

The Kent and Medway Funeral Standards

- A guide to assist celebrants, friends and families during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

The usual processes that take place when someone dies have changed due to the numbers of additional deaths caused by COVID-19 (Coronavirus). The need for social distancing to protect the NHS and save lives has also impacted how funerals are conducted.

The Kent and Medway Funeral Standards have been developed to provide to loved ones the assurance that the marking of life will take place with respect, dignity and compassion and to do so while minimising the risk of spread of infection.

The Standards have been developed under consideration for people of all faiths and beliefs and those of none. The priority is that the deceased and their relatives will be afforded the utmost respect, and that no-one should journey alone.

Guidance

1. There should be no intentional delay in organising the funeral
2. The family's choice of burial or cremation for their loved one should be respected, in line with the requirements and conditions set out in the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#).
3. The government strongly advises that mourners should not take part in any rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the body of an individual who has died from, or with symptoms of, COVID-19 (Coronavirus) for the duration of the pandemic. Given the very significant risk for clinically vulnerable and extremely vulnerable people who come into contact with the virus, it is strongly advised that they have no contact with the body. This includes washing, preparing or dressing the body

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4. A celebrant of the deceased/family's choice of faith or belief should always be present at the funeral even if there is no congregation at all, recognising that this may not be the actual individual of their choice.
5. Attendance at funerals should be limited to those from within the household or close family of the loved one – their partner, children, parents and siblings. Friends are permitted if these family members are unable to attend. Nationally, typical attendance is in the order of no more than ten mourners. This is essential in order to prevent spread of the disease, which could result in loss of further life.
6. Those who are showing signs of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) must not attend.
7. Those in the 'shielded' groups are urged to stay at home, including celebrants within that category.
8. Those who are socially isolating are similarly asked to stay at home.
9. Anyone attending a funeral must observe social distancing guidelines at all times, i.e. to remain two metres apart from anyone not living in their household, and from all staff enabling the funeral to take place. This includes staff working outside within cemetery grounds.
10. Mourners will not be permitted to help with carrying the coffin due to social distancing measures not being possible to adhere to.
11. Mourners will not be permitted to help with the practice of back-filling the grave of the deceased due to health and safety reasons and to ensure no spread of the disease through cross contamination of equipment handling.

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12. Soil boxes or scattering of any items in the grave for the committal should not be used due to the possibility of cross contamination increasing the risk of infection to other attendees and ground staff.
13. Transport to and from the funeral should only be shared by those living in the same household.
14. For burials, mourners should remain in their vehicles until the Funeral Directors have safely placed the coffin over the grave or have immediately lowered the coffin into the grave.
15. Do not publicly announce funeral details. This will deter well-meaning mourners from turning up (See paragraph 20 below for ideas as to how others may mark the occasion at home).

Notes for celebrants and those officiating.

16. As far as possible, name and contact details for the family (or friends) should be given to the celebrant by the funeral director a minimum of one day before the funeral, to allow the celebrant contact with the family.
17. Ceremonial words, readings and other materials should be said in line with the deceased/family's choice, but these may need to be shortened from usual funeral rites.
18. Where possible an offer to facilitate livestream via social media should be made. In the first instance permission for filming must be sought from the cemetery/crematoria involved. However, it is recognised that not all Crematoria/Cemeteries have adequate Wi-Fi/signal to achieve this. Where this is known to be the case (and where it is not),

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the family or attending close friends may prefer the funeral to be filmed so that it can be shared afterwards. Filming can only be undertaken by someone who was already going to be in attendance at the funeral - not an additional person for the sole purpose of filming.

19. The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities' Code of Cremation Practice ensures that all services are carried out with the utmost dignity, which should provide further reassurance to those unable to attend in person.

<https://www.fbca.org.uk/code-of-cremation-practice/>

20. It may be appropriate for faith and belief groups to consider suggesting to those unable to attend in person, other means of following a ritual that may assist in their grief and make them feel part of the service. Examples could include following the words of the service (by email), saying a particular prayer at the time of the funeral, or lighting a candle. Families or close friends are encouraged to speak to the celebrant as to how they may wish to do this.

21. Faith and belief communities should, within their understanding of what is possible, offer memorial services and subsequent commemorations to bereaved families after the restrictions have been lifted. Families and close friends considering how they may wish to do this may find this an avenue of hope during their period of grief.

