

No One wants to Talk About Death

Planning for death is often an unspoken worry. People have trouble expressing fears and feelings openly. They broach the subject awkwardly, hoping someone will pick up on their cues.

“Don’t worry about me. I’m too old. I won’t be around much longer.”

“I don’t want to be a burden to my family and friends.”

“I’m not going to die. I’m going to live forever.”

“How can I plan for my death?”

“Do I need a will?”

“I want to change my will.”

“Who will pay? I don’t want to die a pauper.”

“I’ve got my plot all paid for.”

“I’d be better off dead.”

“I’m such a burden—they’ll be glad when I’m gone.”

“I’ll be called home soon.”

“My family will know what to do.”

Become aware of these hidden concerns so you can help people over the hurdles to discussion. If you feel self-conscious about discussing funeral plans with the people you care for, think about the comfort they may derive from:

- knowing someone cares and is concerned
- easing anxieties just by talking
- finding that making plans isn’t so difficult, especially when they’re not alone.

Peace of Mind Comes with Planning

Because . . .

- Sharing plans with loved ones often brings families closer and makes grief easier to overcome.
- Planning ahead is satisfying for people who like to make their own decisions and do things for themselves. It gives them an opportunity to be responsible for themselves—and for others.

• Knowing arrangements are made smooths away some worries about dying or burdening others with unfinished business. Completing an important task—especially if doing so helps someone they love—gives people a significant sense of accomplishment and pride.

• People can explore alternatives and make choices that suit their religious beliefs, personal values, and financial circumstances.

• Planning gives people an important opportunity to help others—through anatomical donations or memorial gifts to a favorite charity. It also spares families all of the pain and dissonance that can arise over making arrangements at a time of crisis.

• Planning ahead does not mean paying ahead but it can save money. It also protects loved ones from emotional decisions—and expensive mistakes—when death occurs.

Before people can make funeral plans they need to be aware of the choices available. To make informed choices, they need to know all the options, costs, and legal requirements.

You can help. We can help, too.

Today, funeral home costs average \$6,500 or more—not including cemetery expenses. For many people, a funeral is one of the largest expenses they will face. Most will make funeral arrangements having little knowledge of their rights or alternatives. Decisions are made at a time when judgment is clouded by grief and bereavement—when people are most vulnerable.

More than sixty-five years ago, memorial societies were formed to provide consumers with an alternative. Memorial society members pay a fraction of the cost for cremation and burial.

A Pervasive Concern

Every year, thousands of older Americans seek advice about funeral plans. One short article in the back pages of *Modern Maturity* prompted more than 20,000 letters voicing worries and practical concerns about the indignity and expense of dying . . .

I am almost 76 years of age . . . my husband and I are living on Social Security, and our savings are small. It would take almost all that we have for the funeral. . .

(Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

My wife and I went to the undertaker we planned for our funerals, but when we asked about the minimum cost, they said at least \$1,500. So we have been looking around for somebody else.

(Thompson, Connecticut)

I have seen what my mother-in-law and grandmothers went through within hours of losing their husbands . . . They were made to feel that if they didn't provide the very best, they surely didn't love their life mates.

(Charlotte, North Carolina)

I want to arrange for my cremation while I can still function. I am 86—absolutely alone—no relatives of any kind. I do have many nice friends, but I do not want to leave them the burden of disposing of me . . . I only wish I could send my ashes to be scattered over the lakes and mountain peaks of my most beloved native Switzerland. . . I want to go home.

(Caroline County, Maryland)

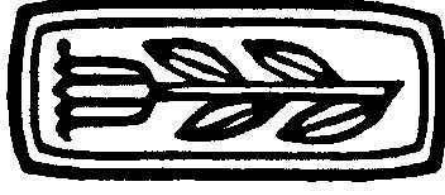
Additional Resources

Dealing Creatively With Death: A Manual of Death Education and Burial by Ernest Morgan. Upper Access, 160 pp. \$14.95

Caring for the Dead, Your Final Act of Love by Lisa Carlson. Upper Access, 640 pp. \$29.95

To order these books, contact the Funeral Consumer's Alliance at www.funerals.org call 1-800-765-0107

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