

Guidelines for Funeral Celebrants in Response to Coronavirus

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, and recognising the variety of approaches from funeral directors, crematoria and cemeteries, The Funeral Celebrancy Council has drawn up some guidelines to support celebrants. We recognise the situation is dynamic, and that there may well be a need to update the guidelines as matters progress.

Whilst the majority of celebrants are self-employed, and responsibility for welfare lies solely with the individual, these guidelines are offered as a coherent approach to help protect, not only the health and welfare of the bereaved people we serve, but also fellow professionals, our own families and friends, wider society, and ourselves.

We believe it is our duty to support the NHS and society by helping to flatten the curve of the spread of Covid-19, as well as ensuring we take proportionate measures to protect ourselves.

Hygiene

- Frequent and thorough hand washing and hand drying is a crucial protection, especially after using public transport(including taxis) and before and after each ceremony. Consider carrying your own small towel and soap, there may be an absence of paper towels
- If no soap or water is available, use alcohol gel. (Antibacterials are not effective in combating any virus.) Encourage funeral attendees to use gels provided in chapels
- Use a tissue to blow your nose and dispose of it appropriately and as soon as possible, cough into the crook of your arm if you have no tissue, wash your hands again
- Refrain from touching your face and if you do, wash your hands again
- Do not hand out business literature, hard copies of ceremonies, song sheets or orders of service

Communication is key

- Urgently update your website, detailing how you will handle ceremonies
- Explain clearly why these guidelines have been put in place; give advance notice of what you will do, how your practice has changed, and communicate these points compassionately
- As appropriate, offer and explain to clients/families the alternatives to a traditional ceremony. The client/family may not have begun to think about this and may not know the digital alternatives. These include:
 - Small number of essential attendees plus webcasting
 - An online ceremony they can attend in real time, being able to keep a recording
 - Pre-recording of the ceremony on video and audio to provide to the client/family for dissemination at their discretion
 - Direct cremation with a memorial ceremony at a future date

Social distancing

- Explain to families and funeral directors that, due to social distancing, we will be conducting family meetings remotely, by phone, Zoom, GoogleMeet, Skype, WhatsApp, email, by whatever remote means is appropriate. Let clients/families and friends know that you will not be shaking hands before the ceremony or after. Reiterate this at the ceremony
- Try to insist people refrain from embracing and handshaking too, appreciating how hard this may be for them at this time, suggest and role model other compassionate methods such as the right hand over the heart as you say 'hello'
- Encourage the client/family to invite only close family or friends to the ceremony and that as few people should physically attend as possible. Let them know a memorial event can be planned during the pandemic, and held after the pandemic, to meet the needs of all involved
- Advise mourners in advance to sit well spaced in the chapel
- Dissuade mourners from holding a reception or wake. Instead, as above, recommend a memorial gathering when we are free of the pandemic
- Advise no song sheets or hymn books, lyrics can be on a screen if there's one in the chapel. Where there is no screen funeral directors and chapel attendants may agree to distribute song sheets. If they do then it will be the mourners' responsibility to dispose of them in an appropriate bin in the chapel or to take them home with them
- Mourners may need to wait in cars or stand outside chapels, waiting rooms may be closed
- At a funeral ceremony:
 - Aim for two metres of separation between yourself and others, and encourage this amongst bereaved people
 - Do not shake hands or hug people, however natural it may feel. You are endangering others with what seems like a caring act. Find an alternative: a hand over your heart with a nod of the head, or whatever feels right for you that doesn't involve physical contact

Get Support

Local celebrant forums and networks

- Set up a local network if you can't find one already established
- Share information on local venues: closures or population restricting measures; and when funeral directors amend guidelines
- Arrange cover for illness, most of the big celebrant organisations will be able to help with this
- Finalise scripts well in advance and organise a means to share them if needs be
- Discuss and disseminate these guidelines to your network