

# When Someone Dies: A Practical Guide



Colchester & District Jewish Community

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Please note that this booklet is intended as a guide only although to the best of our knowledge, all information was correct at the time of printing. All information is given in good faith and we would be grateful for any constructive feedback. Members are therefore strongly encouraged to make their own enquiries at the appropriate time.

## INTRODUCTION

It's an uncomfortable reality but we will all, someday, die. Most of us don't want to think about it and so we put off any decision making about what we want when we go. Why remind ourselves of the inevitable? All very human, but at some point, the issue must be embraced. It is better to embrace it positively so that we feel in control and our families are clear about what we want and how we have chosen to say goodbye.

So whether you opt for a sit-down session with your family or decide to think it through by yourself, forewarned is forearmed. Options can be thrashed out, decisions recorded, and then everything – both wishes and documentation – put away in an easily retrievable envelope and forgotten about.

We have avoided “What ifs?” in favour of a straightforward “How to” with minimal complications; we hope you find it useful, practical and easy to follow. It is designed to help on what can otherwise seem a tough and lonely journey.

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER SOMEONE DIES?

### A Death in Hospital

The first thing to be aware of is that hospital staff may not know that the deceased was Jewish! Whilst identification of religious affiliation is always part of the required admission information, the health care staff may not be fully aware of what processes to follow in the event of death. Families are strongly urged, therefore, to let staff know of the patient's Jewish identity, either at admission or when the situation becomes critical. In that way, staff can act appropriately when the time comes, and in any event, will help the family with formalities.

### If the deceased was a member of the United Synagogue Burial Scheme (USBS)

In the first instance, please contact either:

**Ruth Stone ((07752 854 826) [ruth@xwp8users.com](mailto:ruth@xwp8users.com))** or

who will contact the **US Burial office (0208 950 7767)** on your behalf. The burial office will then liaise with the hospital and arrange for burial. Please be aware, however, that even with the 24 hour burial custom for Jewish interments, the USBS still cannot collect the deceased until the death has been formally registered. As a rule, however, such registrations are normally fast-tracked. As ever, calls made to the USBS on Shabbat will be diverted to answerphone and responded to immediately Shabbat is over.

### Deceased was not a member of USBS

As above, we advise letting Ruth know in the first instance. They will contact **Penny Stynes (Bereavement Services Manager, Colchester Cemetery (01206 507801))** who will begin arrangements for the funeral.

## Funeral Directors

Both **Hunnaball (01206 760049)** and the **Co-op (01206 767675)** are familiar with Jewish burial procedures but we are not, of course, advocating any particular firm. Should you prefer Ruth to make initial contact with the funeral directors, they would be happy to do so. Funeral directors will normally liaise with the cemetery on your behalf.

## Letting the Wider Jewish Community Know

If you would like the wider Jewish community in Colchester to be aware of the death, the shul will be happy circulate the news to its membership via email. In all cases, we will respect the family's wishes.

**Hebrew name:** it would be useful to know the Hebrew name of the deceased in advance of the burial service. The Shul can assist you with this.

## The Funeral Service

**Location:** Services are not restricted to the synagogue but can take place at the graveside or an appropriate alternative location, such as the Colchester Cemetery Chapel. Please note, if many people wish to speak at the service, it might be advisable to book a double slot as normal services are of 30 minutes duration only and there is a charge for a service which overruns! Unfortunately, there is no guarantee, that the Chapel will be available at the time scheduled for the burial and members are advised to make their own enquiries.

**Celebrant - Orthodox:** If you are a member of the US Burial Scheme once they have been informed of the death, a rabbi will automatically be assigned to cover the burial. Please note, however, that although it is a mitzvah to attend a burial, it is not a requirement that the service be led by a rabbi; only that

someone is willing and able to do so. If you are happy, therefore, for a Lay Reader from CDJC to lead the service instead. They can be contacted via Ruth. If, however, you prefer a rabbi, she can arrange for one. Please be aware that a freelance rabbi would charge for this service (approximately £600).

**Celebrant – Reform/Liberal:** Again, in the absence of your own chosen celebrant, we can arrange for a rabbi. If you prefer a Lay Reader, **Ruth** would be happy to conduct the service.

