



Held After Death



Body Care, Ritual, and the Sacred Work of Shrouding



About Us

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With gratitude to

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Death Belongs to Community

“For most of human history, caring for the dead was never outsourced. It was an act of love performed by families, friends, and community. Death was ours.”





*Raise your
hand if you*

Have seen someone after death?

Helped care for someone after death?

Wish you knew what to do?



What Is a Home Funeral?

A home funeral is family- or community-directed after-death care.

Families choose home funerals because they offer:

- *More time*
- *Hands on participation*
- *Ritual and meaning*
- *Community Support*
- *Natural burial compatibility*
- *Reduced cost*

And the most important thing: they can offer closure, a participative place for grief, and a firm place to begin healing





Preparing Sacred Space

Practical Preparation:

- *Choose a cool room.*
- *Gather supplies.*
- *Invite helpers.*
- *Assign roles.*
- *Turn off distractions.*

Ritual Preparation:

- *Light candles.*
- *Play meaningful music.*
- *Open windows.*
- *Place photographs nearby.*
- *Brew tea for caregivers.*
- *Create an ancestor altar.*

01

The Practical

Preparation, body care, natural course of events



Order of Body Care

1

Create a calm, quiet, and cool space. Dim the lights, silence phones, and open windows for ventilation. A peaceful environment helps support grieving and preserves the body naturally.

2

Gather the necessary tools ahead of time. Include items like: wash basin, towels, essential oils, shroud or blanket, absorbent pads, ice packs, and clean clothing.

3

Keep the body cool from the start. Use Techni Ice or sealed frozen water bottles under the torso. Aim to keep the room below 65°F and avoid direct sunlight.

4

Begin care as soon as possible. Before rigor mortis sets in (2-6 hrs after death) is ideal. If delayed, wait until it eases after 24-48 hours for easier repositioning.

*Take your time and move
with intention*



*This is sacred work. Speak gently. Breathe. Let this
be an act of love and honoring, not of rushing or
perfection.*



Location: Where to Care for the Body

01

Ideal locations include a living room, guest room, or even a garage or basement in cooler climates. Choose a quiet, cool space with privacy and airflow.

03

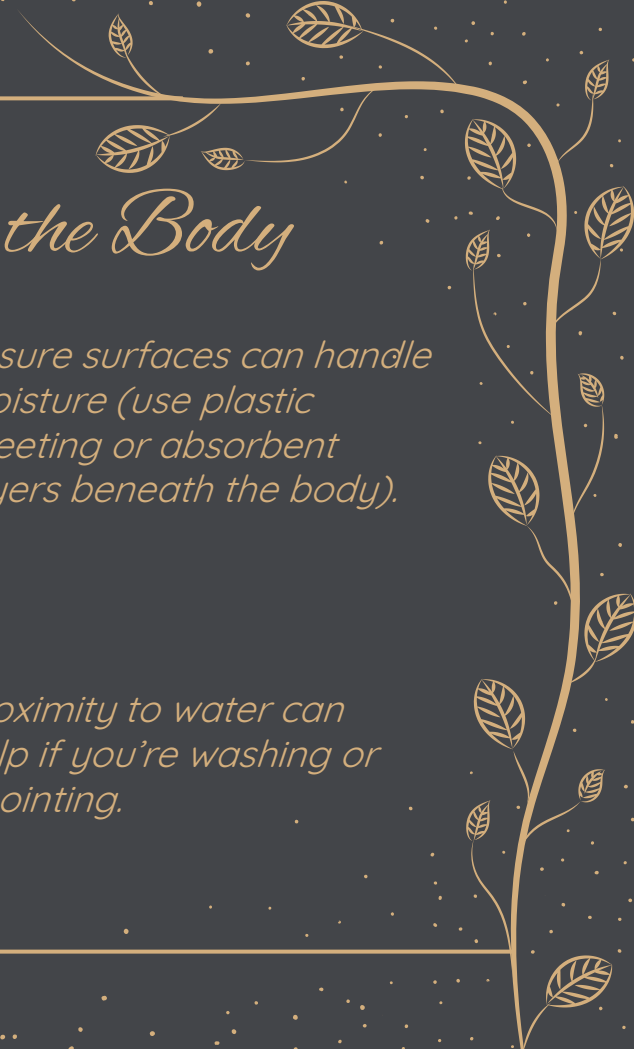
Ensure surfaces can handle moisture (use plastic sheeting or absorbent layers beneath the body).

02

Prioritize accessibility for loved ones to visit. Move furniture as needed.

04

Proximity to water can help if you're washing or anointing.



Mouth Closure



Photo courtesy of
Jerrigrace Lyons, as
seen in our [Home
Funeral 101: Body
Care Basics](#) video.

*Use a head wrap or
towel under chin
A headscarf tied
under the jaw and
over the top of
the head is the
most natural
approach.*

*Dental floss tie (upper to
lower tooth) Dental
floss can be tied from
upper to lower molars
like a soft internal
suture—this can work
when wraps are not
enough.*

*Leave open or fill with
herbs/flowers if preferred If the
jaw remains open and you're
comfortable with that, tuck
dried lavender, rose petals, or
cotton infused with essential oils
in the mouth. This is both
fragrant and symbolic.*

Closing the Eyes

Gently pull lids closed. Use clean hands or cloths to gently lower lids.

Use weights. Small rice-filled eye pillows or soft cotton pads can help hold them closed.

Vaseline + Cotton. A thin layer of Vaseline can keep lids from drying or opening.



Illustration courtesy of
Day Corso & Sky Gomez





Oral Care & Dentures

01

Wipe mouth gently with cloth.

A soft washcloth or sponge on a stick can help clean lips and teeth.

03

Moisturize lips.

This can help keep the appearance of the mouth natural and prevents drying.

