

Life After Loss

A practical guide to what
happens next



“When Mum died, I didn’t know where to start. It was overwhelming.”

– Sam Grice, Founder of Octopus Legacy

Death is tough enough

Without all of the admin, calls and work that comes with it.

We've put together a step-by-step guide to talk you through the practical and legal steps you, or the people you love, will need to take after someone you love dies.

This guide applies when the person has died in England or Wales, and not all of the details apply in every case.

Got A Question?

Chat with one of our expert team:

☎ +44 (0)20 4525 3605

✉ hello@octopuslegacy.com

💬 octopuslegacy.com/contact

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The Checklist

The checklist

Knowing where you are in the process can be difficult. We've created a checklist to help you know where you are, and track your progress.

1. Initial Steps

- ☐ Register their death with the registrar and get their death certificate

- ☐ Locate the will, if there is one

- ☐ Organise their funeral

- ☐ Notify various organisations including:
 - Government agencies
 - Financial institutions
 - Other private companies

Feeling overwhelmed and need support?

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The checklist

2. Build a picture of their estate

- ☐ Get hold of the original signed will, if there is one

- ☐ Value the estate

- ☐ Work out if you need to pay inheritance tax

- ☐ Work out if you need to submit a full inheritance tax account (IHT400) to HM Revenue & Customs
 - Pay inheritance tax, if needed
 - Submit inheritance tax account to HM Revenue & Customs, if needed

- ☐ Work out if you need to apply for Grant of Probate (if there is a will) or Letters of Administration (if there isn't a will)
 - Apply for Grant of Probate (if there is a will) or Letters of Administration
 - Receive the Grant of Probate from HM Courts & Tribunals Service

☐ Place a Section 27 Notice (optional)

☐ Collect in the assets of their estate

☐ Settle any liabilities and debts

☐ Finalise, pay, and/or file the appropriate tax returns to deal with the following taxes, if required:

- Inheritance Tax - obtain clearance from HMRC
- Income Tax
- Capital Gains Tax

☐ Distribute the assets of their estate in accordance with the terms of the will (or as laid out by the rules of intestacy if they didn't have a will)

☐ Prepare final accounts laying out all of the transactions and distributions

Registering their
death & getting a
death certificate

Registering their death & getting a death certificate

When?

Within 5 days

**How long
does it take?**

~ 30 Minutes

Where?

A register office near you. You can find your nearest register office here:



or visit

<https://www.gov.uk/register-offices>

Who can do this?

A relative should register the death. If this isn't possible, then any of the following people can register the death:

- Someone who was there at the time of death.
- An administrator at the hospital (if they died in the hospital).
- Someone in charge of making funeral arrangements.

How?

Call the register office before you go. They'll tell you what documents and information you'll need to bring with you.

Top Tip:

It's worth requesting more than one official death certificate, we recommend between 5-10.

Organising the funeral

Organising the funeral

There's no right way to organise a funeral.

Here are some questions that might help you get started:

Did they have any religious beliefs that might help determine what kind of funeral they'd like?

What songs did they love?

Do you want or need to have the funeral quickly, or do you want to take your time?

Did they express a preference for burial, cremation or anything else? (You can check their will if they have one)

Who are the people most important to them?

How would they want to be remembered?

**Notifying various
organisations**

Notifying various organisations

Government departments

Such as HM Revenue & Customs, Department for Work & Pensions, HM Passport Office, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Local Councils, Civil Service Pension Scheme, NHS Pension Scheme, Local Authority Pension Schemes and Veterans UK.

When?	Within 28 days
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How long will this take?	~15 minutes
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Where?	Online via Tell Us Once (for most government departments) or with the assistance of the registrar at the time of registering the death.
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What is it?	Tell Us Once is a scheme that allows you to notify lots of government departments at once, saving you from having to contact each government department individually.
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**You will
need the
following:**

- Their passport, and name of their local council.
 - A copy of their death certificate.
 - Their national insurance number.
-

How?

You can start this here –



or visit

<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once>

Financial institutions, online accounts and social media companies

Such as banks, building societies, private pensions, savings & investments accounts, life insurance companies, general insurance providers, mortgage providers, hire purchase or loan companies, credit card and store card providers, utility companies, video & streaming services, social media & email accounts, loyalty cards and online shopping subscriptions.

Why?

They will end any automatic payments or subscriptions, and it will help you work out the value of their assets and debts to be able to build a picture of the estate.

