

Spiritual and religious needs of people at the end of life



*because
you matter*

St Nicholas
Hospice Care

A Registered Charity No. 287773

24 hour advice and support



01284 766133

stnicholashospicecare.org.uk

Here for all

A guide to the spiritual and religious needs of people in our care and those important to them at the end of life.

The Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy Team is here for everyone. We are here to offer spiritual and religious care to those in our care, their family and friends. It is essential that we do not make assumptions based on faith tradition. Everyone is different and unique.

Spiritual care is for everyone; those of any faith and those of none. Sometimes people value the space and opportunity to talk about what is happening to them and how they feel. Spiritual care is about valuing and respecting each person as a unique human being and acknowledging who and what is important to them.

This booklet outlines some of the important things to consider for some faiths as a person approaches the end of their life and once they have died (this booklet is not exhaustive). For some people, religious care is a valuable part of who they are. In the next few pages; we will look at some of the important points to be aware of, when looking after someone who practices a particular faith.



Baha'i

- People may wish to say prayers with Baha'i visitors (including family, friends and members of their local Baha'i community).
- Last offices: according to the beliefs, the body should be washed and wrapped in plain cotton or silk.
- A special ring may be placed on the finger of the person, which should not be removed. Baha'i believe that after death the body should be treated with respect. Cremation is not permitted, and burial should take place as near as reasonably possible to the place of death, certainly within one hour travelling time. There is no objection to necessary post-mortem examinations provided these stipulations can be met.

Buddhism

- On the whole, Buddhists wish to have full information about their imminent death to enable them to make their own preparations.
- Buddhists consider that dying should be approached positively and in as clear and conscious state of mind as possible; people may therefore wish not to be given drugs that reduce consciousness. (They believe that the state of mind at the time of death will influence the character of rebirth.)
- Chanting is used so that death may be peaceful.
- After death there are no special rituals. Cremation is usually preferred to burial.



Christianity

- Prayers may be said at the bedside of the dying, and sometimes the patient may ask to be anointed. Ministers should be called to people as early as possible so that they can get to know the person and their family.
- The family/significant others may welcome the support of a minister after the person has died and may wish for prayers to be said at the bedside.
 - Holy Communion and the Sacrament of the Sick (Anointing) may be of particular importance to those of the Roman Catholic faith.
 - Those of the Free Church tradition may often welcome the opportunity to pray with a minister but may not expect a sacramental ministry



Christian Scientists

- Worship is kept free from ritual and there are no last rites.
- Routine last offices are appropriate. The body of a female should be handled by female staff.
- Cremation is usually preferred, but this is individual family choice.

Hinduism



- Before death, a Hindu may desire to offer clothes and other articles of use to those in need, religious persons or to the Temple. These gifts will be brought by the relatives for the patient to touch.
- Presenting food offered to God for those in need or devotees at the temple is auspicious for the soul's departure, as is the recitation of the holy names of God.
- It is important to have a conversation with the family and ask if they wish to perform the last rites as distress may be caused if the body is touched by non-Hindus.
- If no family member is available, the following procedure should be followed: Close the eyes and straighten the limbs. Jewellery, sacred threads and other religious objects should not be removed.
- In most cases the body should not be washed as this is part of the funeral rite and will usually be carried out later by relatives.
- All adult Hindus are cremated.

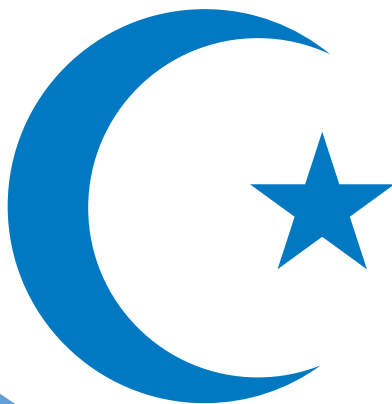
Humanism

Humanist: non-religious pastoral support

- Humanism is an approach to life that is found throughout time and across the world in many different cultures. You can find out more about what humanists think and believe under Humanism Today, and more about how Humanism has developed over time under The Humanist Tradition.