Please note that although Lay Readers do not charge for their services, families are asked to make a donation to the Tzedakah Fund (shul charity fund). The suggested figure is £150 and the Funeral Directors will collect this sum on our behalf.

## **Post Funeral Reception**

If you would like help in organizing a reception after the funeral – basically, sourcing and/or preparing and serving refreshments for a *Kiddush* - the shul are more than happy to help. Please contact the secretary.

## **Shivah**

Shivah – the seven-day period of mourning following a burial – can be as long or as short as you wish. If you wish to observe shivah, we have both Shiva chairs and siddurim. We can also arrange for a Lay Reader to lead prayers in the absence of a rabbi. *(Please contact the secretary to arrange for collection of chairs and prayer books.)*

## USE OF THE COLCHESTER JEWISH CEMETERY

The Cemetery (which is owned by Colchester Borough Council) is consecrated as a Jewish Cemetery and divided into Orthodox and non-Orthodox sections. The Council allow CDJC to administer it. As things stand, anyone can acquire a plot by contacting the Cemetery office (contact **Susi Long: 01206 282950**). As with all cemeteries, Colchester is governed by both national legislation and local by-laws in relation to the number of available plots, the days and times for burial, permissible structures, etc. The Cemetery is NOT open on Saturdays, Sundays or Bank Holidays. This means that it may not be possible to hold a burial within 24 hours of the death.

Please note that because space in the non-Orthodox section is somewhat limited, discussions are currently underway (February 2021). More land for Jewish burials in the Cemetery may be made available in future.

In the case of someone seeking an Orthodox burial, the Cemetery passes the request on to the Synagogue who will establish whether that person was halachically Jewish (i.e. their birth mother was Jewish) or not. If they fulfil the requirements for *halachah*, they can be buried in the Orthodox area, whether or not they are members of CDJC. Alternatively, if halachah is not established, they could be buried in the non-Orthodox section or they could approach an alternative burial site.

There are local arrangements that can be made if a non orthodox burial is sought, this information is available through the contacts at the Synagogue. If alternative arrangements are preferred, please contact Cheshunt Cemetery for further information

Lease of the plot:

Plots are held on leases of either 50 or 100years. The cost for 50 years is currently £495 or £939 for 100 years

At the end of the leasehold period, the Cemetery authorities will write to the next of kin at the last known address to ask if they want to re-purchase the right. Please be reassured that the plot will not be disturbed if the authorities are unable to contact the next of kin.

Plots are available in a number of different formats for example, singly, side by side or double depth.

The Cemetery and Crematorium Bereavement Services Manager is Penny Stynes and the office phone number is 01206 282950. She can also be contacted by email ([Penny.stynes@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:Penny.stynes@colchester.gov.uk))

Alternatively, you can contact Susi Long (the office manager) on the same number or at [cemetery@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:cemetery@colchester.gov.uk)

Visiting hours are

November to February 8.00am-4.30pm

March and October 8am-5.30pm

April and September 8am to 7pm

May, June, July & August 7am to 8pm.

Burials are carried out at the following times:

November to February

Mondays to Fridays, between 9 am and 2 pm.

March to October:

Mondays to Thursdays, between 9 am and 3 pm

Fridays, between 9 am and 2pm

Costs of burial

These will vary depending on the funeral director and the services used.



The costing below is an estimate. It is a good idea to discuss your particular wishes with the funeral director to avoid any potential misunderstandings

Cemetery Costs	To reserve a single plot for 50 years	£495
	Interment (2021) dependent on whether the burial is at single, double or triple depth	£654 – £911
	<b>Application for Erection of Monument</b>	
	Up to 56cm:	£101 - £144
	Over 56cm:	a/a
Legal costs	Copies of death certificate at the time of registration(6)	£11
Funeral director costs	Contact your funeral director in person as the cost can vary.	
Cost of memorial	There a number of stone masons who have been approved by the United Synagogue for orthodox burial. Please contact them directly for further information: <a href="http://www.garygreenmemorials.co.uk">www.garygreenmemorials.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.memorialgroup.co.uk">www.memorialgroup.co.uk</a>	
Non US funeral director costs	Their services with a plain veneer coffin and transport of the body to Waltham Abbey for Tahara (pre burial preparation) Note: The United Synagogue burial office will provide a coffin and shroud considerably more cheaply than the Funeral Directors.	Up to £15,000

The total cost of the average burial (2021) is £5000. The cost of the stone erection at yahrzeit is approximately £2000.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LEGALITIES

The previous two sections dealt with the current operation of the Cemetery and what to do immediately after someone dies.

