GOODBYE WITH LOVE

HOME • TRANSITION • ESTATE • LEGACY

When someone dies

A gentle guide to the first steps, funeral arrangements and finding support.

For families and the people supporting them.
With practical information for Victoria.

The first steps

When someone dies, it can be difficult to take in information while also making phone calls and decisions. Start with the next necessary step and ask someone you trust to stay with you or help take notes.

If the death is unexpected

Call 000 and follow the operator's instructions. If you are unsure whether the person has died, call 000. Do not arrange to move the person yourself; follow the directions of emergency services.

If the death was expected at home

When someone dies peacefully at home as expected, there is usually no need to rush the goodbye or arrange immediate collection. Follow the agreed plan and contact the doctor or palliative-care team for guidance about confirming the death and what happens next. You can ask for time to sit together, gather the people who matter and consider how you would like to care for your loved one. There is more about these choices on the next page. [1]

If the person dies in hospital or care

Ask the hospital, hospice or aged-care staff to explain what happens next, whom to contact and the arrangements for the person's care. Staff can arrange the doctor. Ask about any time available for family to be present and cultural or spiritual practices that matter. [1]

If the coroner is involved

Some deaths are referred to the Coroners Court. Follow the instructions provided by police, healthcare staff or the court. You can speak to a funeral director before the investigation is finished; ask them to confirm release arrangements before a funeral date is finalised. [2]

Choose one person to help with communication

Write down names, phone numbers and the next action after each call. Decide who should be told personally before any public announcement. Ask a trusted person to help with meals, children, pets or contacting relatives.

This guide is a starting point for families in Victoria. The linked official sources on page 11 explain procedures and current requirements.

Time together at home

Care does not have to stop at the moment of death. For some families, these quiet hours become an important part of their goodbye.

After an expected death, you may wish to sit beside your loved one, hold their hand, play familiar music, pray, tell stories or simply be still. Some families gather others; some prefer privacy. Neither response needs to be justified.

Ask for the time that matters to you

Tell the care team and funeral provider if you would like your loved one to remain at home. Ask what is practical in your circumstances and what support is needed. Depending on the arrangements, time at home may be hours or days. Suitable cooling, the person's condition, the environment and any medical or coronial requirements need to be considered with experienced support.

Taking part in their care

Families may choose to help wash, dress or wrap their loved one, brush their hair or carry out meaningful rituals. Ask the care team or an experienced after-death-care practitioner to guide you and explain any precautions. You can take part as much or as little as feels right, and change your mind.

A vigil can be simple

A vigil is time spent in the presence of the person who has died. It might include readings, flowers, silence or a small gathering. Discuss cultural and spiritual wishes early so practical arrangements can support them.

The goodbye can continue

Ask about further time together, care rituals or viewing after transfer, or whether returning home can be arranged. There may be more choices than the usual sequence of collection followed by a coffin viewing. Confirm what the provider can offer before agreeing to a plan.

These choices apply where the circumstances allow. If the coroner is involved, follow their directions before washing, dressing or moving the person.

Australian Home Funeral Alliance | Home funeral information

Palliative Care Australia | Family-led care after death

An end-of-life doula beside you

An end-of-life doula offers non-medical support to a person and the people close to them before, during and after death.

A doula can help make space for conversations, explain choices and support the practical and emotional parts of saying goodbye. Their role is shaped by their training, experience and the services they offer.

Support may include

- Talking through wishes, questions and what matters most.
- Companionship, listening and support at the bedside.
- Helping family and friends organise practical support.
- Planning a vigil, personal ritual or meaningful farewell.
- Legacy projects, stories, letters and memory-making.
- Guidance with family-led after-death care, where specifically offered.

Ask about the support you need

Not every doula offers hands-on after-death care or home-funeral support. Ask about relevant training, experience, service area, availability, fees and who to contact outside agreed hours. If keeping your loved one at home matters, ask specifically about cooling arrangements and links with the care team and funeral provider.

Working alongside the care team

A doula does not replace your doctor, palliative-care team, solicitor or funeral provider. Some practitioners hold separate professional roles; clarify which service they are providing and who is responsible for each part of the arrangements.

Places to explore support

Find a practitioner through the directory, learn more about the doula role with Preparing the Way, or explore Journease, whose team serves the Mornington Peninsula. Confirm services, local availability and whether the support feels right for your family.

End of Life Doula Directory | Find a doula

Preparing the Way | What is an end-of-life doula?

Journease | End-of-life doula services

These links are for information, not formal partnerships or guarantees of availability. You are welcome to choose your own practitioner.

Arranging a funeral or farewell

A helpful first conversation is one where you can ask questions, understand the choices and see the costs clearly.

