

1. Are you planning a burial or cremation?
2. Has a burial plot or cremation plan been prepaid? (trust us from professional experience—worth asking) When relevant, has the cemetery been contacted? If your loved one was a veteran, consider contacting one of the VA's national cemeteries.
3. Has a funeral home been contacted to retrieve and prepare the body, prior to burial or cremation?
4. If your loved one passed away out of state or out of the country, there are extra bureaucratic hoops to jump through.
 - If the death occurred out of state, you or another designated person will need to arrange to transport their body back home. Funeral homes in each location will need to coordinate with one another. Leaning on the funeral home you'll be using is a good move here, as they know the ropes, including how to get the proper paperwork from another state's medical examiner
 - If the person died abroad, contact the United States Consulate in that country for assistance in getting them home. Visit the State Department's site for a full list of consulate information.
5. When relevant, has a religious burial society been contacted?
6. What kind of memorial service do you want to have (graveside, onsite chapel, off-site gathering, burial followed by memorial service at a later date, etc.)?
7. Who is going to officiate (clergy, relative, friend, other)? Feel free to get creative here, especially if your loved one wasn't religious. And keep in mind what they might have wanted.
8. When will the funeral take place? You may want to take into account who needs to be in attendance, and how long will it take them to travel to the funeral site. Some faith traditions mandate burial within a set amount of time.
9. Have you called friends and family to notify them of the death, and the funeral arrangements? You may want to delegate this task to a friend or two, as this tends to be a drain on both a time and energy.
10. Do you plan to have flowers, wreaths, photographs or other decor at the funeral? Or even music? Enlist someone close to help you get that done.
11. Who will speak at the funeral, and in what order? Who will be giving the eulogy? We've found that it's helpful to designate a back-up person to read the eulogy in case the task seems like too much to handle in the moment.
12. Will you have pallbearers? Traditionally, a casket can accommodate six people carrying it. This can be a really nice way to honor several people close to your loved one — you know, the ones you might not necessarily want giving eulogies, but you want to include somehow.
13. Will the funeral have an open or closed casket? This might be an easy decision based on the wishes your loved one had expressed in the past, or an incredibly difficult one they didn't and people in their inner circle disagree. Think long and hard about what the best option is for everyone (Note: if you opt for a closed casket, it's very easy to invite people who want to say a final "goodbye" into a separate room before the service while the casket is still open.)

14. Do you want to distribute memorial programs or specialty prayer cards at the event? If so, you may want to gather some of your favorite poems, readings, and photos to include.

15. Do you plan to have a post-funeral reception? If so, will food be served? Casseroles and deli platters are popular, along with the omnipresent fruit-as-flowers baskets. If you're going the catering route, some caterers have menus that you can customize for the occasion.

16. What outfit will they be buried in? If you haven't a clue as to what they would have wanted, try to select something they might have chosen for themselves. Doesn't have to be fancy; just needs to reflect who they were. Feel free to include any meaningful letters, photos or small objects in the casket with them.