This section will go into more detail about the legalities and what information the family will need to produce. There is a lot of information to gather, and it really is wise to gather everything together well before the event, so that the additional stress of looking for the documents and required facts right after someone has died is avoided. Also, the information is much more likely to be correct.

On a general note, if a local funeral director has been chosen, they can deal with the legalities, but the United Synagogue will not so separate arrangements will need to be made.

This section deals with the following four situations:

1. Someone dies in hospital and wanted to be buried,
2. Someone dies in hospital and wanted to be cremated,
3. Someone dies at home and wanted to be buried,
4. Someone dies at home and wanted to be cremated.

In all cases, call Ruth or the United Synagogue as soon as possible, but note, the United Synagogue Burial office is not open on Shabbat. If a death occurs on Shabbat, as mentioned above, it will not be possible to talk to the US until Shabbat is over.

In order for a burial or cremation to take place, the death must be registered and a Certificate for Burial or Cremation, also called the green card or green form, issued. For cremation, there has to be an application which is made on a specific form which the Crematorium office will supply.

## 1. The person dies in hospital and wanted to be buried:

For registration to take place there must be a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. This is a relatively short document which will be completed and signed by a doctor in the Hospital and there is no charge. This will then be passed to the Bereavement Suite, which is where the body is kept temporarily. (Incidentally, the Bereavement Suite has facilities for washing the body, if family members want it.) The Bereavement Suite staff will notify the family when the Certificate is ready to be collected. At this point an appointment can be made to register the death.

A death can be registered by

- a relative of the deceased,
- someone who was present at the death
- the occupier of the house or institution where the death took place if there is no known relative who is able to register,
- or by the person instructing the funeral director. Normally the Registrar will accept registration by someone who is not a relative only if no relative can be found. The Registrar's telephone numbers are:

Daytime: 0845 637632 (this covers the whole county)

Out-of-hours: 0845 6061212 (this is a local number)

The Registrar in Colchester will attend on weekends or at night if an Orthodox burial is requested and time is short. However, as the Cemetery is closed on weekends, asking for out of hours registration may not be useful.

Details which will be needed for registration are

- Date and place of death
- Full names of the deceased

- Maiden surname of a woman if she has been married
- Date and place of birth
- Occupation of the deceased
- If a married or widowed woman, the full name and occupation of her husband
- Whether the deceased was in receipt of a pension from public funds
- Usual address including post code
- If the deceased was married, the date of birth of the spouse.

Not all of this information is for the Registration itself. Much of it is sent to other government departments.

There is no cost for Registration, although there is a cost for Certificates, and the next-of-kin will need several of these to deal with the deceased's estate. We advise people to purchase at least six at the time of Registration

The Registrar will then provide the green card which must accompany the body of the deceased, either to the Cemetery, or given to the United Synagogue staff when they collect the body. There can be no burial without it.

## 2. The person dies in hospital and wanted cremation:

This is slightly different. Because there is no room for error, two doctors are involved in completing the Medical Certificate for Cremation, which is more extensive and requires investigation of the deceased's medical background. There is a charge (£164) which reflects the amount of time taken. It can sometimes be difficult for the ward or the Bereavement Suite staff to find two doctors, so there can be a delay in producing the Certificate. After that the Registration procedure is the same as for a burial.

The Colchester Hospital has a very useful booklet called “What do I do now?” which deals with death in hospital.

3. The person dies at home and wanted a burial: If a doctor is not present at the death, call the deceased’s own doctor immediately. As soon as possible, contact Ruth Stone who will notify either the United Synagogue staff or the Cemetery. The doctor will fill in the Medical Certificate of Death if possible. But if the deceased has not seen the doctor for some time and/or the death is sudden or suspicious, there may be a reference to the Coroner and there may have to be a post-mortem examination, which will most likely take place in the Colchester General Hospital.

