Day 1: Someone Has Died Suddenly

You do not need to sort everything out today.
Your only job today is to get through today.

This checklist is based on my experience of a sudden, unexpected death at home in Northern Ireland. Procedures may differ elsewhere. Follow the instructions given by the emergency services, police and Coroner.

Immediate Things

- ☐ Call 999 immediately if the person is unresponsive, you don't know whether they are alive, or the death was sudden and unexpected.
- ☐ Follow the instructions you're given. The emergency operator and paramedics will take you through what needs to happen immediately.
- ☐ Be aware that, with a sudden or unexpected death in Northern Ireland, the police will also be informed and the death will be reported to the Coroner. The Coroner will decide whether any further investigation is needed. You don't need to organise that process yourself.
- ☐ Get someone you trust to come to you. Even if you don't particularly want people around, having one calm, useful person there can help.
- ☐ Stay close to the people who are going through this with you. Your children, partner, brother, sister, best friend or whoever your people are. Just be together.

Find One Thing That Will Become Incredibly Important

- ☐ Find a notebook and pen.

Your brain is dealing with too much to hold everything in your head. It can be a child's school book, a cheap art pad lying around the house, which is what I used, or anything else with pages you can write on.

Use it to record:

- ☐ The date of the person's death
- ☐ The names of the people you speak to
- ☐ Telephone numbers and reference numbers
- ☐ What you have been told
- ☐ What is supposed to happen next
- ☐ Questions you want to ask
- ☐ Anything else you are frightened you might forget

Don't rely on your head. Your head has enough to deal with.

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The Funeral

You are going through extreme trauma and shock. You don't need definitive plans. Things will come together.

If you are already thinking about the funeral, these are the only things you might want to do:

- ☐ Write down the name of a funeral director you may want to use
- ☐ Ask someone you trust for a recommendation if you don't know one
- ☐ Contact the funeral director if and when you feel ready

This may not be on Day One. It wasn't something I was able to do.

> If the death has been reported to the Coroner, you can speak to a funeral director, but you shouldn't finalise the funeral arrangements until the Coroner has authorised the person's body to be released.

That is enough for now. You can deal with the rest tomorrow, or whenever you are ready.

Look After the Ridiculously Ordinary Stuff

- ☐ Keep your children close if that is what you all need. Daniel and I needed to be together.
- ☐ Feed the pets
- ☐ Get somebody to walk the dog if necessary
- ☐ Take essential medication
- ☐ Try to drink something, even if your whole body doesn't want to
- ☐ Try to eat something, even a slice of toast
- ☐ Tell work you won't be available, if necessary
- ☐ Ask someone else to contact work for you if you can't face doing it
- ☐ Ask someone else to drive if you need to go anywhere
- ☐ Let somebody else deal with food, tea or visitors if they are willing to do it

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Things You Do Not Need to Do Today

Unless there is a specific urgent reason, these things can wait.

- ☐ Pensions can wait
- ☐ Probate can wait
- ☐ The person's belongings can stay exactly where they are
- ☐ Accounts and subscriptions can wait
- ☐ Decisions about the house, mortgage or where you will live can wait
- ☐ Major financial decisions can wait
- ☐ You do not have to work out what life will look like in six months
- ☐ You do not need to have the whole funeral organised immediately
- ☐ You do not have to personally tell everybody what has happened
- ☐ You do not have to have lots of people around you

Daniel and I wanted to be on our own, and we told everyone this.

If People Want to Help

Give away actual tasks. Remember to put yourself first. You are the person who has to deal with all of this, and it should be on your terms.

Ask someone to:

- ☐ Bring food
- ☐ Make tea or coffee
- ☐ Walk the dog or look after pets
- ☐ Pick something up
- ☐ Drive you somewhere if needed
- ☐ Tell other people what has happened
- ☐ Contact somebody on your behalf
- ☐ Deal with visitors
- ☐ Help with children
- ☐ Make notes while you're talking to somebody
- ☐ Help with funeral arrangements, but only if you are ready
- ☐ Just sit with you

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Before Today Ends

Forget the enormous list. Check only these things:

- ☐ Have the emergency services or police told me what will happen next?
- ☐ Is there someone with me or us if we need them?
- ☐ Are the children with someone they trust and do they have what they need right now?
- ☐ Have the pets and other basic necessities been taken care of?
- ☐ Have I taken any essential medication?
- ☐ Have I written down anything important I've been told?
- ☐ Do I know what the next thing is, even if that isn't until tomorrow?

Then you've done enough for today.

My Notes

About this resource: This checklist is a prompt, not a set of rules. Every death and every family is different. Follow any instructions given by the emergency services, police, Coroner, medical professionals or funeral director.