



Preparing
for
After
Your
Last
Breath

Making meaningful connection in the Postmortem Gap

Is this about having a Funeral Plan?

Most people think of after death preparation as planning for their funeral. Whilst this can be important, we suggest that preparing fully involves much more than this. The result of the afterdeath preparation we are suggesting is to write a letter, which covers the whole of the postmortem gap from your last breath until your burial or cremation. We call it a “To Whom It May Concern” letter, since it is addressed to anyone, family, friends or carers, who might be involved when you take your last breath. There is an example, **Lily’s Letter**, on the Information page of our website.

Preparing and writing the letter can be helpful in establishing what is important to you, gives you the possibility to prepare those who are going to be affected by your death, and also gives great opportunities for conversations with them. It takes thought and attention to write a letter that is going to convey your wishes and consider the needs of those close to you.

How can I know what needs people have?

Research has shown that some people have a strong emotional need to see someone’s body after they die, and some people have no need to see it. For those who need to see someone’s body, they can have long standing deep regrets if they do not do so. For these people, the situation in which they see the body is important. Privacy, familiarity and physical comfort are helpful elements to consider, as is possibly emotional support from someone not so close.

If you, or those close to you, have not had many experiences of someone dying you they may not know how they will respond or what they will need when you take your last breath. If you feel able to, then it is worth asking those close to you directly. Even if they do not know what they will need, it may be helpful to them just to be aware that they will have needs to be met, and that they may be very different from yours and others’ around them.

What if they don’t want to talk to me about it?

You may find people reluctant to engage in conversations about your letter, and you may have to trust that, despite this, it is of benefit. People knowing that it exists can be helpful in itself - it will always be there when the time comes.

What could I think about?

We suggest you think about how to encourage those close to you to take care of themselves in the days immediately after your last breath, particularly by taking time to feel into what is important to them at this time. By keeping your body at home, even for a few days, and tending to it themselves, they will have the opportunity to begin to adjust to the momentous change which has occurred, and to make meaningful connection with you and each other.

You may be introducing people to ideas which are new to them, but which could have significant value to their mental well-being. To know your preferred options ahead of time allows them to get used to these ideas, and to explore with you how they might carry them out.

So, what do I write in the letter ?

Your “To Whom It May Concern” Letter to the people close to you could have these elements in it:

- ❖ reference to what you believe happens after your last breath,
- ❖ advice that they may have surprising reactions, different to others,
- ❖ suggestions for taking care of themselves in the first few days,
- ❖ guidance on your preferred options for care of your body after your last breath,
- ❖ suggestions for ways they may find meaningful connection with you, and each other, in the first few days after your last breath,
- ❖ guidance for your burial or cremation, with or without a funeral.

Why give guidance rather than specifics?

It is our experience that, given time and encouragement, people know what best serves them in the days after someone’s last breath. By giving guidance you give them the scope to do what is best for them, whilst also honouring your requests and preferences.

This leaflet was prepared by Pushing Up The Daisies to inform people wishing to take good care of themselves and those close to them at the time of their death. An example “To Whom It May Concern” letter, Lily’s Letter, is available on our website.

For information on the decisions to be made see our “Your Options When Someone Dies” Leaflet.

We can help you think through your options so that you can write a letter that is right for your situation and budget.

Please get in touch.

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