

# Autism & Grief Project

## Fact Sheet



### What Happens to the Body After a Death

#### Hospital Death

When a person dies in a hospital, family members are often asked if they want to spend time with the body. This gives the family a last chance to be close to the person, see their body, and hold hands or say something important to them. Even though the person cannot respond, this time alone with them can be very important for family and friends. It can be especially important to those who were unable to see the person when they were in the hospital or receiving medical care.

Seeing the body not important for everyone, so people may think you don't want to be near the person who died. If you would like to spend time with the body, you may need to let trusted people or someone at the hospital know.

After the family spends time with the body, hospital staff cover it with a sheet and take it to the morgue.

#### At the Morgue

A morgue is where the body of a person who has died is kept until it is ready to be moved to a funeral home or crematorium. The temperature is cool in the morgue and it's very quiet. A worker at the morgue will make sure that the body is kept safe. If you were unable to spend time with the body in the hospital room, it is possible to ask to see it at the morgue.

If the person died alone at the hospital, or if they died on the way to the hospital (for example after a car accident), the family might be asked to view the body to confirm the identity of the person.

#### Death at Home

When a person dies at home, especially if their death was expected while in hospice care, family members can spend time with the body. Some family and friends may want to talk to the deceased person, hold their hand, brush their hair, or wash their body. This is fine to do, and it is a personal choice about whether you want to stay with the person for a little while after they have died. If you would like to do this, you may need to let people know.

#### Transporting the Body

Funeral service workers carefully move the body from the home or the hospital morgue on a stretcher to a van or a vehicle designed for transporting dead bodies. This vehicle

is known as a hearse. The body is taken to a funeral home to be prepared for the funeral or other service.

## **At the Funeral Home**

A funeral home is a place where specially trained people take care of the body of a person who has died. They may also help with a ceremony called a funeral, which is a time when family and friends gather to remember and honor the person who died. The funeral home staff meet with the family or friends of the person to find out how they would like to honor the deceased and how the person wanted their body to be taken care of after they died.

Some people choose to be buried and others choose to be cremated. After talking with the family, the funeral home workers prepare the body for burial or cremation. There is no one right way to have a funeral or memorial service. The plans depend on the wishes of the person who died and what the family tells the funeral home would be the most special way for the person to be remembered and honored. The section of this portal called Rituals after a Death provides more information.

## **Preparing the Body for the Funeral and Burial**

When a family chooses to have the person's body buried, the body is often (but not always) embalmed first. To embalm the body, funeral service staff wash it and take the blood out using long tubes. Special chemicals are then put into the body, and it is dressed in an outfit that the person may have worn when alive.

The body is then put into a large box called a casket or coffin, which could be made of metal or wood. The lid of the casket is often open during the funeral or memorial service so that people will be able to see the person who died if they choose to do so. If it is an open casket, funeral service workers dress the body in clothes chosen by the family and apply makeup to the person's face and hands to make them look like they did before death.

## **Preparing the Body for Cremation**

When a family chooses to have the person's body cremated, the people who work at a funeral home or crematorium use a special machine that gets very hot. The heat removes the water from the body so all that is left is similar to sand or ash, which is sometimes called "cremains." This process doesn't hurt the person, since the person has died, and their body can no longer feel anything. The cremains are put into a container like a box or vase, called an urn, and the container is given to the family. If there is a funeral or memorial service for the person, the urn is usually brought to that location. Some families take the urn home and some families scatter the cremains of the person in a place that was important to them. Other families bury the urn at a cemetery.