

# a jewish funeral

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**Honoring the traditions of our people**



CREATED EXCLUSIVELY FOR CHICAGO JEWISH FUNERALS®

***“Through the centuries, Jewish people practice time-honored traditions that keep families and generations connected. The Jewish funeral is a significant moment in time, when the practice of these traditions provide support and comfort to the mourners and a reaffirmation of faith.***

***Many of these traditions and the related terms are familiar to Jewish people. However, when a death occurs, it can be difficult to remember funeral traditions and the meanings behind them. This pamphlet is an uncomplicated overview of funeral arrangements and a Jewish Funeral.***

***Chicago Jewish Funerals will provide all the support and guidance you need during a funeral. Throughout this process we assist families in creating a service that is meaningful, appropriate and affordable.***

***And that is the way it should be.”***

***–David I. Jacobson  
Founder  
Chicago Jewish Funerals***

# Traditions and customs may vary

among the

branches of Judaism. Families may have a wide variety of observances. Many decisions can be made with the counsel of clergy, family members and your funeral director. Above all else, respect is shown to the deceased and the mourners.



# Things to consider before making funeral arrangements.

It's never easy. Ever.

Whether you are making arrangements following a death or as part of pre-planning, there are a number of decisions that must be made.

This checklist can help you better understand the elements of a funeral, help guide your decisions, and help you be better prepared to make the arrangements. Our ultimate goal is always to help you create a service that is meaningful, appropriate and affordable.

- Select a funeral service location:
  - Chicago Jewish Funerals Chapel
  - Temple or Synagogue
  - Graveside
  - Other place of worship
  - Family Residence
  - Special Setting (golf course, museum, historical mansion)
  
- Decide on the time and date of service \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Select a cemetery for burial.
  
- Select the clergy to help with arrangements and officiate at the service:  Rabbi  Cantor  Other
  
- Consider special service additions:
  - Music:  Live (musicians)  CD
  - Photo montage DVD w/music:  show before  after service
  - Transmit services over internet for out-of-town family and friends (when available).
  - Recording of service
  
- For those who are eligible, determine whether you want a military presence at the funeral.

- Determine the preparation of the deceased:  
\_\_Traditional preparation with *Tahara* (Ritual Washing) and *Tachrichim* (Burial Garment) in \_\_Muslin \_\_Linen  
\_\_Non-traditional with personal clothing (suit, dress, casual)
- Determine if a *Shomer*, the person who guards over the deceased until the funeral, should be assigned.
- Select a casket and/or other merchandise. Consider what is aesthetically acceptable, appropriate and affordable.  
\_\_Traditional Wood \_\_Environmentally-friendly (“Green”) \_\_Other
- Select an outer burial container.
- Be prepared with information for vital statistics: i.e., Social Security Number, date of birth, parents’ names.
- Be prepared to locate Military discharge papers (DD 214) if appropriate.
- Be prepared to provide information for death notices and possible obituary.
- Consider a synagogue, a charity or organization for donations in memory of the deceased.
- Decide on a *Shiva* Home or alternative location.
- Decide if flowers would be meaningful.
- Determine how many limousines will be required. A limousine holds seven passengers.
- Determine pallbearers.
- Consider care for any young children or older adults who may or may not attend the service.
- Consider which family members or friends can assist in informing others of the death/funeral plans.
- Be prepared to sign a contract and authorizations.
- Be prepared to decide on the method of payment for services.



# Meaningful. Appropriate. Affordable. Planning for a funeral service.

## **When does the funeral take place?**

The funeral takes place without any unnecessary delay. Naturally, if people are coming in from out of town, or other issues arise, the service may have to be delayed.

## **What are the preparations?**

If the family wishes, there may be the *Taharah*, the ritual washing and purification. The body can be dressed in the *Tachrichim*, the traditional burial garments. The simple white garment is meant to signify that we are all equal in death and we are judged on our merits and deeds, not material possessions.

## **How do you select a casket?**

Keep in mind what is aesthetically acceptable, and affordable. The traditional casket is made entirely of wood. The type of wood selected is a family decision.