22. Bereavement and other support services should be offered, recognising the unique nature of grief and the varying length of time an individual may need support. At the end of this document there are links to support available. It also should be noted that Funeral Directors offer Bereavement Services.

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23. If an individual chooses not to attend a funeral due to anxiety surrounding the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) – this must be respected. Where appropriate signpost individuals/families to bereavement support groups at the end of this document.
24. Celebrants within the Shielded and Socially Isolating groups are asked to stay at home and not officiate at any funerals.

Questions and Answers:

What is the maximum number of people who can attend a Funeral?

UK Government guidance does not currently suggest limits to the number of mourners that can attend funerals. However, attendance at funerals should be limited to those from within the household or close family of the loved one – their partner, children, parents and siblings. Friends are permitted if these family members are unable to attend. Nationally, attendance is typically in the order of no more than 10 mourners. This is essential in order to prevent spread of the disease, which could result in further loss of life. Anyone who is showing signs of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) should not attend, and we would ask the same of those socially isolating. Those who are among the ‘shielded’ or are otherwise clinically vulnerable are urged to stay at home and to take part in the funeral virtually or by other ways as described in paragraph 20 above.

How can you ensure that our loved one’s wishes (burial/cremation) are adhered to?

The deceased/family’s choice should be respected in line with the requirements and conditions set out in the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#). Where it is safe to do so the wishes of the deceased will be respected.

The use of Schedule 28 powers.

Schedule 28 of the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#) gives certain powers to local authorities, which can **only** be triggered when a local authority is overwhelmed in managing the death process. It will allow the authority to issue direction on whether to bury or cremate someone, to direct a crematoria to operate longer hours or funeral directors to have shorter services and to direct a company to use their vehicles to transport the deceased or resources. It is reassuring to know that the legislation was amended in response to faith groups - to ensure that local authorities have due regard to the deceased’s wishes, religion and beliefs.

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Some faiths require the deceased to be buried within 24-48 hours. Will this still be possible?

Wherever possible, yes. Acknowledging and respecting the wishes of families and friends is key. Sadly, however, it is possible that an anticipated increase in the number of deaths may affect the time frame in which some processes occur. These include changes to registration processes to follow social distancing, the potential for reduced availability of mortuary space and of transportation - together with a reduction in staffing by cemetery and crematoria staff. Wherever possible we will work to meet the wishes of the deceased or the relatives.

How long will the funeral service last?

This will vary from case to case. If an unusually high number of deaths have taken place, it may be that burials and cremations need to be strictly limited (for example less than half an hour) in order to accommodate a larger number of funerals.

Can we send flowers, wreaths and other tributes to the burial/cremation site?

Families choosing to send floral tributes may do so by making arrangements for the florist to deliver directly to the Funeral Director on the day of the funeral. Alternative ways of honouring loved ones could include donations to the deceased's favourite charity or a public commemoration such as planting a tree, organising a memorial bench or having an entry in a memorial book or on a memorial wall.

Will I have to pay for the funeral?

We recognise that having to think about funeral expenses at such a distressing time presents an added burden to families. The situation regarding paying for funerals remains unchanged; and Kent and Medway Funeral Directors are committed to fair and transparent charging, continuing to work closely with families to meet families' needs. Bereaved families are advised to check that the funeral director is a member of a recognised industry body such as the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) funeral-directory.co.uk, the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) saif.org.uk/members-search, or that your chosen funeral director is covered by the F.A.S. (Funeral Arbitration Scheme). Information as to where to get debt advice is included at the end of this document.

How will I know where my loved one is between their death and their burial/cremation?

We respect and understand the importance in knowing where your loved one has been taken to. Families will be given clear information in this regard and notified of any changes.

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Will a post-mortem be performed if the person passed away with COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?

Usual practice will be followed for deaths in the community (ie outside of a hospital). There will be no post-mortem if it is a confirmed death due to wholly or in part COVID-19 (Coronavirus). There may be circumstances where the death may be investigated by the police and referred to the Coroner to decide.

What if the deceased person wanted to be buried in a faith section of a burial ground – will this be respected?