For burial, if no post-mortem examination is necessary, the Registration procedure will be the same as for death in hospital, except that the body will have to be collected from the deceased’s home.

4. The person dies at home and wanted a cremation:

The person’s GP would need to be called, but the same form as with a hospital death would have to be completed by two doctors, one of whom will probably be the GP.

In all cases, if the death is sudden or suspicious, a post-mortem examination would have to be held. Orthodox Jews may object, in which case a “virtual post-mortem”, i.e. MRI or CAT scan, may be held if the Coroner allows. However, if s/he is not satisfied with the results, s/he may still order a post-mortem examination. The United Synagogue Burial Scheme has a member who will attempt to persuade the Coroner that a scan should be sufficient. He has had a success rate of over 95%.

## CHAPTER FOUR CUSTOMS

In the Jewish religion burial should take place within 24 hours of death or within the shortest possible time.

There are many customs surrounding death in Judaism. People may want to observe them all or only a few. The choice is that of the family or the family together with the deceased if the matter was discussed before the death. This list is taken mainly from the United Synagogue guide. There are several websites run by religious and Jewish educational organisations which discuss the customs and the reasons behind them in considerable depth. The website of Star of David Memorial Chapel, an American Jewish Funeral Director, (<http://jewish-funeral-home.com/Jewish-burial-customs.html>) gives a comprehensive explanation of many of the customs. Chabad ([http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/282505/jewish/Soul-Talk.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/282505/jewish/Soul-Talk.htm)) presents a more Orthodox and mystical account and is very interesting.

Many of the customs derive from the principle that the Shiva period is a time of deep mourning when the mourners should be allowed to remove themselves from the everyday world and examine and express their sorrow. For example, outdoor shoes are not worn because the mourners should remain in the house. Friends should bring them meals because the mourners should not have to expend their physical and mental energy in buying and preparing food.

Many of the customs are not observed on Shabbat. For example, on Shabbat the mourners should wear normal clothing. The full seven days are not observed if a Yomtov intervenes.

The Shiva period starts immediately after the funeral and ends on the morning of the seventh day. Kaddish is not said until the burial service. Many people will choose not to have a

seven-day-Shiva; as far as the Colchester Jewish Community is concerned, this is their choice.

Before or at the burial service mourners should tear an item of clothing that they will wear throughout the Shiva period, except for Shabbat. Normally the Rabbi or person conducting the service will tear the item. It is now common for mourners to wear a black ribbon which is pinned onto their clothing and ripped.

### **The Shiva house:**

A memorial candle should burn throughout the Shiva period. Candles are available that will burn for one, three or seven days; there is no prescription as to which should be used.

A bowl of water should be put at the door of the house on the day of the funeral in which mourners and visitors should wash their hands on returning from the cemetery.

Two candles in candlesticks should burn during every prayer service. They may be extinguished at the end of the service and used more than once.

Mirrors and television sets in the home should be covered; mirrors can be uncovered for Shabbat. The original explanation was that the spirit of the dead might get trapped in the mirror, but rabbis later saw the custom as a repudiation of personal vanity.

Mourners are defined as the parents, siblings, spouse or children of the deceased. These are the only people to whom the laws of mourning apply. They should wear non-leather shoes throughout the period, to show that they are humbled by loss.

They should sit on uncomfortable low chairs, to signify their depressed state.

It is usual for visitors to bring food or to offer to prepare meals throughout the Shiva period. Someone who is not a mourner should be available to answer the telephone and answer the door to visitors.

A visit to a Shiva house should not be treated as a social occasion, and traditionally visitors should wait for the mourner to initiate conversation.

On returning from the funeral, it is the practice for neighbours or friends to prepare the mourners' first meal, called the Meal of Condolence. It should include bagels or round rolls and hard-boiled-eggs.

It is not the custom for food or drink to be provided for friends and family on returning to the Shiva house, unless they have travelled a long way.

The Shiva house is traditionally open to visitors to offer their condolences during the day and until evening services are said. However, mourners should be allowed time to themselves, so it is permissible to ask people not to visit at certain times.



# Notes