## **What is the *Kriah* ceremony?**

At some point during the funeral, a piece of clothing or a black ribbon is torn and worn as an expression of one's grief. If the person is mourning the death of a parent, the ribbon/cloth is worn on their left side, over the person's heart. All other relatives in mourning, which includes siblings, spouse and parents, wear the ribbon/cloth on their right side.

## **What takes place during a funeral service?**

The service may consist of Psalms, Scripture readings and a eulogy. Today, there may be more personalization of the service. Several family members, in addition to the clergy, may be asked to speak. Discuss this with the officiating clergy.

## **What happens at the cemetery?**

Pallbearers may carry the casket to the grave. Some people follow the Jewish tradition that calls for the casket to stop seven times on the way to the grave. This is generally determined by the clergy. After final prayers are said, the burial takes place. Here family and friends are invited to shovel earth into the grave. This final act helps mourners with acceptance and closure. *El Maleh Rachamim* is then recited by the clergy. Mourners recite the *Mourner's Kaddish*. The *Kaddish* is not a prayer of death, but a reaffirmation of life. This prayer is traditionally recited for 11 months less one day for parents.

## **What happens *after* the cemetery?**

The family and friends return home to “sit *Shiva*”. The tradition calls for a bowl of water and cup to be placed outside the home for visitors to cleanse themselves—metaphorically—as they return from a place of death to a place of life.

Upon returning from the cemetery, a *Shiva* candle is placed on the memorial plaque, provided by Chicago Jewish Funerals, and is lit immediately. The family has a meal prepared for them (meal of condolence) by friends, and the family should eat before anyone else. Tradition calls for the inclusion of round foods such as hard boiled eggs, to signify the cyclical nature of life. The word *Shiva* comes from the Hebrew word for seven.

*For more information on Shiva traditions and customs, please see our Shiva Customs pamphlet.*



# Children and Funerals

There is no rule that dictates Jewish tradition about children and funerals.

Probably the one word that might guide your decision is “appropriate”. This is a personal decision that may change depending upon circumstances. We have provided some guidance that may help you make your decision.

## **Funerals are for the living.**

The funeral ritual is valuable in several ways. Funerals honor the person who died. It is a time to say goodbye to a loved one and a time for family and friends to gather in support of one another following a death. It is a time to affirm that life goes on. It is for these reasons it is important to consider having the family’s children included in the process.

Many experts agree that children can attend funeral services at a young age. They suggest that if the children are old enough to talk, they are old enough to ask if they want to attend.

## **What do you tell a child about the person who died?**

Your personal relationship to the deceased and your views about death should be your compass. You can explain that the body of the person who died will be in a casket. The person is no longer able to talk, see, feel or breathe. This may be a time to share spiritual beliefs you have about death. You may explain the meaning behind the mourning rituals that you and your family will observe. Under no circumstances should you say the deceased is “sleeping”.

## **What do I tell a child when someone close to them dies?**

Tell them the truth. And tell them as soon as possible. Children have tremendous coping abilities. When people try to shelter children from death, they can do more harm than good. Explain to a child how the person died, what happens next and what the following days will be like. Allow the child to participate as much as possible. Avoid euphemisms like “passing away” which can be confusing and even a little scary.



## **What are the challenges of speaking to a young child about death and funerals?**

Communicating with preschoolers and young school-age children about any subject can be difficult. They need simple and brief explanations. Use straightforward and familiar examples. In his book, *Explaining Death to Children*, Dr. Earl A. Grollman suggests explaining death in terms of the absence of familiar life functions. For example, when dogs die, they no longer bark. When flowers die, they no longer bloom. When people die, they no longer laugh, eat, sleep, talk or see.

## **What should you share about your personal grief?**

Death is part of life. If you are open and honest about your feelings and emotions with your child (you laugh when you're happy, right?) then your crying as a natural reaction to the pain of the death of a loved one will make sense to them. It may help the child be open about their feelings as well.

Remember: it is important to convey that no matter how sad you are, you will still be able to care for them. Make your child feel safe.

However, be honest. There may be a time when your immediate pain of grief may be overwhelming. If so, ask a familiar family member or friend to help in the care of your child during the service.

## **Should children attend the funeral?**

It's important to remember that children are permitted to grieve and say goodbye. Their participation in the funeral service allows them to feel the comfort and support of our traditions. They learn to draw on our faith, our traditions and our community during times of death.



