

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED A HOME FUNERAL?

Death touches us all. During the second half of the twentieth century, many, if not most, Americans died in hospitals. Often, if family members were present at the time of death, they had little time to spend with the body before it was taken to the hospital morgue. The family was under pressure to select a funeral home and next saw their loved one embalmed and lying in a casket in a funeral home. Family members often did little more to their loved one than offer a kiss or a touch of the hand.

Even though funeral directors try to comfort families and funeral homes provide a comfortable, dignified place for a funeral, a funeral home is still a strange place with services provided by strangers.

Families may wish to consider caring for the body of a loved one themselves. Caring for a dying family member is probably much harder than caring for him or her after death. Today, with the support of hospice, an ever-increasing number of families are choosing to care for their dying family members at home. Home funerals, also known as family directed funerals, are becoming more common across the country, probably as a natural extension of this trend.

WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS?

Pros

- The family can spend time with the loved one in their own home, typically one to three days before interment.
- Adjustment for parents to the loss of a child or by children to the loss of a parent or sibling can be easier in a home setting.
- The family may find comfort in bathing and dressing their loved one, one last time.
- Friends and family can visit at times set by the family. Caskets can be closed for visitation or open for viewing.
- The body can be viewed on the bed rather than in a casket, if desired, until final disposition.
- The family can select a casket or alternative container for cremation or burial online, or through a funeral home. Some families find comfort in decorating the casket or container themselves.
- Embalming is not necessary. Instead the body can be kept cool in various ways such as with ice packs.
- A church or graveside service can be held.
- Funeral costs are more easily contained.

Cons

- More planning is required than when simply turning the body over to a funeral home.
- There is more work for the family than with a funeral in a funeral home.
- Care needs to be taken that the casket selected will fit through doors.
- Muscles relax after death so an adult diaper or pads may be needed.
- If cremation is chosen, whether in a funeral home or at home, a metal casket cannot be used.

WHAT DOES NEW YORK STATE REQUIRE?

- New York requires that a funeral director sign and file the death certificate and obtain the transit and burial permits.
- A funeral director must also be present at the final point of disposition.
- The body must be transported in a rigid container that is concealed from view from outside of the vehicle.
- At this time, if death occurs in a New York hospital, to avoid problems, either have the funeral director pick up the body or have him arrange with the hospital in advance for removal by the family.

HOW DO I ARRANGE FOR A HOME FUNERAL?

Discuss plans with family members and write the plans down. If an early death is expected, discuss the plans with the hospice or hospital social worker. If death is imminent contact the funeral director.

New York State law now allows each of you to select the person that you want to arrange your funeral. Complete the NYS statutory form Designation of Agent for Disposition of Body. The person selected is expected to act in compliance with the wishes of the deceased.

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of L.I./NYC has arranged with a local funeral home to offer a Home Funeral plan that complies with New York State law. The options range from simply having the viewing or visitation at home with the funeral director transporting and preparing the body to having the family completely care for the body except for the funeral director obtaining the authorizations required by law and arranging for a funeral director to be present at the final point of disposition.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- Talk to your hospice or hospital social worker.
- Join the Funeral Consumers Alliance of L.I./NYC online at www.NYFunerals.org or by calling 631-544-0383.
- Visit the national website of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, Inc. at www.funerals.org
- Read: *Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love*, by Lisa Carlson, 1998.
- Watch the film: *A Family Undertaking*

Funeral Consumers Alliance of L.I./NYC is a not for profit organization of area residents dedicated to helping our fellow New Yorkers make funeral arrangements that are dignified, meaningful and affordable. We are staffed by unpaid volunteers and are funded by donations from the public and membership fees. Simply put, we are a group of people who have learned about planning funerals through personal experience, and we would like to share our knowledge with you. To join visit: www.NYFunerals.org or telephone: 631-544-0383.

HOME FUNERALS IN NEW YORK

Until the second half of the twentieth century, many funerals in this country were held at home. That was a traditional American funeral. Some of you are old enough to remember such a funeral held in your own or a neighbor's home. Perhaps, when you are planning a funeral for yourself or a family member, you might want to consider returning to this traditional option. Yes, it is legal under New York State law.



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