

# Checklist for Death care – Information for surviving family

Courtesy of GWEP HRSA Grant, Cheryl Mustain, LICSW  
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## Person found deceased and hospice care is not involved:

- Don't panic; this is a very natural occurrence and you have time. You can spend time with your loved one.
- Don't rearrange or clean up anything before police arrive.
- Call **non-emergency** number for police in your town: e.g., Ludlow (413) 583-8305, Springfield 787-6302, Greenfield 775-5411.

Do NOT call 911 if the person is clearly deceased. Paramedics would need to perform CPR (unless a contrary MOLST order is prominently displayed) until doctor or other authorized person declares the death.

## General Checklist

1. Get a legal pronouncement of death. If no doctor is present, police officer will remain with the body and Medical Examiner (M.E.) will be called.
2. If M.E. does not take the body (e.g., for an autopsy), arrange for transportation of the body. Contact a funeral director (or several, to compare prices). By law, a funeral home must provide price info over the phone.
3. Notify the person's doctor or primary care provider.
4. Notify close family and friends. (Ask some to contact others.)
5. Handle care of dependents and pets.
6. Call the person's employer, if he or she was working. Request info about benefits and any pay due. Ask whether there was a life-insurance policy through the company.

## *Within a few days after death*

7. Arrange for funeral and burial or cremation. Search the person's documents to find out whether there was a prepaid burial plan. Ask a friend or family member to go with you to the funeral home. Prepare an obituary.
8. Contact Social Security (800-772-1213; [socialsecurity.gov](http://socialsecurity.gov)) and other agencies from which the deceased received benefits, such as Veterans Affairs (800-827-1000; [va.gov](http://va.gov)), to stop payments and ask about applicable survivor benefits. A one-time Social Security payment of \$255 can be paid to the surviving spouse if he or she was living with the deceased or, if living apart, was receiving certain Social Security benefits on the deceased's record. If there is no surviving spouse, the payment is made to a child who is eligible for benefits on the deceased's record in the month of death.
9. If the person was in the military or belonged to a fraternal or religious group, contact that organization. It may have burial benefits or conduct funeral services.
10. Ask a friend or relative to keep an eye on the person's home, answer the phone, collect mail, throw food out, and water plants.

*Up to 10 days after death*

**11.** Obtain certified copies of the death certificate (usually from the funeral home). Get multiple copies; you'll need them for financial institutions, government agencies, and insurers.

**12.** Find the Will (if any) and take to the appropriate county or city office to have it accepted for probate.

**13.** If necessary, the estate's executor should open a bank account for the deceased's estate, and obtain an estate tax ID number (EIN) from the IRS.

**14.** Contact:

- A trust and estates attorney, to learn how to transfer assets and assist with probate issues.
- Police, to have them periodically check the deceased's house if vacant.
- Accountant or tax preparer, to find out whether an estate-tax return or final income-tax return should be filed.
- The person's investment adviser, for information on holdings.
- Bank, to find accounts and safe deposit box.
- Life insurance agent, to get claim forms.
- Agency providing pension services, to stop monthly check and get claim forms.
- Utility companies, to change or stop service, if appropriate.
- Postal service, to stop or forward mail.

## **Know the person's wishes. Steps to take BEFORE death.**

For an elderly friend or relative:

- Know the location of the will, birth certificate, marriage and divorce certificates, Social Security information, life-insurance policies, financial documents, and keys to safe deposit box or home safe.
- Ask the person's wishes about funeral arrangements, organ donation, and burial or cremation.
- Have the person complete an advance directive, including a living will, which specifies wanted and unwanted procedures. The person should also appoint a health-care proxy to make medical decisions if he or she becomes incapacitated.
- Have a do-not-resuscitate order drawn up if the person desires. That tells health-care professionals not to perform CPR if the person's heart or breathing stops and restarting would not result in a meaningful life.
- Make sure the person gives copies of the documents to his or her doctor and a few family members or friends. Take the documents to the hospital if the person is admitted.