Look for wishes and existing arrangements

Check for recorded preferences, cultural or religious instructions and any existing funeral plan or prepaid arrangement. Tell the funeral director what you have found before agreeing to new services. If there is uncertainty about who may make arrangements, ask the relevant solicitor before signing a contract.

Choose a provider that explains the options

You can ask more than one provider for information and a written quote where circumstances allow. Explain what matters to the family and what you can afford. Ask what decisions are needed now and what can wait.

Understand the full written cost

Consumer Affairs Victoria says funeral providers must give an itemised statement of costs before an agreement is made. Ask for goods and services, service fees and third-party charges to be shown clearly. Check what is estimated, excluded or optional and how additional charges will be approved. [3]

Questions to take to the meeting

- What choices are available within our budget?
- What is included in the quote, and what is charged separately?
- Which decisions have a deadline, and why?
- Who will be our contact, and who will carry out the arrangements?
- Can you accommodate our cultural, spiritual and accessibility needs?
- Who is signing the agreement, and what are the payment terms?

Ask about registration and the certificate

In Victoria, the funeral director usually registers the death and can arrange the legal death certificate. Ask what is included in the quote and which certificate is needed. If you are arranging matters without a funeral director, contact Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria for guidance. [4]

A meaningful farewell does not need to be measured by how much is spent.

You have choices

A farewell can reflect the person's values, your family's wishes and what is affordable. You can ask for alternatives before accepting a package.

Coffins made from different materials

Ask about purpose-made cardboard coffins, simple timber coffins or woven options such as willow, wicker or bamboo. Suitability depends on the chosen burial or cremation service, construction, fittings and local requirements. Confirm acceptance with the funeral provider and cemetery or crematorium before purchasing or decorating anything.

Shrouds and natural burial

A shroud is a cloth wrapping used to care for and enclose the person. Some services allow a shroud with an appropriate carrier instead of a conventional coffin. Ask the chosen cemetery or crematorium about its requirements. Natural burial can involve biodegradable materials and specific preparation and clothing rules.

Bunurong Memorial Park offers a natural burial area. Ask Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust about current availability, accepted materials and the full cost of the arrangements.

Ask what an environmental claim means

If a product is described as "eco-friendly", ask about its materials, finishes, lining and fittings, how it is made and whether it meets the requirements of your chosen service. A different-looking coffin is not, by itself, proof of lower environmental impact.

A simple arrangement and a later gathering

Ask about burial or cremation without an attended ceremony, with a family memorial at another time if wanted. Check what is included, who can attend any part of the process and how the person's wishes will be respected. Availability and arrangements vary.

Make it personal in affordable ways

Letters, drawings, music or a family-made tribute can be meaningful. Ask before adding decorations or items to a coffin or shroud, as materials may be restricted. You can choose simplicity with care and dignity.

SMCT | Natural burial options at Bunurong Memorial Park

SMCT | Natural Burial Standards and accepted materials

Make the farewell feel like them

Begin with the person: the relationships, habits, beliefs and small details that made their life their own.

Some families want a formal service. Others prefer a simple farewell, a private gathering or a separate memorial later. Discuss the available arrangements and any legal or practical requirements with the provider, celebrant or faith leader.

Choose a few meaningful details

A favourite song, a familiar reading, a photograph or a story told in someone's own words can bring a personal connection. There is no need to include every part of a life in a single ceremony.

- What would the person have wanted people to know or remember?
- Which people, traditions, languages or beliefs should be included?
- Who wants to contribute, and what feels comfortable for them?
- Would a private moment, viewing or ritual matter to the family?
- What access, transport or remote attendance arrangements are needed?

Share the work gently

Ask one person to collect photographs, another to check names and dates, and someone else to coordinate readings or music. Keep a single approved version of the service information and agree who can make final changes.

Give children a supported choice

Explain in clear, age-appropriate words what the farewell will involve. Invite questions and discuss whether and how they would like to participate. Arrange a trusted adult who can stay with them and step outside if needed. Grief Australia has resources for supporting children and young people. [6]

Respect privacy and differences

Ask before sharing photographs, recording a ceremony or posting online. Family members may have different memories and relationships with the person. You can acknowledge that a life was complex without expecting everyone to feel or speak in the same way.

You do not have to create a perfect farewell to honour someone's life.

People to tell and things to protect

Make a short list and work through it with the appropriate person. Some tasks are time-sensitive; others can be shared or handled later.

Begin with relevant notifications

Services Australia provides a “Who to notify” checklist and information about payments and support. Check its current requirements promptly if the person received a payment. The Australian Death Notification Service can help notify participating organisations; it does not replace every notification. [1, 5]

- Close family, friends and people providing day-to-day support.
- Employer, relevant government services and care providers.
- Banks, insurers, superannuation funds and other relevant accounts.
- Utilities, subscriptions and memberships, where appropriate.
- The solicitor or executor dealing with the estate.

