



**Jamie Innes**  
**Humanist Celebrant**



**Naming Ceremony Guidance**  
**for Parents**



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## What is Humanism?

Humanism is built on the belief that we have one life, and that during this one life we should look to find as much happiness and fulfilment in the present as possible.

Humanists value independent thinking, based on the reality we observe rather than religious observance. Humanists believe that people should be able to enjoy their human rights freely and have a fair voice in all matters that affect them.

The core human values of tolerance, respect and kindness are central to the principles of Humanism.

Valuing creative expression through the arts is also an important principle of Humanism.

You can read more about Humanism on the [Humanist Society Scotland website](#).



## What is a Naming Ceremony?

In short, a Naming Ceremony is a celebratory gathering of people, led by a Celebrant, where the key purpose is to welcome a new member of the family.

Naming Ceremonies can range from a very informal gathering of a few people in the living room or back garden, to much more formal occasions in large, hired venues, and everything in between!

Naming Ceremonies are most commonly carried out for new babies or very young children, but there is no age restriction on a Naming Ceremony! Families may wish to hold a Naming Ceremony for any child, at any age – for a variety of reasons.

Many families choose to hold Naming Ceremonies for children shortly after they are born, or around their first birthday.

Naming Ceremonies can also be a great addition to a wedding, where a family might look to celebrate joining together under a new surname. (Something my wife and I did, as you can see in the photo below and throughout this guide!)

Naming Ceremonies are also very popular for newly adopted children, as a way of marking their inclusion in a new family.

You can read more about Naming Ceremonies by visiting the [Humanist Society Scotland website](#).



## Structure of a Naming Ceremony

The structure of your child's Naming Ceremony can be very flexible. We will work together closely to identify what is important to you, making sure that every detail is exactly as you would want it to be to make the celebration as unique and special as possible.

Your child's Naming Ceremony may feature:

- A welcome to your guests from me, with a short explanation around the significance of the day
- Sharing the story of how your little one came into the world, and what they're like
- Readings which you have chosen, performed by people close to your child
- Guide Parents' Promises, where a couple of special adults you have chosen share their commitment to supporting your child's happiness and development with you, your child and your guests
- Parental Promises, where you would make a commitment to your child directly to them, witnessed by your guests
- A formal 'Naming' where we would gift your child their name, with the support of your guests
- A Symbolic Gesture
- Signing of a Naming Certificate as a physical memento of the day – something to frame for the nursery!
- A toast to your child's health and happiness



## Promises from Parents and Guide Parents

### Parental Promises

A Naming Ceremony gives you a chance to share make some promises to your child in front of your guests. The promises you choose would usually reflect how you want to care your little one. My recommendation would be two serious promises and a fun one from each parent present. If this is tricky, I can help my giving you more examples or shaping your promises with you. Here's a quick example which may be helpful for you:

*I promise to love you always.*

*I promise that wherever you go in life, and whatever you choose to be, you will have my unwavering support.*

*I promise not to lose my temper in the very likely event that you request to watch the same episode of Peppa Pig 46 times in a row!*



### Guide Parents' Promises

Many families choose special 'Guide Parents' who would also make promises to your little one. You can have as many or as few Guide Parents as you like (or none at all) but I'd recommend 1-4 adults who you think will play a special role in your little one's life.

This can be a good opportunity to include special aunts, uncles or friends in the ceremony.

You may wish to write your own Guide Parents promises, or ask the Guide Parents themselves to write them. Or, you may like me to come up with some promises which I think suit your family and your child. Here's an example which might be useful:

*Mum and Dad ask that you formally accept this commitment to baby, to offer her your friendship and trust. They hope that you will listen to her, encourage her, and support her when she needs you. They would like you to you promise to be there through the highs and lows of her life, through the adventure of growing up and beyond. If you agree, please reply 'We do.'*



## Choosing Readings

Including a couple of nice readings in your little one's Naming Ceremony can be a lovely way of adding some variety to the occasion, and gives families a nice opportunity to further recognise some important people in your child's life.

