



The
Compassionate
Friends



Funeral Directors and the Bereaved Parent

The Compassionate Friends is a national charity supporting parents and siblings who are bereaved through child loss. This leaflet has been written by parents who have lost children of all ages in the hope that our insights can help you support families when they contact you regarding funeral arrangements for their child.

Funeral Directors and the Bereaved Parent

To lose a child is a parent's worst nightmare. No matter their age, or the circumstances, grieving parents will be heartbroken. It is during this difficult time of emotional turmoil that they must make decisions regarding the burial or cremation of their child. They may have never dealt with anything like this before, they may not therefore understand what a funeral entails, or what they are allowed or not allowed to do. This is when they turn to you, the Funeral Director.

The following suggestions may be already part of the service you offer, whilst others might be newer ideas. We do hope you will consider them. Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet. (The words in italics are from parents who have lost a child.)

*"Try to think of infinity? You can't.
That's what it is like when you lose a child"*

The first contact

- Our first contact is often by telephone. Here we will probably need your understanding. A gentle 'take your time', 'would you like me to phone you back' could make so much difference.
- When arranging an appointment, some parents might prefer a home visit rather than an appointment at the Funeral Home.
- If time permits, a letter before our initial meeting to introduce yourself and the person who we will be seeing can help put us at ease.
- Try to use words we will be able to understand.

- Ask how we would like our child to be called.
- Sending a form that we can complete at home in our own time before the visit, with some of the basic information you require such as 'name' 'date of birth' 'date of death' 'place of death' etc., can save so many wrong answers and mistakes.

"I was so wrapped up in my son's illness still, knowing he was dying but never prepared. A home visit would have helped so much, with proper explanations about what was and was not possible for my darling boy's last journey."

"It was too business like, too impersonal, too rushed, I didn't have any idea about any of it. Had I been better informed. I would've done lots more for him myself."

Making decisions

- During our appointment, you will ask us so many questions, we are likely to find it difficult to listen and concentrate. As a result, we may make decisions that we later come to regret and wish we could change. Letting us know any decisions we have made that can be changed, and giving a time limit within which these changes can be made, would be very helpful for both parties.
- Let us know we can contact other funeral directors before we make our final commitment.
- Please tell us of the visiting hours at the Chapel of Rest, if there is a time limit for visits to the Chapel, and if there is a restriction on how many times we can visit. Many parents might wish to visit their child several times before the funeral.
- Let us know if there is a cost to visiting our child.

Funeral expenses

The thought of the funeral cost can cause additional stress. Many parents will not have had a funeral plan or some other insurance to cover costs. We will wonder how much the funeral will cost, whether we will be able to give our child all that we wish when we say goodbye, and we may worry if we can afford it. All of these thoughts and anxieties compound the grief we are already experiencing.

This again is where the Funeral Director can help. We would ask you to:

- Provide different funeral packages, costs and so on, including the cost of a basic funeral, easy payment plans, or (if you offer these) interest-free options.
- Many funeral companies provide free or discounted funerals for children under a certain age. If you are one of these, please let the parent know.
- Help parents feel they are doing right by their loved one, if they choose the basic funeral package or another at a lesser price.
- Provide pen and paper when we attend the meeting, so we can make notes.
- Give a timescale/timetable that we can take with us of what needs to be done, and when.

“When I asked for a basic funeral. The woman looked at me and stated ‘I need different paperwork’. I felt like I wasn’t doing right by my son.”

Planning the funeral

- Some families have firm ideas about whether to hold a burial or cremation, whilst others will find this a difficult decision. Information leaflets that set out what we could expect from each option would be helpful. It is likely that parents who are undecided will appreciate a couple of days to make their decision.
- Inquire after our wishes regarding the funeral. Some of us may wish for a traditional religious service, whilst others will want something different. Giving us ideas of the different types of funeral that are available could be helpful. The Funeral Inspirations website shows many different choices. www.funeralinspirations.co.uk
- Suggest that we may wish to carry the coffin ourselves, especially if our child was a baby.
- Encourage us to choose music and other elements of the service that will have special significance for us, if we wish.
- If this is a service you offer, let us know that you can arrange for our child to stay overnight at home before the funeral or, if they can be taken home on the day of the funeral.

“Our funeral director had so much empathy and was sensitive to our situation – he helped us create very fond memories of that day.”

