children, and how
- Consider whether any guests will need fold-out chairs, particularly elderly or less mobile guests
- Check whether toilet facilities are available at your chosen site and make arrangements if needed, such as hiring a portable toilet for a longer gathering
- Let guests know what to expect, including uneven ground, outdoor conditions, and appropriate footwear
- If you are planning a wake or gathering after the burial, book a venue and arrange catering. Some families hold a simple gathering outdoors at or near the burial ground, while others prefer a nearby pub, hall, or private home
- Send invitations or let people know the date, time, and location once arrangements are confirmed

The Coffin or Shroud

- Choose a coffin or shroud made from natural, biodegradable materials. Wood, wicker, cardboard, and natural fabric shrouds are all suitable
- Check with us before purchasing to confirm the materials meet our requirements
- Ensure clothing for the person who has died is made from natural fabrics such as cotton, wool, linen, or silk
- Confirm that no embalming has taken place. We do not permit embalming except in exceptional circumstances such as repatriation

Flowers and Personal Touches

- If bringing flowers to place in the grave, ensure they are free from plastic wrapping and floral foam
- Consider whether you would like to decorate the coffin with drawings, messages, or flowers
- Think about any meaningful objects, photographs, or mementos you would like to bring to the graveside

Practical Arrangements

- Arrange transport for the coffin if you are not using a funeral director. An estate car, SUV, or van is usually suitable. Let the local police know your route in advance
- Delegate practical tasks to friends or family where possible, such as managing music, welcoming guests, or coordinating readings
- If the weather is likely to be cold or wet, consider arranging a nearby indoor venue for gathering before or after the burial

Financial Support

- If the person who has died was a child under 18, see our guide on Children's Funeral Costs for details of government schemes in England, Wales, and Scotland
- If you are on qualifying benefits, check whether you may be eligible for a Funeral Expenses Payment in England and Wales, or a Funeral Support Payment in Scotland, via GOV.UK
- If the loss occurred before 24 weeks of pregnancy, contact the Child Funeral Charity, who may be able to help with costs

After the Funeral

- Save the GPS coordinates and what3words address we provide for the grave, and share them with other family members who may wish to visit
- Download the free what3words app so you can navigate directly to the grave when you visit
- Consider whether you would like a memorial plaque or, at some sites, a memorial tree. Speak to us about what is available at your chosen burial ground
- Think about the digital legacy of the person who has died, including social media accounts, email, and online subscriptions. Most platforms have a process for memorialising or closing accounts, and GOV.UK has guidance on managing a deceased person's digital footprint
- Begin to consider probate and the administration of the estate if required. GOV.UK has clear guidance on when probate is needed and how to apply. If the estate is complex, a solicitor can help
- Remember that you are welcome to visit the burial ground at any time of year, and that our team is always here if you have questions

We Are Here to Help

If you are unsure about any of these steps, please get in touch. There is no obligation and no question is too small. We have worked with many families over the years and are always happy to help you find a way forward that feels right.

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