### **What do you tell a young child about a funeral?**

Give as many specifics as possible. Explain what a funeral is and what happens before, during and after the service. Describe where the funeral will be held, how the room is set up, who will be attending and how long the service lasts. Prepare the child for the myriad of emotions they will see – tears, grief, anguish, sorrow, and yes, laughter. By seeing these natural expressions of emotions, children will become more comfortable expressing theirs.

Let the child's questions and natural curiosity guide the discussion. If it is their first funeral experience, expect a lot of questions.

### **Should a child participate in the funeral ceremony?**

When appropriate, of course. A youngster might share a favorite memory, read a special poem or just stand with others who are participating as part of the service. Also, a child may wish to place a special picture, note or memento in the casket. They may also participate in the interment. Nothing should be forced on them, but they should be asked. Bereaved children should know that their feelings matter.

### **Children are always welcome at Chicago Jewish Funerals.**

We understand that sometimes a child must leave the service. At the funeral home, we have a room (with coloring books and crayons) where a child can sit. While in this room, the funeral ceremony (if desired) may be viewed and broadcast on a television monitor.

### **Should I bring a child to the cemetery?**

The graveside ceremony can have a therapeutic effect on a child as well as an adult. Try not to project any feelings of fear you may have about cemeteries or burial. Explain to a child what will happen at the cemetery and let the child decide on participating or not. Share that the burial, like the earlier service, could be sad but not scary.

### **Should I bring a child to the *Shiva* House?**

Yes, this is also part of the process and Jewish tradition. Children, as well as adults need closure, and a *Shiva* House can offer this. Allowing children to participate in the traditions and events helps them create a memory picture and recall the events later in life. Let the children have close friends with them, just as you do.

## **What children understand about death varies with age.**

We consulted information on children and grief, written by noted author Dr. Alan Wolfelt. Of course, not all children fall into these categories by age. Each child develops and matures in their own, unique way.

**AGES 1-3.** Children in this group have little understanding of death. They often do not realize what has happened. Sometimes they believe the person is sleeping and cannot understand the permanence.

**AGES 4-6.** Children in this age group have little concept of death, but more of an idea than 1-3 year olds. These kids may understand that death is sad, but may not know why. They typically react to the people around them. As they approach the age of six, they begin to understand more about death, however, the permanence is still not totally understood. Children around the age of six become preoccupied by funerals and cemeteries.

**AGE 7-9.** These children start to perceptualize the finality of death and become interested in the cause of death. They now understand the concept of death and begin asking questions about what happens after death, and realize they will someday become old and die.

**AGE 10- EARLY TEEN.** As kids mature into teens, they start to understand that every human being eventually dies—regardless of grades, behavior, wishes or any attempt to stop it. They cope best with death when given accurate, simple, clear and honest explanations about what happened.

**OLDER CHILDREN** begin to comprehend fully that death is irreversible, that all living things die and that they too will die one day. Some begin working on philosophical views of life and death. Teenagers often become intrigued with seeking the meaning of life. Some youngsters react to their fear of death by taking unnecessary risks with their lives. In confronting death, they are trying to overcome their fears by confirming their “control” over mortality. They learn to draw on their faith, traditions and community during times of death.

**About Dr. Alan Wolfelt** – Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T. is an educator, grief counselor and internationally noted author. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School’s Department of Family Medicine.



# Terms and Phrases

The following is a list of terms and phrases often associated with a Jewish Funeral. For more information about funeral planning, services, Jewish traditions or customs, please contact Chicago Jewish Funerals at 888.509.5011.

## **Aron**

A Hebrew word for casket.

## **Bier**

Framework for supporting a casket.

## **Casket**

Case where human remains are placed.

## **Cemetery**

An area of ground for the final disposition.

## **Chevra Kadisha**

“Holy Society”; group of men or women who care for the deceased.

## **Committal Service**

Service conducted at the place of interment/disposition.

## **Cortege**

Vehicle procession from the place of funeral to the place of interment.

## **Death Certificate**

Legal document containing vital statistical information of the deceased. It is signed by a physician, medical examiner, coroner or other medical health professional certifying the death of an individual. It is used for many legal processes pertaining to death, from arrangement for interment to the settlement of estate assets.

