



Preparing  
for  
After  
Your  
Last  
Breath

## 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 thorough preparation involves much more than this. The result of the after- death preparations we propose is a letter that includes the whole time, from taking your last breath until your burial or cremation. We call it an “After My Last Breath” letter. You can address it to family, friends, carers, or anyone 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 help you to establish what is important to you. It also helps you to prepare those who are going to be affected by your death and offers opportunities for conversations with them. It takes thought and attention to write a letter that will 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 others do not need to see it. Those who need to see someone’s body can have long-standing deep regrets if they do not do so. For these people, the circumstances in which they see the body are important. Privacy, familiarity, and physical comfort are helpful elements to consider, as is possibly emotional support from someone not so close.

If you have not had many experiences with someone dying, you may not know how they will respond or what they will need when you take your last breath. If you feel able to, it is worth asking those close to you directly. Even if they do not know what they will need, it may be helpful to be aware that they will have needs to be met and that their needs 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 the time to notice what is important *to them*. Consider whether they will want to take charge of your body or engage a funeral director. Keeping your body at home, even for a few days, possibly tending to it themselves, can help them begin to adjust to the change. There may be opportunities for meaningful connection with you and each other to think about too.

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

## So, what do I write in the letter?

Your “After My Last Breath” Letter could have these elements in it:

- ❖ reference to what you believe happens after your last breath,
- ❖ advice that they may have surprising reactions, different from others,
- ❖ suggestions for taking care of themselves in the first few days,
- ❖ guidance on your preferred options for the 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 provide them with the scope to do what is best for them while 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 of an “After My Last Breath” letter, Lily’s Letter, is available on our website. A video giving further guidance on writing your letter is also available.

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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