

The First Week After Someone Dies

What actually needs done, what might need done, and what can wait.

The first week is not a seven-day deadline. You are still trying to understand what has happened, and your brain may be completely screwed.

First: You Are Still in Shock

- ☐ Stay close to the people I need close to me
- ☐ Eat something, even if it is small
- ☐ Drink something
- ☐ Take my own medication or collect prescriptions if needed
- ☐ Rest when I can
- ☐ Let somebody else deal with visitors if I don't want them
- ☐ Ask for help if I need it

For us, staying together mattered. Daniel and I didn't want to be separated. Do what feels manageable for you and the people closest to you.

What would make today slightly more manageable?

Funeral Arrangements

Depending on what has happened and your circumstances, some of this may already be underway.

- ☐ Choose or contact a funeral director
- ☐ Decide burial or cremation, if this is known
- ☐ Think about the type of funeral or ceremony
- ☐ Contact clergy, Humanist celebrant or another celebrant if needed
- ☐ Agree a date and time when possible
- ☐ Think about where the ceremony will happen
- ☐ Choose a coffin
- ☐ Start thinking about music
- ☐ Start gathering photographs
- ☐ Think about readings, stories or a tribute
- ☐ Decide whether family or friends will speak
- ☐ Give funeral details to the people who need them
- ☐ Ask somebody else to organise refreshments or other practical jobs

Questions I need to ask

Who can help with these arrangements?

Who Actually Needs to Know This Week?

- ☐ Immediate family
- ☐ Close friends
- ☐ Employer or work
- ☐ School, college or childcare where relevant
- ☐ Anybody directly involved in funeral arrangements
- ☐ Other urgent contact

Someone else can tell people for me

Start a Notebook

This was one of the most useful things I did. I found a cheap notebook and started writing everything down.

- ☐ Who I contacted
- ☐ Date I contacted them
- ☐ Phone number or email
- ☐ Who I spoke to
- ☐ Reference or case number
- ☐ What they told me
- ☐ What I need to do next
- ☐ Any deadline
- ☐ Any follow-up date

You do not need a special system. The point is simply to stop relying on your memory.

Notebook or folder kept

Find Things. Don't Sort Everything.

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Wallet or purse
- ☐ Keys
- ☐ Important paperwork
- ☐ Basic bank information
- ☐ Pension information I happen to find
- ☐ Insurance information I happen to find
- ☐ Property or mortgage paperwork if relevant
- ☐ Employer details
- ☐ Anything obviously important sitting in front of me

Things I know I need to find later

Don't Start Deleting Their Digital Life

- ☐ Keep their phone safe
- ☐ Keep their computer, laptop or tablet safe
- ☐ Don't delete email accounts
- ☐ Don't reset devices without thinking about what may be lost
- ☐ Don't close social accounts simply because they exist
- ☐ Don't cancel cloud storage before checking photographs or files
- ☐ Remember their phone or email may be needed for verification codes

Find first. Record second. Decide what to do with it later.

Give Jobs Away

- ☐ Bring food or groceries
- ☐ Walk the dog or help with pets
- ☐ Do school runs or lifts
- ☐ Tell people what has happened
- ☐ Pass on funeral details
- ☐ Deal with visitors
- ☐ Collect photographs
- ☐ Ask friends for memories
- ☐ Organise tea, coffee and food
- ☐ Drive me somewhere
- ☐ Pick something up
- ☐ Sit beside me while I make a difficult call

A job I can give to somebody else today

The Ridiculously Ordinary Things

Normal life hasn't stopped simply because yours has been blown apart.

- ☐ Pets fed
- ☐ Dog walked
- ☐ Children have what they need
- ☐ Basic groceries in the house
- ☐ Bins dealt with
- ☐ Clean clothes if needed
- ☐ Prescriptions or medication
- ☐ Appointments that genuinely cannot wait
- ☐ Car or transport if needed

Money This Week

- ☐ Ask what funeral items actually cost
- ☐ Ask what is included in funeral director fees
- ☐ Ask which funeral extras are optional
- ☐ Keep receipts and paperwork
- ☐ Make a note of urgent household payments
- ☐ Write down financial things I discover rather than trying to solve them all

Urgent payments or questions

Things That Can Wait

- ☐ Sorting through clothes and belongings
- ☐ Deciding what to keep or give away
- ☐ Most subscriptions
- ☐ Social media decisions
- ☐ Memorial decisions
- ☐ Headstone decisions
- ☐ What to do with ashes, if there is no immediate need to decide
- ☐ Major house decisions
- ☐ Longer-term financial decisions
- ☐ Trying to sort every pension, account and piece of paperwork at once

Leaving something for later is not avoiding it. It is deciding that it does not need your energy this week.

What Actually Needs My Attention Next?

At the end of the week, don't make another enormous list. Pick the next few things.

1.

2.

3.

Who can help me with those three things?

This is not a seven-day deadline.
Take it day by day, or hour by hour if necessary.

About this resource: This checklist is based partly on my own experience of the first week after Darren died suddenly. It is a practical prompt, not a complete legal or administrative checklist. What needs to happen, and when, will depend on the circumstances of the death and where you live. Follow any specific instructions or deadlines given by the relevant authorities, funeral director or professional adviser.