## **Death Notice**

Classified notice publicizing a death, giving details of a funeral.

## **Deceased**

One in whom all physical life has ceased.

**Disposition**

Any manner in which remains will be finally taken care of, including ground burial, entombment, scattering of cremated remains and all other forms of placement.

**Embalming**

A process by which the deceased is restored to a life-like appearance through preservation, disinfection and restoration.

**Eulogy**

Oration praising a deceased individual.

**Family Car (Limousine)**

Automobile designated for the use of the family of the deceased.

**Funeral**

Flexible, group oriented, purposeful, organized, time limited response to death where the rites are held at the time of disposition with the deceased present.

**Funeral Arrangement**

Completion of funeral service details. (See pages 4-5)

**Funeral Director**

The licensed professional who assists with all the arrangements for the funeral service, prepares the deceased for burial, supervises the disposition and maintains a funeral home for these purposes.

**Funeral Home**

A licensed, regulated business that provides for the care, planning and preparation of a deceased person for their final disposition. Funeral and memorial services are frequently held at a funeral home.

**Funeral Service**

Ceremony, religious or secular, in which the bereaved say goodbye to the deceased.

**Grave**

The place for interment.

**Grave Liner**

A receptacle usually made of concrete or other durable material covering the top and sides of the casket to support the weight of the earth and activity above ground. Illinois law does not require it, however, most Illinois cemeteries do.



## **Green Burial**

Also called “environmentally friendly” burial, is the process of burying a body without the use of chemical preservation in a simple biodegradable container.

## **Hesped**

A Hebrew word meaning eulogy.

## **Interment**

The burial.

## **Kaddish**

Jewish prayer recited by the mourners in memory of the deceased.

## **Kever**

Hebrew word meaning grave.

## **Kevura**

Hebrew word meaning burial.

## **Mausoleum**

An above-ground structure or building, often on cemetery grounds, that holds casketed remains. Historically, the word mausoleum comes from the large temple-like structure which was erected by Queen Artemisia in the ancient city of Halicarnassus as the final resting place for her late husband, King Mausolus, circa 350 BC.

## **Obituary**

A news item concerning the death of a person, containing a biographical sketch of the deceased and his/her achievements.

## **Pallbearers**

Individuals who are asked to carry the casket. Traditionally, this is an honor for those closest to the deceased, but not the immediate mourners.

## **Perpetual Care Trust Funds**

A certain portion of the cost of a burial plot is set aside in a trust fund for its ongoing care usually restricted to grounds keeping.

## **Pre-arranged Funeral**

Arrangements which have been completed prior to a death. (See pamphlet *Respect My Wishes*)

## **Register Book**

A book for those attending the service to sign.

## **Remains**

Another term for deceased.

## **Shiva**

A Hebrew word referring to a period of mourning lasting seven days. The *Shiva* house is where people go after the funeral.

## **Shloshim**

A Hebrew word referring to a period of mourning lasting thirty days.

## **Shomer**

A Hebrew word meaning a “guard”, one who sits with the deceased from the time of death until the time of the funeral.

## **Tachrichim**

A Hebrew word meaning special burial garment or shroud. This should be white, symbolizing purity. It has no pockets.

## **Tahara**

The ceremony of ritual washing the deceased by the *Chevra Kadisha*. Men wash deceased males. Women wash deceased females.

## **Tallith or Tallis**

A Hebrew word meaning prayer shawl. Before it is placed on the deceased, one of the fringes is cut.

## **Vault**

A lined, sealed burial receptacle which performs all the functions for the concrete grave liner, and in addition is designed and constructed using one or more lining and sealing materials to increase the overall tensile strength of the finished unit and to reduce the risk of the intrusion of exterior elements. Another term for vault is outer burial chamber.

## **Yahrzeit**

The anniversary date of death according to the Hebrew calendar. This is a Yiddish term for “time of year”. In the Jewish tradition, a Yahrzeit candle is lit on the evening before the anniversary of the death of a loved one. It burns for 24 hours and signifies the soul and spirit of the deceased.

## **Yizkor**

Memorial service recited four times a year at Yom Kippur and on each of the last days of Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot.





The way it should be.

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