

Common Questions and Answers about Planning a Service or Burial

In the days immediately following the death of a loved one, grieving family members and friends are asked to make some very difficult, important and many times, urgent decisions. Many questions can arise regarding these decisions. Hopefully, this handout will help answer some of those questions.

1. Should I consider cremation or burial?

- Every person and family are different and not everyone will want to make the same decisions. Many times, the deceased might have a plan already in place. If the deceased's wishes are not known, then it is up to the family to decide what type of arrangements will be made.
- Cremation is not a substitution for a funeral, but an alternative to earth burial or entombment. Cremation often follows a traditional funeral or memorial service.
- There are many factors that determine these decisions: religious and cultural traditions, cost, and/or personal preference.

2. What is the purpose of embalming and does the deceased have to be embalmed?

- **Embalming is a process to help preserve the body of the deceased. Embalming makes it possible to lengthen the time between death and the final resting place, thus allowing family members time to arrange and participate in the type of service most comforting to them. It slows down the decomposition process and enhances the appearance of the deceased**
- **In Colorado, the deceased does not have to be embalmed however, embalming is required when the deceased is going to be transported out of state.**

3. What do funeral directors do? Why do we need them?

- Funeral directors are caregivers and administrators. They make the arrangements for transportation of the deceased, complete all necessary paperwork and implement the choices made by the family regarding the funeral and final resting place of the deceased.
- Funeral directors have experience assisting the bereaved in coping with death and are trained to answer questions about grief, recognize when a person is having difficulty coping and recommend sources of professional help.

4. Are you required to have a funeral director?

- No law in Colorado prevents family members from making their own arrangements for their loved one as long as filing and documentation requirements are met. However, most people find it very trying to be solely responsible for arranging the details and legal matters surrounding a death, while at the same time attempting to deal with the realities of a loss of a loved one.

5. How do people select a funeral director?

- The funeral director is often chosen on reputation, proximity to the home, or past experience. It is best to visit the funeral home and to talk with the funeral director in person when time allows. This allows you to examine the facilities, ask questions about prices and understand the ways in which you will be served. Key factors in the final selection of a funeral director may include comfort and rapport.

6. How much does a funeral cost?

- The National Funeral Director's Association estimates that in 2004, the average charge for an adult, full-service funeral was \$6,500.00.
- The Funeral Rule, enforced by the Federal Trade Commission, requires funeral directors to give you itemized prices for the cost of the funeral in writing. This is called a General Price List (GPL). The Rule also requires funeral directors to give you other information about their services and a summary of your selection before you leave the funeral home.

7. Why have public viewings of the deceased?

- Viewing is part of many cultural, ethnic and religious traditions. Many grief specialists believe that viewing aids the grief process by helping the bereaved recognize the reality of death. Viewing is encouraged for children, as long as the process is explained and the activity is voluntary. If viewing is not possible, a picture or another method of honoring the deceased may be considered.

*"A man's dying is more the survivors' affair than his own."
Thomas Mann*