Islam

- People may wish to sit or lie facing Mecca (South East)
- Family or friends may sit with the person in your care reading the Holy Quran and praying.
- After death, the family will not want staff to wash the body. Where no relatives are available, staff should wear gloves to avoid direct contact with the body. The body should face Mecca and the head should be turned towards the right shoulder before rigor mortis begins. The body can be made respectable in the usual way i.e. combing hair and straightening limbs. The family/mosque will ritually wash the body before burial.
- A post-mortem is only allowed if required by law.



Jains

- Jains may value the presence of a Jain spiritual-caregiver when dying.
- Close family members and relatives will wish to remain at the person's bedside and may read from their religious books. Prayers are offered for the soul of the dying person.
- Jains prefer no interference with the dead body. If a coroner's post-mortem is required, an explanation will be necessary.
- The body is always cremated at the earliest opportunity.



Jehovah's Witnesses

- There are no special rituals or practices for the dying, but people who are very ill may appreciate a pastoral visit from one of their elders.
- Jehovah's Witnesses do not support euthanasia, but if death is imminent or unavoidable then life should not be prolonged artificially.
- There are no religious objections to either post-mortem or transplant and the Witnesses' view is that the use of material for research or transplantation is a matter for personal conscientious decision. The living body is dedicated to God, but the body has no particular religious significance once the breath of life has passed from it.
- Jehovah's Witnesses may be buried or cremated depending on personal or family preferences and local circumstances. There are no specific funeral rites, though a simple, personal service may be held at the deceased person's Kingdom Hall, or at the graveside or crematorium.



Judaism

- According to Jewish law a dying person should not be left alone, and many families will wish to sit with the person during their last days/hours. A dying person may wish to hear or recite special Psalms and a special prayer (Shema). These prayers can be said on their behalf by a relative or a Rabbi, but a Rabbi is not essential.
- The person's eyes should be closed at or soon after death and the nearest relatives may wish to do this. The arms should be placed by the side, hands open, and the mouth closed. The body should be wrapped in a plain white sheet without any religious emblem before being placed in a body bag.
- Relatives may wish to keep vigil over the body.
- Burial should take place within 24 hours of death and will be delayed only for the Sabbath and major festivals.



Romany

- If a Traveller is dying, his/her family and friends from around the country may want to visit and be with the person before they die.
- After the death, the family may request that the person be laid out in clothing of their choice. Family and friends will often place items in the coffin that were of special significance to the person who has died e.g. jewellery, photographs, children's toys.
- The family may wish to stay with the person who has died and to allow family and friends to pay their respects before the funeral the next day.
- Burial is preferred since the majority of Romanies do not believe in cremation.
- There is no objection to the giving or receiving of blood or organs.



Sikhism

- The family will normally say prayers.
- At death routine procedures may be performed, but **DO NOT REMOVE THE FIVE Ks**.
- There is no religious objection to post-mortem or transplantation.
- The body should be released as soon as possible to enable the funeral to take place
- Sikhs are always cremated.
- **TURBANS AND THE FIVE Ks** Sikhs as an act of faith wear the following:
 - KESH (which means hair) - for men long hair is kept under a distinctive turban.
 - KANGHA - small comb worn in the hair at all times.
 - KARA - steel bracelet.
 - KACHHA - special type of underwear.
 - KIRPAN - sword worn symbolically by baptised Sikhs.
- If for any reason the patient's KACHHA (special shorts - underwear) are removed, they should be replaced by another pair. Consult the person or their family for method of removal and replacement.





The **Spiritual Care** and **Chaplaincy Team**

Our Chaplains represent the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Humanist traditions and provide support to those of a particular faith or none.

The team will endeavour to put you in touch with a representative of another faith if this is your wish. Please let us know if you would like us to try to arrange this.

Resources

Faith at end of life A resource for professionals, providers and commissioners working in communities - PHE

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/496231/Faith_at_end_of_life_-_a_resource.pdf

Diversity in End of Life Care: A Handbook on Caring for Jewish, Christian, Muslim Patients.

<https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/research/publications/reports/diversity-in-end-of-life-care-a-handbook-on-caring-for-jewish-christian-and-muslim-patients>

Get in touch

If you would like to contact the Spiritual and Chaplaincy Team, please speak to a member of staff or contact us via:

01284 766133 **SpiritualCare@stnh.org.uk**

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This leaflet is available in different formats upon request.
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