How

Unfortunately, there is no single 'Tell Us Once' equivalent for private companies. However, there are a few that are similar and work with lots of big companies, which should save you some time if you choose to do it yourself, such as Life Ledger:

app.lifeledger.com/register

To notify companies/cancel accounts you'll often need the following:

- Personal details of the person who died and account details, if available.
 - Copy/original death certificates.
 - Copy of will (if any).
-

Thoughts:

Whilst it's best to notify financial institutions as soon as is practically possible to stop due payments, it's okay to take your time closing some of the other accounts. Sometimes cancelling accounts mean you lose access to something meaningful...

e.g. their voicemail message, or their go-to orders.

Don't feel you have to rush this process.

Build a picture of
their estate

Build a picture of their estate

Is there a valid will?

Working out whether or not they have a valid will is key before you do anything else. This is because it will usually lay out who is in charge (i.e. the executor) and responsible for dealing with the estate and funeral wishes, as well as the details of what they want to happen to their property and belongings.

The best place to look for and/or make enquiries for a will is:



Their home



Their bank



Octopus Legacy /
their lawyer



National Will Register (where
you can search for wills)

If there is no valid will

The estate will be dealt with under the rules of intestacy. To find out more, you can check out our blog here:

<https://octopuslegacy.com/advice/what-happens-if-you-die-without-a-will>



What is in their estate?

Identify their assets and debts, and their rough values, then notify the relevant organisations as listed in pages 11-16.

A few things to think about:



Property



Bank & building society accounts



Pensions



Savings/investment accounts



Mortgages



Life insurance



Credit card and store cards



Funeral costs



Any other places you think they might have assets and/or debts

Top Tips:

1. You will need to include assets and debts held in joint names, not just in their name.
2. You'll need to consider gifts they made in the last seven years before they died.

Work out if probate is needed:

You might not need probate, as it's only required in about 50% of cases in England & Wales.

Probate is usually not needed if:

- The value of the estate is less than £5,000 and financial institutions have said they will release their funds without probate.
- All property and/or accounts were held jointly with someone who is still alive.

Probate is usually needed if they had:

- A property in their sole name;
- ~+£20k with a bank or building society (however each bank is different so you will need to check with them);
- ~+£5,000 worth of shares and investments with a company (however each provider is different so you will need to check with them);
- ~+£5,000 NS&I Premium Bonds;
- Cryptocurrency.

**We've laid out the threshold for
some of the biggest banks here:**

+£50K

Barclays

£10K

First Direct/HSBC

(depending if there is a will and if not, it depends
on your relationship to the person that has died)

+£10K

Starling

+£50K

Santander

+£50K

Nationwide

+£50K

NatWest

+£25K or +£50K

Halifax & Lloyds

£25K if there wasn't a will
£50K if there is a will

+£50K

TSB

(Numbers from March 2025 - subject to change)

Check if you need probate by speaking to
our expert probate team here:

octopuslegacy.com/probate



Work out if inheritance tax needs to be paid and/or a full inheritance tax account is needed:

You may need to report the value of their estate to HMRC by providing a full inheritance tax account if:

- They are single and their estate is worth more than **£325,000**.
- They are widowed and their estate is worth more than **£650,000**.
- They have made lifetime gifts totalling more than **£250,000** in the last **7 years**.
- They gave away their property but continued to live in it.
- They are claiming the Residential Nil Rate Band.

Top Tips:

You have to send the inheritance tax account to HMRC and pay all of the inheritance tax (if due), or, for some, the first instalment of the tax, before applying for probate. HMRC needs to send you a code, which is needed before you can prepare, sign and submit the application for probate.

How to do this?

Use the gov.uk online tool to check if there is inheritance tax to pay or, if there is no inheritance tax to pay, whether a full account needs to be sent to HMRC here:

<https://www.gov.uk/valuing-estate-of-someone-who-died/estimate-estate-value>



If there is inheritance tax to pay, complete form IHT400 to send to HMRC here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inheritance-tax-inheritance-tax-account-iht400>



Top Tips:

If the estate is taxable, you need to submit the IHT400 and pay the tax due (or the first instalment if applicable) within 6 months of the last day of the month of the date of their death, or interest starts to be charge by HMRC. You can get more guidance on the government site by visiting: [gov.uk/inheritance-tax](https://www.gov.uk/inheritance-tax)

If it is needed, apply for Grant of Probate or Letters of Administration

If probate is needed, you'll need to do one of two things:

- Apply for Grant of Probate (if there is a will)
- Apply for Letters of Administration (if there is NO will)

You have different options when it comes to starting the probate process:

- Do-it-yourself (DIY)
- Hand it over to a probate professional
- Mix of both

Want to understand your options?

