

Arranging a Funeral - things to think about...

The Viewing

TIP SHEET 3

A 'viewing' is the word we use to describe seeing the person who has died and spending one last time with them at some time before the funeral. This usually happens at the funeral home but it can be held at your home if you wish.

The idea of seeing someone who has died may be confronting for some, especially if you have never seen a dead body before. It's always a personal choice.

Grief experts say that a viewing can be helpful for a number of reasons:

- It helps to lessen the likelihood of disbelief and denial, especially if the death is sudden or unexpected – seeing the person helps us to cope with the reality of what has happened
- It allows us to see the person not in pain or in a clinical hospital setting where they may have been surrounded by medical equipment, tubes and other apparatus
- It gives you an opportunity to say your own goodbye or any other words you didn't get a chance to say. It's important that you aren't left with things unsaid – the viewing can be a beneficial opportunity to say:
 - I love you
 - I'll miss you
 - Thank you for everything
 - I wish I'd said I was sorry for the time when

A viewing is quite different to the actual funeral which is usually a public event – the viewing is usually private with family and selected friends who attend. A viewing can be just for you – even if several people are there at the time, if you want some one-on-one time you just need to ask your funeral director for some quiet time alone.

If the person's body has been injured, there are many ways a viewing is still possible. Perhaps the coffin will be closed rather than open but just sitting next to it can be comforting. The coffin may be open with the injuries bandaged or covered. Talk to your funeral director who will be able to suggest some alternatives.

Sometimes adults are uncertain if children should attend. Our experience tells us that children often cope much better than we expect. They too need to say their goodbyes and often feel left out and disappointed when they aren't considered. Children need to have clear explanations about what they will see and how the viewing will take place to help them understand what's going to happen. Children often like to be able to write a letter or a draw a picture to place in the coffin.

It's a common practice these days for families to choose to make the viewing a special time together – they might play favourite music, they might share one last favourite drink or some food together, they might place some small mementos in the coffin like photographs or a favourite belonging or personal goodbye letters. All of this is possible to make your final time together memorable.