MH Funerals

Guide for Families: Caring for a Deceased Loved One at Home

Supporting a loved one at home after death can be meaningful and allow family and friends to say goodbye in their own way. This guide gives practical advice for doing so respectfully and safely until the funeral directors arrive to receive you loved one into their care.

Arranging documentation for transfer

- If the death was expected, call the palliative care nurse as soon as possible to arrange for a life extinct form to be completed.
- If you do not have a nurse available to complete this form, you can call the QLD Ambulance Service who can provide this for you.

Preparing a suitable space

- Set the room's air conditioning to a cool setting (e.g., around 18 °C) to help keep you loved one cool.
- If there is no air conditioning, only open windows if they are screened to help reduce insects entering the room.
- Choose a quiet, private room where family and friends can gather without interruption. Place a comfortable chair nearby and keep tissues and water available for family use.

Gentle After-Death Body Care

- Lay your loved on their back, ideally flat with arms by their side.
- Place a single pillow under their head and a rolled towel under the chin to support the jaw and help the mouth remain closed without force.
- Eyes often stay open after death. Gently close them if you wish; if they don't stay closed, this is normal.
- Remove any blankets from your loved one, a sheet can be used for modesty and privacy.
- You may choose to lightly bath your loved one with warm water and a soft cloth, in the same way you would care for them alive, this is optional, not required.
- You may want to dress your loved one in fresh clothing if this feels right, again this is optional, not required.

What to Expect

It's helpful to be aware of how the body can change after death so you're not alarmed.

- Incontinence: Some persons may release urine or bowels at or soon after death, this is natural. You can use an absorbent pad or nappy if helpful.
- Fluids: When the body is moved later, fluids may occasionally leak from the mouth or nose, this is a normal so take care and move slowly to reduce this possibility.
- Odour: With a cooled room and short timeframe, smells will be minimal however everyone is different so just be aware that smells can develop.

Closing Thoughts

Please note that after death, it is natural for physical changes to begin, and these can vary depending on yourloved one's illness, the environment, and room temperature. Without cooling, changes such as alterations in skin colour or a gradual increase in odour may occur more quickly. If you notice any changes that concern you, please contact us for guidance and support at any time. In some cases, palliative care services may be able to provide cooling aids, such as a cooling mat, to help extend the time your loved one can remain at home.

Caring for a loved one at home after death is a deeply personal and sometimes sacred choice. With a cool, comfortable room, gentle body care, and emotional support, this time can be peaceful and meaningful.