02

Brush lightly if desired.

Some families want to brush the person's teeth as an act of care; others skip

04

Optional: insert cleaned dentures early

Insert dentures early if the family prefers a more "natural look." This can help with mouth shape before muscles relax

Washing the Body



- *Use warm water & essential oils*
- *Work head to toe*
- *Clean folds, back, feet*
- *Blot dry, moisturize*

Treat this similarly to washing a newborn.

Essential oils like lavender, frankincense, or clary sage are gentle and calming.

Use slow, respectful motions. Talk to the body. Invite others to help or observe.

After washing, pat dry and apply unscented lotion, coconut oil, or shea butter.

Remember - your beloved dead has passed on. You're not going to hurt them.

Washing the Hair

- *Lay trash bag under head, cut corner over a bucket. Work head to toe*
- *Roll towel under neck for support.*
- *Shampoo & rinse over edge*

This is a helpful workaround when no sink is nearby. .

Cut one corner of the trash bag to create a drainage spout

Pour water gently from a pitcher

This setup mimics a portable salon sink and keeps the bed or floor dry. You may then style.



Dressing, Cosmetizing, Positioning

Cut clothing in back to ease dressing Place clothing underneath the body, roll gently side to side. Choose soft, breathable fabrics that reflect the person's style.

Light makeup if desired Apply a touch of foundation or blush if desired—but avoid heavy makeup unless skilled.

Colored lighting can soften discoloration Colored lightbulbs (e.g., warm pink, amber) soften the look of pallor or bruising.



*Cross hands or place at sides
Use pockets or soft ties
Reposition before or after rigor mortis*

The most traditional position is hands crossed over the abdomen or heart.

*Use soft wraps to keep arms close to the body if they begin to splay.
Positioning can also be symbolic—hands holding flowers, a rosary, or*

Cooling the Body

- *Focus on torso: under shoulders, back, abdomen*
- *Swap ice every 4-6 hours*
- *Keep room below 65°F if possible*
- *Place a chux pad or towel between the body and the packs.*
- *Re-cool packs outside or in a freezer/cooler rotation if needed.*
- *The goal is to cool the core organs, not the extremities.*
- *Use sealed, reusable packs like Techni Ice or frozen water bottles.*



Things to Expect

01

*The Body
Cooling*

03

*Skin Color
Changes*

02

*Fluid Release
[Purge]*

04

*Slight odor over
time*

These changes are natural and normal.



02

The Magical

Ritual, herbs, intention, and The Work



Washing as Blessing



Invite everyone to participate.

Wash one hand.

Wash the feet.

Speak gratitude.

Tell a story.

Offer forgiveness.

Sit quietly.

This transforms body care into ceremony.



Anointing

*Across cultures, fragrant oils have been used to
honor the dead.*

Examples:

*Olive oil
Lavender
Rose
Cedar
Frankincense
Myrrh*

*Invite those present
to anoint:*

*Forehead
Hands
Heart*

while offering a blessing.



Keepsakes & Sacred Objects

Many loved ones choose keepsakes.

Ideas include:

Lock of hair

Fingerprints

Handprints

Footprints

Nail clipping

Favorite jewelry

Written letters

These become tangible expressions of memory, and/or items used on altars/in spellwork



03

Plant Allies

Featuring the work of



Michelle Sanders

Home Funeral Alliance Board Member

Herbalist



Plants Have Always Walked Beside Us

Plants have accompanied humanity through:

*Birth
Growth
Healing
Grief
Death*

Nearly every culture includes herbs in funeral traditions.



Plant Allies

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Plant</i>
Peace	Lavender
Comfort	Lemon Balm
Memory	Rosemary
Love	Rose
Protection	Cedar
Protection	Juniper
Prayer	Frankincense
Prayer	Myrrh
Transition	Basil
Transition	Parsley

Building a Deathcare Kit

Water

*Washcloth, Towels,
Basin, Tea*

Fire

Candles, lighter

Earth

*Natural Twine, Soil,
Flowers, Herbs*

Air

*Incense, Blessing
cards, Fans, Diffuser*

Body

*First aid kit, skin cream,
shave kit, cotton balls,
pads, chux, q tips, lip
balm, nail kit*

Other

*Crystals, oils, art
supplies, scissors,
safety pins, ritual tools*





04

Shrouding

Why we're all here, no?

Blessing the Shroud



Touch the fabric
Write messages
Paint handprints



Sprinkle flower petals
Mist with rosewater
Anoint with oil



Place objects
Pray over
Other Spellwork

The Sacred Work of Shrouding
Each fold may carry intention.



First Fold

Gratitude

Second Fold

Love



Third Fold

Release

*Each knot may
carry a blessing.
Feet. Heart. Head.*





Holding Vigil



A vigil may include:

*Candles, Silence,
Storytelling, Singing,
Drumming, Poetry,
Shared meals,
Favorite music,
Tea,
Laughter,
Tears.*

Presence is enough.



*There Is No Wrong Way to Love Someone
Provided it is safe, legal, and respectful...*

Love may look like:

*Painting nails, Braiding hair, Reading favorite
books, Playing heavy metal, Bringing the
beloved dog, Wearing costumes, Sharing
chocolate cake, Holding hands, Sitting quietly*

Ritual is personal.

Community Shrouding Demonstration

Today we'll practice:

Positioning

Wrapping

Tying

Volunteers are welcome. Observing is participation, too.





Discussion:

*What rituals from your own tradition have
helped you honor the dead?*



Contact Us & Resources

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WithoutFearDoula.com

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HomeFuneralAlliance.org

Come to the table in the vendor hall for QR codes to the guide and more!

Death is not only an ending. It is one of humanity's oldest opportunities to care for one another with intention, tenderness, and love.