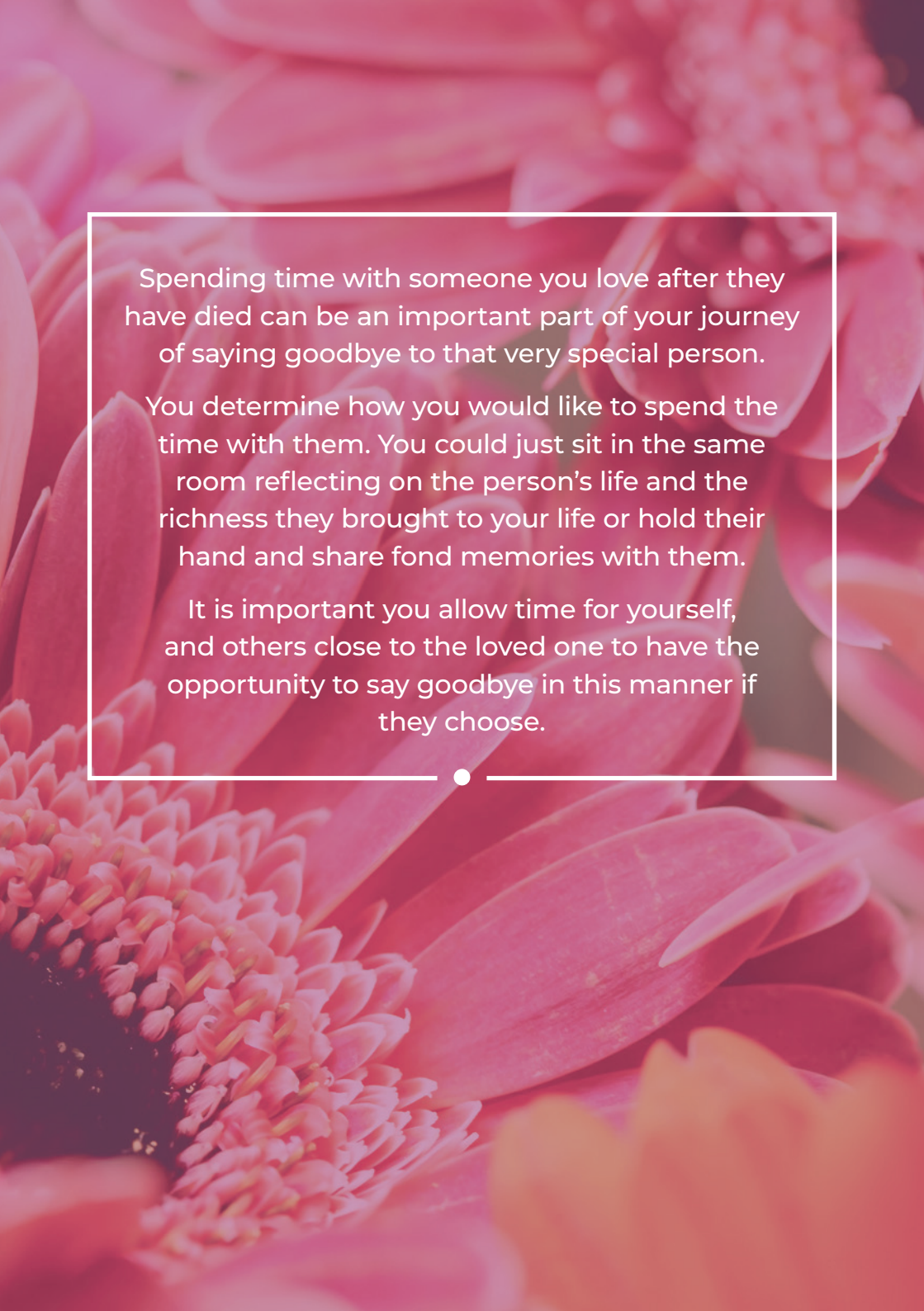




Time together

Spending time with a person
who has died

Funeral Directors
ASSOCIATION OF NZ

A close-up photograph of pink flowers, likely dahlias, serves as the background for the entire page. The petals are layered and detailed, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the foreground and background. A white rectangular box with a thin border is centered on the page, containing three paragraphs of text. Below the text box, a horizontal line with a small white dot in the center is visible.