Keep information and documents together

Record whom you contacted, when and what they requested. Ask each organisation about its process and the documents it needs. Keep identification, financial papers and the legal death certificate secure, and share them only with appropriate people.

Check the home’s immediate needs

Arrange agreed care for pets, collect mail and check access and security. If the home will be unoccupied, ask the insurer about cover and any requirements. If someone remains living there, consider their needs before changing services or access.

Pause before clearing or distributing

Keep important documents, devices and meaningful belongings safe. Confirm who can authorise access, removal or distribution and ask the estate solicitor about any uncertainty. Do not let a cleaning or collection date drive an unresolved decision.

Leave the larger work for an agreed plan

Where circumstances allow, separate immediate care of the home from decisions about sale or clearance. Goodbye With Love’s “Before You Clear the House” guide offers a practical starting point for protecting belongings and planning the next stage.

A family member can help organise the list without taking responsibility for every decision.

Support for the days that follow

The practical arrangements may move quickly. Your feelings may take a different pace.

You may want company or quiet, find comfort in routines or struggle with ordinary tasks. Family members may respond differently, and relationships can carry mixed feelings. You do not need to explain every response before asking for support.

Ask for specific practical help

A meal, school pickup, a lift to an appointment or someone beside you during a phone call can ease a small part of the load. If people ask what they can do, give them one clear task and say when it would help.

Let someone help you keep track

Use a notebook or an agreed shared list for appointments and questions. Ask a trusted person to attend important meetings and check your understanding before commitments are made. Where a decision can wait, ask for the time you need.

Include children and young people

Make room for questions and repeated conversations. Let the child’s school or another trusted adult know what has happened, where appropriate. Consider specialist guidance if you are unsure how to explain the death or support their participation in family rituals. Grief Australia offers information and bereavement support for individuals, children and families. [6]

Find support that suits you

Talk with your GP, a trusted health professional, a bereavement counsellor or a cultural, faith or community support person. Ask about the type of support offered, availability and any fees. You do not need to wait until everything feels unmanageable to make an enquiry.

If things feel especially difficult

If your wellbeing or ability to manage daily life concerns you, contact your GP or another health professional for help. If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 000.

Support can be practical, emotional or simply someone who stays alongside you. What helps may change over time.

Our next steps and questions

Use this page with someone you trust. Keep sensitive personal information and documents separately and securely.

Our main family contact and the person helping with calls

The person or professional confirming who can make arrangements

Wishes, cultural or spiritual needs we want to discuss

What needs attention next

Task or question	Who will follow up	By when

Questions about the funeral quote, choices or payment terms

One thing someone else can help us with this week

Useful information and support

These links are the sources for the numbered references in this guide and a starting point for further help. Choose the information that fits your circumstances.

1 Services Australia

Practical steps after a death, people to notify and information about assistance that may be available.

What to do when someone dies

Who to tell when someone dies

2 Coroners Court of Victoria

Information for families when a death has been referred to the coroner, including funeral arrangements and release of the person into funeral care.

Information for families

Funeral and release arrangements

3 Consumer Affairs Victoria

Information about funeral provider pricing, itemised quotations and cost disclosure.

Funeral quotations and provider obligations

4 Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria

Guidance about registering a death and obtaining a legal death certificate.

Death administration and certificates

5 Australian Death Notification Service

An online service for notifying participating organisations. Check which organisations are included and contact others directly.

Visit the notification service

6 Grief Australia

Bereavement information, resources and specialist support, including support for children and families.

Explore grief information and support

Information checked October 2026. External organisations provide their own services; arrangements and eligibility can change. Visit the linked websites for current information.

When the home needs attention

The days after a death can be filled with decisions. Preparing the home does not have to become another responsibility carried by one person alone.

There may eventually be belongings to sort, a garden to care for, maintenance to arrange or a home to prepare for sale. Those tasks can be approached with a practical plan that still respects the person and the life connected to that home.

How Goodbye With Love can help

Goodbye With Love helps families prepare homes for sale during major life transitions, including deceased estates and inherited homes. I begin by listening, understanding what needs attention and helping identify manageable priorities.

Depending on the agreed scope, support may include belongings and decluttering, arranging cleaning and gardens, approved maintenance and cosmetic improvements, access, scheduling and communication with the selling agent.

I work alongside the family, executor, solicitor and other professionals. Funeral arrangements, clinical care, legal advice and estate decisions remain with the appropriate people and services.

Begin with a conversation

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Serving Frankston, the Mornington Peninsula and surrounding areas.

Other guides from Goodbye With Love

- Where Do We Begin?
- Before You Clear the House
- When Mum or Dad Moves into Aged Care

This guide offers general practical information for families in Victoria. It does not replace medical, legal, financial or funeral-provider advice. Procedures elsewhere may differ. Seek help suited to your circumstances.

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