

FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S SUGGESTED CHECKLIST

GENERAL:

- ___ Give the family a copy of the "Have You Considered?" brochure.
- ___ Involve both parents in planning, if others are making or seem to be taking over the arrangement planning, be an advocate for the parents by directing questions and clarification back to them.
- ___ Try to get them to talk about what this ceremony looks like in their minds.
- ___ Gently find out if the parents can afford the service they really want, what are other options, similar but more affordable, reduced rate, payment plan, or services through the county that they should know about before signing anything.
- ___ Consider if a request is reasonable, trust the parents' impulses. If parents make a special request, they have given it some thought.
- ___ Describe all options:
 - embalming
 - cremation
 - cemeteries
 - family plots
 - burial with a relative
 - burial in a special area for babies
 - casket options (show open and closed)
 - cremation container options
 - future location of cremation remains (handling & legalities)
 - closing the grave
 - use of the funeral home chapel
 - service at the family's church
 - grave side service
 - service at home
 - role of a funeral director in another state if the burial/service will be there
- ___ Explain visitation. Many parents believe they can only come to the funeral home during regular business hours or only at the time of the funeral.
- ___ Check that the medical examiner or family physician has contacted them with the cause of death.
- ___ Be supportive of a postmortem examination. Experience has shown that the procedure can reduce unnecessary and unwarranted feelings of responsibility and can assist in the planning of future children.
- ___ Grave marker options:
 - whether required to match others in the location
 - design the headstone themselves- wording, poem, infant's picture, artwork
 - restrictions- size, position, color, design

- directions on how to proceed in ordering from a stonemason

SERVICE:

- ___ Ask if they would like to write or assist in writing the obituary and/or service.
- ___ Ask if they would like to help design the memorial folder; show them a sample of covers and verses.
- ___ Ask if they would like to have literature or donation envelopes related to the cause of death available for funeral guests, or suggestions for those who attend on how to best help the family.
- ___ Suggest that they could bring a collage of pictures for display or special toys to put in or around the casket.
- ___ If it will be a closed casket, make suggestions regarding a floral arrangement or the placement of picture(s) or other items.
- ___ Ask if they would like to have their infant viewed during visitation in a bassinet, wicker basket or special wooden cradle or box.
- ___ Suggest that they might wish to hold the casket during the service.
- ___ Check if they would prefer to transport the casket to the cemetery in their own vehicle or hold the casket in the family car rather use than the hearse. In any case, beware of just placing the casket in the trunk.
- ___ Show them how to carry the casket for greatest ease and respectability.
- ___ Suggest they dress the child to meet their needs, not what they think society expects.
- ___ Offer to record the homily.
- ___ When writing the public obituary notice, the term "investigation" may imply suspicious circumstances, raising doubts about the family's care of the child.

RELATED ITEMS:

- ___ Offer private time for parents and/or family members to spend with the infant before the official service or visitation. Repeat this offer each time you see them in case they didn't hear you or change their minds but didn't know they could do so. Even in the case of severe deformity or injury or choice of closed casket.
- ___ Offer the opportunity to hold, dress (even partially) and rock the infant.
- ___ Ask if they would like to place the infant in the casket themselves.
- ___ Explain the scaring as a result of the autopsy and suggest a bonnet or cap, if appropriate.

- ___ Ask if there is any way they would want the child repositioned or appearance altered.
- ___ Offer to take a picture(s) of the child and or flowers. This can be especially helpful if they choose not to view the child, and later regret it. Pictures can be stored in clients file if not wanted by family right away.
- ___ Prepare the parents by explaining what to expect before they see and touch their child, ie coolness, rigidity, color, heaviness, remind them to support head and body like a new born. Provide a chair with arms or rocking chair.

FOLLOW-UP:

- ___ Provide cards or suggestions to help parents announce their child's death to those far away, i.e. print extra copies of the memorial/funeral card.
- ___ Offer to talk with surviving siblings about what is occurring.
- ___ Offer or recommend books for the siblings and parents to read.
- ___ Offer to contact resources relating to the type of death for them asking the resource to contact them.
- ___ Make a follow-up call to them in a few weeks to see how they are doing and to again offer to contact resources.
- ___ In the case of sudden infant death syndrome, alert them to the availability of a public nurse home visit who will talk with them and discuss further questions or concerns.
- ___ Don't shelter the parents too much or make decisions for them. Burying their child can never be easy and the ceremony they plan will stay with them always.

Northwest Infant Survival & SIDS Alliance
4649 Sunnyside Ave. N Ste. 350 Seattle, WA 98103, 1-800-533-0376, info@nwsids.org

Adapted with permission from a checklist developed by the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Center. ©1990, revised 1997.