

*PEACEFUL PASSAGE AT HOME*  
*Caring for our own after death*

## **Holding a Vigil**

The central and most profound experience of the home funeral is the vigil or home wake. It usually involves keeping the body of the deceased in the home for one to three days after death. During this precious time family, friends and community experience a spectrum of emotions and connect with each other in the privacy of the home. Often in the presence of the loved one's body stories are told, old family wounds are healed and those present experience transformative moments.

Some important considerations:

The actual vigil begins after the body is washed, dressed, cooled and laid in honor. (see *Care of the Body*)

During the next one, two or three days many unique and personal rituals can arise as family and friends gather. Some of those rituals involve decorating the casket or cardboard cremation box, playing music, or arranging a formal ceremony at the bedside.

During the vigil there is time to accomplish all the necessary tasks. It takes some energy, coordination, and willingness to ask for help and involve extended family, friends, and the wider community.

### **Asking for Help**

When a death occurs many people don't know what to say or how to act. Often they will say "Please call if there is anything I can do," not being at all sure what they could really do. Will you be able to ask for help, especially **ahead of time** when the death is expected? Not all of these will apply to every home funeral.

Tasks to Consider:

- Bathe and dress the body

- Help with notifying family and friends, by phone or e-mail, Facebook or Twitter
- Be in charge of obtaining the required paperwork (burial transit or disposition, permit to cremate)
- Contact the cemetery, crematory or med school to schedule delivery of the body
- Make or purchase a casket, shroud, or cardboard container
- Obtain frozen gel packs if needed
- Arrange for music
- Contact any clergy desired
- Arrange for flowers
- Arrange for cleaning, housekeeping, or pet-sitting
- Arrange for meals or other refreshments
- Meet out-of-town guests at the airport
- Provide overnight accommodations for out-of-towners
- Collect and display photos or other memorabilia
- Plan any service to be held, with or without the body present
- Help if there will be more than one event or more than one location
- Write the obituary
- Write a eulogy
- Video any events for the benefit of out-of-town family
- Serve as pall bearers
- Transport the body
- Send thank-you notes
- Apply for veterans' benefits such as a marker and flag
- Notify Social Security if not already part of the death registration
- Extend support to the bereaved after everyone has gone

This list may seem excessive, but you give your family, friends, and community a great gift by allowing them to help you during this time. These tasks are a way they can be useful and show their love. Allowing others to contribute their time and energy to this moment in your life also helps them deal with their own grief. You need not be alone during this time.

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