



Jackie Bailey, Interfaith Celebrant

Ph: 0428 576 372

Em: jackie@jackiebailey.com.au

W: www.jackiebailey.com.au

How to Arrange a Funeral

When someone dies, it can be overwhelming and scary to suddenly have to arrange a funeral.

But it does not have to be that way.

This information sheet sets out the key steps in planning and designing a funeral for your loved one that is authentic, meaningful and affordable.

The five steps in arranging a funeral



Step 1: Have a cup of tea

After a loved one dies, we can feel like we have to get straight into planning the funeral. Zenith Virago, founder of the Natural Death Care Centre, advises, “Before you reach for the phone, turn on the kettle.”

Take a breath. Have a cuppa. Then start making your phone calls.

Step 2: Choose your approach

You might not know this, but there is no legal requirement to work with a funeral home. You can DIY your loved one’s funeral, as much or as little as you like.

For example, you could decide that you will build a coffin, transport your loved one’s body to the crematorium or cemetery, even hire a cool plate so you can take your loved one’s body home for a few days.

The funeral director can also place an obituary for you with details of the service, or you can do this yourself.



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Step 3: Design the ceremony

You can work with a celebrant to design the ceremony, or you can DIY. You can choose your own celebrant or you can ask the funeral director for recommendations.

Some things to consider when choosing a celebrant include:

- Do I or my loved one have a preference for a particular gender?
- Do I or my loved one want the celebrant to include religious or spiritual elements?
- Is the celebrant available at the time and in the location we want?

I generally meet with the family before the ceremony for about an hour, in person if possible, to design and plan the ceremony. At the end of the planning session, you should feel clear on the elements of the ceremony and your tasks.

Personalised elements

There are no rules for the elements of a ceremony. You can do whatever you think is best to farewell your loved one. I have included a general guide on the next page. But remember, you can have any elements you wish. Examples might include:

- A candlelight vigil the night before the ceremony
- Incense and smoking ceremonies before or during the ceremony
- Cultural traditions such as a Celtic uncoiling of the loved one's spirit; placement of stones on or near the loved one's grave; Chinese rituals of paper money
- Entrance of the casket on the back of a ute
- Motorbike cortege for the hearse
- Musicians, singers and special dances
- A whiskey toast

Possible venues

You can also hold the ceremony almost anywhere. For example:

- A park or at the beach (you might need a Council permit)
- A venue e.g. a club, a pub or a surf club
- At home or in a friend's backyard
- At a funeral chapel, crematorium or graveside



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Funeral ceremony: a guide

Start (5 min)	Music plays.
	Everyone takes their places.
	You can bring in the casket now, or already have it in place.
Introduction (5 min)	The celebrant welcomes everyone and might say a few words on behalf of the family.
Eulogy and Speeches (5-15 min)	People who wish to speak would do so now. I recommend speeches of no longer than 5 minutes each, and a total no more than 15 minutes.
Reflection (5-7 min)	Music plays. This is an opportunity to reflect. You might decide to play a slideshow of photos from your loved one's life at this point. I recommend no longer than 5-7 minutes (approx. 2 songs) I often distribute notepaper and pens during the reflection so people can write a message, or come up to the casket and place a flower or say good-bye. The messages which can go in the casket or which the family can keep.
Poem/Reading (3 min)	This is a good moment for a poem, prayer or blessing.
Committal (3 min)	This is the point in the service when the body of your loved one's body is committed to the ground at a burial, or to the crematorium for cremation.
Conclusion (5 min)	The celebrant may say a few final words.
	Music plays. This is the end of the formal ceremony.



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Step 4: Create the elements

Once you have designed the ceremony, you will know what elements to prepare. Here is a general guide.

Funeral elements: a guide

Music	<p>Choose the music for the ceremony. Generally you will need about 5 songs: 1 for the start, 2 for the reflection/slideshow, 1 for the committal and 1 for the conclusion.</p> <hr/> <p>Tell the funeral director and the celebrant. If you want recorded music, some funeral directors ask for the music on a thumb drive, whilst others can play it on Spotify.</p>
Slideshow	<p>If you have decided to have a slideshow, gather images of your loved one from throughout their life if possible.</p> <hr/> <p>Choose the music to accompany the slideshow. I recommend that the slideshow goes for no more than 5-7 minutes.</p>
Objects	<p>Many people like to have an enlarged, framed photo of their loved one at the funeral</p> <hr/> <p>You might also wish to choose some objects from your loved one's life to decorate the casket or the funeral space.</p> <hr/> <p>You can also decide if you want to bring flowers, fabrics, candles (you might need electric candles for some venues) or any other objects.</p> <hr/> <p>Sometimes people like a colour scheme for the funeral. Let everyone know so they can dress accordingly.</p>
Order of Service	<p>You may decide to prepare an 'order of service' brochure, which sets out a guide to the funeral and any prayers, blessings or songs you might want people to join in with if they wish.</p> <hr/> <p>There are online sites which have basic Order of Service templates. Your funeral director or celebrant might also be able to help, for an additional fee.</p>
Mementos	<p>You might wish to create a memento for attendees.</p> <hr/> <p>Examples include a postcard or a bookmark with a picture of your loved one, a favourite saying or poem, and their dates of birth and death.</p>



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Step 5: The ceremony

On the day of the ceremony, hopefully you will need to do as little as possible. The celebrant, the funeral director can take care of everything from here. Your job is simply to be.

Resources

Here are some of my favourite resources for preparing a funeral. I also keep adding resources to my website, including poems and songs, and special resources for children's funerals.

<https://www.jackiebailey.com.au>

Funeral directors

If you are in NSW and choose to work with a funeral director, I recommend Tender Funerals in Port Kembla. They operate throughout the Illawarra, South Coast and Greater Sydney, and are one of the only non-profit funeral homes in Australia. They focus on providing meaningful and affordable services for all.

Tender Funerals

Ph: 02 4276 1611

Em: funeraldirector@tenderfunerals.org

W: <https://www.tenderfunerals.org>

DIY funerals

The Last Hurrah Funerals has a free guide to DIY funerals. Visit

<https://www.lasthurrahfunerals.com.au> and click on "About" and then "Resources"

Order of service templates

There are a couple of websites which provide templates. Some are free and some you have to pay for.

<https://www.info.print-print.co.uk/free-funeral-order-of-service-design-templates/>

<https://eulogise.com.au/>

Celebrants

There are a number of directories online to help you find a celebrant or end-of-life support. Here are the ones I find useful.

<https://www.naturaldeathcarecentre.org/services/>

<https://www.funeralcelebrants.org.au/celebrant-directory>

<https://www.celebrants.org.au>



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Contact me

You are welcome to contact me for a free, no-obligation 15-minute consultation about your service.

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About me

I am Australia's only Ordained Interfaith Celebrant.

I provide support for people who would like a spiritual dimension to a Ceremony, whether or not you identify with a particular religion.

I am passionate about providing **affordable, authentic & meaningful services** for the spiritual but non-religious.

I offer Weddings, Funerals and all other Life Ceremonies throughout Australia.

I am local to Wollongong, Sydney, the Southern Highlands and the South Coast of NSW.

I also offer support towards the end of a loved one's life, as well as spiritual counsel at any point in your life.