The funeral service

- A brief explanation of the day's proceedings, outlining what we as parents can expect, will help us to make well-informed decisions before the full service is arranged and finalised with whoever will be conducting the service.
- If it is possible for us to conduct the service ourselves, let us know. This decision will be greatly supported by a reassurance that you will be there to guide us if needed.
- Suggest we might like to put some information together regarding our child beforehand.
- Some of us like giving out an Order of Service booklet, perhaps with our child's picture on the front. If we need help with this, please give us some guidance on where to locate this.

“We got a copy of the funeral service. I still read it months afterwards.”

Our child and preparation of the body

- Ask us how much we would like you to explain regarding the preparation of the body, viewing the body, burial or cremation. This sensitive approach might save upset on both sides.
- Explain to us where our child's body will be kept, letting us know if he or she will be kept elsewhere rather than on the premises. Many parents might be upset at the thought of their child being transported from one place to another. They may also worry that this might cause a problem, if they wish to view.
- Embalming: Ask if we would like this explained to us, and if so outline what the process entails. Emphasise that we do not have to have this done. Make us aware if embalming might change our child's appearance.

“We had them embalmed, I am sure it changed how they looked. My brother said, she looked awful and that image will stay with him forever.”

- Let us know that the body can be dressed in normal clothing or their favourite clothes.
- Let us know that we can place items in the coffin. Providing a list of items that are not suitable would also be useful.
- Ask if we would like to help dressing and caring for our child ourselves.

Viewing our child

- Try to allow us as much time as we need at the Chapel of Rest. It helps if you can respond respectfully to our wishes, and try as best as you can to accommodate our requests.
- Let us know that even if the body is not in your care, we can still see our child at the Hospital Chapel of Rest.
- Let us know that our child will be placed in a coffin if we choose to view.

"I wish they had told me he would be in his coffin. We didn't realise. I nearly vomited with the shock."

"The painter, decorators and electrician were working and we had to walk across dust sheets to get to the room. I should have complained; I just didn't have the heart or energy to do so. To this day I still find it upsetting."

After the funeral

- A letter or telephone from you asking if there is anything else you can help us with is a courtesy we would appreciate.
- Many parents might not know how or what to do with the ashes, or that they can be collected. Let us know where we can spread the ashes if we wish to do so, or that we could take them home with us.
- Immediately after the funeral, some parents may feel too distressed to contemplate taking care of their child's ashes, let alone decide where they should be interred or scattered. It would be helpful if parents know that you are willing to provide safe keeping of their child's ashes until they are able to take possession of them themselves.
- Please give us help or information regarding a headstone after the burial, or a memorial plaque following cremation.

Other support for parents and siblings

We are enclosing copies of some of our leaflets that you might like to give to families. These include general information on The Compassionate Friends, advice on "preparing our child's funeral", and some leaflets on specific bereavements such as suicide. If you require any further copies please contact us (details below).

Once again thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet. If there is anything more we can do to support you, we will be glad to hear from you.

Who are the Compassionate Friends?

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other similarly bereaved family members who have suffered the death of a child or children of any age and from any cause.

Many people who have suffered the loss of a child feel a bond with others in the same situation and wish to extend the hand of friendship. We offer support, both directly to bereaved families, and indirectly by fostering understanding and good practice amongst professionals concerned with child death and by increasing public awareness.

In TCF, "family" covers a broad spectrum of relationships. We aim to help any individual or family affected by the death of a child, including unmarried partners, adoptive parents, step families, same sex couples and single parent families.

TCF has no religious affiliation and offers support to bereaved families irrespective of the age of the child, cause of death, ethnic, social or political background.



The Compassionate Friends

UK Helpline:

0345 123 2304

Northern Ireland Helpline:

0288 77 88 016

General Enquiries

0345 120 3785

E: info@tcf.org.uk

TCF Library

0345 120 3785

E: library@tcf.org.uk

To find out more about TCF visit

www.tcf.org.uk |  [@tcf.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/tcf.org.uk)  [@saytheirname](https://twitter.com/saytheirname)

Printing of this leaflet has been sponsored
by Bromley TCF group and its supporters,
in memory of all their beloved children.

Founder: The Revd Canon Dr Simon Stephens OBE

President: The Countess Mountbatten of Burma