

Conversations about death eases the pain

Death is life's only certainty, and yet the topic remains taboo. Our inability to talk about death and our funeral wishes could just be moving the pain further down the road.



Howard Hodgson
CEO, Memoria & Low
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In 2019, the Liverpool Law Review¹ published a paper on the increase in family disputes over funeral arrangements. So perhaps families should have aired their views before it came to that?

However, as Howard Hodgson, a fourth-generation funeral director, who floated his first funeral business on the London Stock Exchange in 1986, knows that's often easier said than done.

"Parents often organise a pre-paid funeral plan without consulting their children - they want to leave their money to them and so go for the cheapest option. But then the children, who don't necessarily want that when the time comes, are horrified. So, we all need to have at least one sensible conversation about it," he explains.

Encouraging people to talk

These conversations need to happen sooner rather than later. It's estimated that only around 6% of Britons have a funeral plan² and so most of us don't consider the topic until we lose a close relative.

While it's easy to see the practical and emotional benefits of planning in advance - those conversations still aren't easy because they are about something that we all hate to imagine.

However, over the past few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has made death an imminent reality for all of us.



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Understanding our options

Hodgson also reports a change in attitudes toward funerals too. A YouGov poll conducted in 2019 reflects this with 32% of people reporting that they felt it was a solemn occasion while 44% felt a funeral should be a cause for celebration.³

While Hodgson hopes that we continue to be more open to discuss our funeral wishes, he acknowledges that there is one major problem - we just don't know

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what our options are.

"People may not be arranging what they actually want, because they don't realise what diverse choices they have," confirms Hodgson, who is the CEO of Memoria's 11 crematoria and memorial parks which offer families a wide range of options.

"A funeral should be what each family wants it to be and not a 'one size fits all' tragic conveyor belt," he says. "Giving families what they want and treating them as you would want to be treated yourself was a good place for Memoria to start and that remains our mission and our achievement."

Changing attitudes and perceptions

Even with the current restrictions, families do have options and the pandemic may have forced us to think about how we might deal with death in new ways.

Until now, many of us may never have considered buying a fixed price funeral package online. However, the internet is proving to be a powerful aid to those of us smart enough to use it to explore our options.

In 2016 Memoria set up 'Low Cost Funeral by Memoria' to offer diverse fixed price funeral packages online.



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"If you'd asked me 10 years ago if we'd be using the internet to offer funerals, I would have said no. However, now it is becoming commonplace. Today people buy everything online and so they have learnt that they can search to find exactly what they want and at a price they want to pay - without leaving home and that's hugely beneficial if you are bereaved," says Hodgson.

He adds that, while financial savings can be made by buying an at need funeral or a pre-arranged plan online, it's not an impersonal experience. "We find that the vast majority who do their research online then want to speak to someone in person to discuss the details of their bespoke needs," he says.

References

1. Conway, H. 'First Among Equals': Breaking the Deadlock in Parental and Sibling Funeral Disputes. Liverpool Law Rev 39, 151-174 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10991-018-9212-3>
2. <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/funeral-planning-in-the-uk>
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