Spending time with someone you love after they have died can be an important part of your journey of saying goodbye to that very special person.

You determine how you would like to spend the time with them. You could just sit in the same room reflecting on the person's life and the richness they brought to your life or hold their hand and share fond memories with them.

It is important you allow time for yourself, and others close to the loved one to have the opportunity to say goodbye in this manner if they choose.

Is embalming necessary?

Embalming allows the deceased to be viewed and maintains their dignity during the time before their funeral. Depending on the circumstances, a person may be slightly embalmed or be more fully embalmed. Your funeral director has the knowledge to guide you in this area or to discuss other options for preserving the body.

Feeling uncomfortable

If this is the first time you, or members of your family, have been around someone who has died, you might feel anxious about what it will be like, or what you should do. Your funeral director will explain to you beforehand what you can expect. Knowing this takes a lot of the fear of the unknown out of the situation.

Helping you to accept what has happened

Sometimes it is hard to believe what has happened when someone dies, especially if it is a sudden or unexpected death. Seeing the person who has died can begin the process of believing that the death is real and coming to terms with it.

A chance to say what you need to say

Bereaved people often feel overwhelmed by many intense emotions. For many, spending time with someone who has died gives them an opportunity to express some of these feelings and feel some relief. Others appreciate the opportunity to see the body of a person they love for the last time, though they will always feel a connection with them in their hearts.

When there are visible injuries

Even when the person who has died has visible signs of injuries, spending time with their body gives comfort to bereaved people. Your funeral director is able to prepare and embalm their body to preserve it through the period between death and cremation or burial. They will advise you about the extent of the injury and help you to deal with this.

Where can you spend time with someone who has died?

Having the body of the person who has died at home or on the marae provides people with opportunities for time together for themselves, and their families and friends, in the days before the funeral. Others prefer not to have them at home but like to spend time together at the funeral home. Your funeral director can easily arrange either of these options.

What can you do?

Many families provide clothes that belong to the person who has died for them to be dressed in. If you want to, you can dress them yourself, or your funeral director can do it for you. You may like to find some special mementos to have with the casket or write a letter to put into it. There are many ways you can make this time with the person who has died special for you, and your funeral director will help where they can, to make this possible.

What about children?

Spending time with someone who has died is just as important for children and teenagers as it is for adults. In many cultures children commonly play around the open casket when someone dies and feel much more comfortable about death.

Younger children are usually very accepting and curious about a person who has died. Seeing them helps them to understand death better; to realise that death is final, and that someone who has died doesn't feel things as living people do. This makes it easier for them to cope with burial and cremation, because they understand that it won't hurt or frighten the person who has died.

What do children need to know?

Children and teenagers are often more comfortable being with a person who has died if the adults around them are at ease with it. If it's new for you to see someone when they have died, it's often best that you do so first, and then bring your children in when you feel ready.

It's very important that they are well prepared, know what they will see, and what is expected of them. You can explain that being dead means a person's body doesn't work anymore, so the blood isn't circulating, and their body won't feel warm like a living person's body does. Give them time to get used to things, and don't force them to do things like kiss the person if they don't feel comfortable to do so. Encourage them to ask you questions about things that puzzle or worry them and get your funeral director to help if you don't know all the answers.

Children often like to draw a picture or write a letter or poem to put into the casket when they spend time with someone who has died. This can help them express how much the person meant to them through sharing, drawing, or writing.

Further help and information

The funeral, and the days before it, are an important early step in coming to terms with the death of someone close. Your funeral director will help you, and afterwards are there to support you to deal with your loss or help you to find support in your community.

They may have a free bereavement support service, or they can suggest someone you can talk to if you are finding things hard.

Notes

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