In having regard to the deceased's faith, local authorities bury a body in the appropriate faith section of a specified burial ground or cemetery. Such a consideration must be balanced with operational requirements and the capacity of mortuaries. Making a direction for cremation or burial that would go against an individual's wishes, religion or belief must and will be the **last** option and only used if there is a severe public health risk in not doing so. In such instances the family will be consulted and the reasons explained to them. At the time of producing these Standards (late April, 2020), it is considered highly unlikely that directions will be required that go against an individual's wishes. Your Funeral Director will be able to advise you.

Will faith groups be prioritised for funerals in line with their religious practices?

Local authorities are under a legal obligation to have regard to the deceased's wishes, religion and beliefs where known. This includes religious practices relating to funerals taking place within a specified period, where possible. These considerations must be balanced with operational requirements and the capacity of mortuaries. Funeral directors are working in partnership with local authorities to serve the needs of communities to ensure that religious needs are met.

How can faith groups link up with the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF)?

Faith groups should speak to the Kent Resilience Forum who are leading on resilience preparations if they are concerned about capacity in any element of the death management system in relation to faith or belief. The Faith Lead for the Kent Death Management Process Group is Shuna Body who can be contacted on shuna.body@kent.fire-uk.org

What is the appeal or complaint process if a local authority has potentially acted against an individual's wishes, religion or belief?

Each local authority/organisation will have a complaints process for raising any appeals or escalations if a family member or friend is unhappy with a direction made. However it is important that family members and friends of the deceased raise their concerns with the person that they have been dealing with in the earliest instance.

Local authorities are under a legal obligation to have due regard to the deceased's wishes, religion and beliefs - what will this involve in practice?

Local authorities must make a reasonable attempt to find out the deceased's wishes, religion and beliefs, by contacting their next of kin and family members and consulting any available public record of the deceased's wishes if available. If the family cannot be found, local authorities should consult the local religious, faith or belief groups, if the deceased's faith, religion or belief is known.

Resources available for faith groups

Church of England - resources for use at funerals during the pandemic

<https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals/funeral-and-bereavementresources-ministers>

Muslim Council of Britain - guidance on Ramadan <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb->

[updates/coronavirus-guidance-for-mosques-and-madrassas/](https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/coronavirus-guidance-for-mosques-and-madrassas/) Details of how people can join a "Virtual Iftar" <https://www.openiftar.co.uk/my>

Corona Advice as to how to spend Ramadan in lockdown <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52363397>

Churches together in Britain Churches together in Britain and Ireland

<https://www.cte.org.uk/>

<https://ctbi.org.uk/>

Traveller Movement

https://www.travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/Funerals%20-covid19_final.pdf

Other Resources

Please visit the webpages of Kent County Council, Medway Council and your local District councils, all of which have dedicated up to date advice on dealing with COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

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Other Support Available

Mental Health		
Mental Health Matters/ Release the Pressure	www.mhm.org.uk www.releasethepressure.co.uk	0800 107060
Samaritans confidential helpline	www.samaritans.org	0330 094 5717
Looking after your Mental health	https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-andhealth/health/coronavirus/looking-after-yourmental-health	
Bereavement Support	It should be noted that Funeral Directors also offer Bereavement Services	
CRUSE	https://www.cruse.org.uk/	0808 808 1677

Bereavement Support	https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirusdealing-bereavement-and-grief Young people https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/childrenand-young-people	
Compassionate friends –following loss of a child	https://www.tcf.org.uk/	0345 123 2304
Childhood Bereavement Network	http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/ Support for bereaved children	
Kent Bereavement Advice Service	https://www.bereavementadvice.org/kent/	0800 634 9494

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Council run bereavement services	https://www.gov.uk/find-bereavement-servicesfrom-council	
Step by step guide following bereavement	https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death	
NHS info on bereavement visits	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxietydepression/coping-with-bereavement/	
If you are bringing up a child whose parents have died	https://www.gov.uk/guardians-allowance	
Finance/Legal		
Financial bereavement support	https://www.gov.uk/bereavement-support-payment	
Information about assistance with paying for a funeral	https://www.gov.uk/funeral-payments	

National Debt Line	https://www.nationaldebtline.org/ visit the dedicated Corona Hub on this page	0808 808 4000
Legal advice Free advice on debt, housing, legal aid etc	www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice	0345 3454345

It should be acknowledged that the information contained within this document was made in line with current legislation at the time. Due to the nature of an ever changing picture, this will be subject to change as the pandemic unfolds. Please consult with your Funeral Director for the latest position.