Speak to one of our probate team by calling [+44 \(0\)20 8068 9990](tel:+442080689990).

octopuslegacy.com/contact



Top Tips:

1. If there is a will, you will need the original will.

An original will has the 'wet' signatures of the person who has died and the two witnesses, i.e. it can't be a photocopy.

The original will has to be sent to HM Courts & Tribunals Service as part of the probate application.

2. Remember to leave the will intact
e.g. do not remove any bindings, write on it and/or paperclip/staple anything to it. Any missing documents or 'damage' to the will can cause delays.

Want to DIY it?

Apply online or by post, usually dependent if there is a will or not, by scanning the QR code or visit:

gov.uk/applying-for-probate/apply-for-probate



How Long Does It Take?

You'll usually get the Grant of Probate or Letters of Administration within 16 weeks of sending off the documents.

Top Tip:

It's worth paying (~£1.50 each) for multiple copies of the Grant of Probate or Letters of Administration.

You'll need roughly one per financial institution you'll want to notify/close. This means you don't have to wait for them to return the document each time.

Consider placing a Section 27 Notice (statutory advertisement):

Although not a legal requirement, this is highly recommended. There are alternatives to this – you can speak to our team by calling +44 (0)20 8068 9990 to find out more.

What is this? It is an advert asking anyone who believes they are owed money by the person who has died to come forward and make a claim within 2 months and 1 day from the date that the statutory advert is published.

When should this be placed? This can be placed any time after their death.

Where to publish this? The advertisement should be published in the London Gazette and in a newspaper circulating in the area where they lived.

Why? It protects the people responsible for sorting out the estate from personal liability for any unknown debts which they did not deal with before they distributed the estate.

How?

Visit this website or scan the QR code:

www.thegazette.co.uk/wills-and-probate/place-a-deceased-estates-notice



Sorting out the estate

Sorting out the estate

Once you have received the Grant of Probate or Letters of Administration (if required) next steps are to:

- 1 Collect the assets from their estate by either selling, cashing in or transferring them.
- 2 Pay the debts and liabilities of the estate including all taxes (if any are due).
- 3 Distribute the estate to the beneficiaries according to the wishes laid out in their will or intestacy rules, if there is no will.

Top Tip:

Keep clear records to show what you have done during the estate administration, especially of the money coming in and out of the estate.

It would be a good idea that an estate bank account is opened which is separate from your own.

Jargon busting

Jargon busting

Some of these terms are confusing, so we've laid out the key ones and what they mean below:

Administrator

This is usually someone who stands to inherit the most from the estate of the person who has died under the intestacy rules (when there is no will). They will then become legally responsible for handling their estate.

Beneficiary

This is someone entitled to inherit from the estate of the person who has died, either under their will or intestacy rules (if there is no will).

The estate

This means the property, money and possessions of the person who has died.

Estate Administration

This is the process of handling all the tasks involved in dealing with the estate of the person who has died, from start to finish. This includes managing their assets, debts, and taxes before paying out the inheritance due to the beneficiaries. Obtaining probate is usually part of the estate administration process.

Executor

This is someone named in the will of the person who has died who is legally responsible for handling their estate.

Grant of Probate

This is a legal document which shows financial institutions and other organisations that the person named on it has the right to deal with the estate of the person who has died.

Grant of Probate can only be obtained if the person who died left a will.

Letters of Administration

Like Grant of Probate, Letters of Administration give you the right to deal with the estate of the person who has died.

This is a legal document that shows financial institutions and other organisations that the person named on it has the right to deal with the estate of the person who has died.

It is used when the person who has died didn't have a legal will in place.

Grant of Representation

This is a catch-all term for Grant of Probate and Letters of Administration.

Intestacy/Dying Intestate

This is when someone died without leaving a valid will. When this happens, there are rules which set out how their property (their estate) will be shared out.

Probate

This refers to the legal process of obtaining the Grant of Probate or Letters of Administration, which is not always necessary.

It is also used as a catch-all for the document itself and to describe the whole process of dealing with the estate of the person who has died.

Valid/Legal Will

In order for a will to be legally valid it must meet the following requirements.

The person who made the will:

- was 18 or over at the time, made it voluntarily and was of sound mind; and
- did so in writing and signed it in the presence of two independent adult witnesses, who also signed in their presence.

Getting support

Getting support

Octopus Legacy was founded by Sam after his mum died suddenly. We're a group of people who work in death because we've been affected by it. We know how difficult it is, which is why we're here to help.

We're here to help

Chat with one of our expert team:

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