Again, there are no rules as to how many readings you choose to use – you can have as few or as many as you like, but I'd recommend 1-3 readings. Some ideas you might choose to use are:

- An excerpt from one of your child's favourite stories
- A few words written by an older brother or sister
- A short poem written by a creative relative!
- One of the many hundreds of lovely poems about childhood you can find online

Readings are most meaningful when you are able to choose something which is special to your family and your little one. If you're struggling for inspiration, there's a [collection of examples](#) on my website.



## Symbolic Gestures

Including a symbolic gesture can also add a further meaningful and personal touch to your child's Naming Ceremony.

Here are some popular symbolic gestures you may wish to think about:

- Gifts for Guide Parents/Siblings/Grandparents
- Cake Cutting
- Tree Planting
- Handfasting
- Candle Lighting
- Sand Ceremony
- Hand/footprints
- Oathing Stone
- Promise stones

Take a look at the information below to find out more about each of these popular symbolic gestures. If you're not sure what to pick, I'd be delighted to talk you through each one in more detail.

### Gifts for Guide Parents/Siblings/Grandparents

As simple as it sounds! Many families choose to give gifts to some of the most important people in their little ones' lives on the day of their Naming Ceremony. Let me know if you're planning on giving gifts as part of your ceremony and I'll write in to the most appropriate



### Cake Cutting

Most people tend to have cake at their ceremony anyway, so why not make a little more fuss over it and get some nice photos at the same time!? If you're having a cake cutting this would work very much in the same way as it does at a wedding. Shortly after signing the Naming Certificate, we'd stage a few photographs while you cut the cake in front of your guests.



## Tree Planting

Ideal if you're having an outdoor ceremony in the back garden! Just as your child needs care and nurture to thrive, so too does your new addition to the garden. Planting a tree which will grow as your little one does can be a beautiful way of marking their arrival while also reflecting on how the support you give as parents will help your little one flourish.



## Handfasting



This one works particularly well if you're including the Naming Ceremony as part of your wedding, but it does also work at a stand-alone Naming Ceremony! You'd bring along two lengths of material (traditionally family tartans but the choice is yours!) and I'd loosely bind your hands with your little one's hands as a finale to the ceremony.

The knots tied are representative of the love you have for one another as parents as well as the love for your little one and are also symbolic of your strength and unity as a family.

## Candle Lighting

This is perhaps the most popular symbolic gesture families include in the Naming Ceremonies I conduct. For this gesture, families bring three candles to sit on a table at the front of the ceremony.

During the early part of the ceremony, I ask each parent to light a candle symbolising the individual strengths they have as a parent. Near the end of the ceremony, parents then use the flames from their individual candles to light a larger, central candle, symbolising how their collective commitment as parents will contribute positively to the life of their child as they grow and shine.



## Sand Ceremony

If you chose to have a sand ceremony, we'd normally do this alongside the signing of the Naming Certificate. Each parent adds their own colour of sand from a small container into a larger one, recognising the growth of your family. A third layer is added for your little one (further colours and layers can be added for siblings) and the sand blends to form a unique and beautiful pattern.

Each layer of sand is still distinct, and plays its own part in something bigger and more beautiful. Once the grains of sand have been added, they are near impossible to separate, which I think is a really nice symbol of your strength and unity as a family!



It's really easy to pick up sand ceremony kits online with colours of your choosing, though it's not too tricky to make your own if you prefer!

## Hand/Footprints

Another very popular choice, which would also typically accompany the signing of the Naming Certificate. Children grow up all too quickly, so making hand or footprints on the day of their Naming Ceremony is a lovely way of remembering them exactly as they are on that day!

Whether buying a kit online or just bringing along a tub of squeeze paint and a sheet of card, I like this gesture as it gives you something tactile and tangible to keep in the memory box forever.

## Oathing Stone

In the past, promises were thought to be more binding if they were made over stone, or near water. It's where the expression 'set in stone' comes from. It's also why kings and queens of Scotland were crowned on the Stone of Destiny!

If you have a favourite beach walk where you're likely to come across stones, or nice stones in your garden, you could collect one of these as your oathing stone.



You would hold this together in your hands as you make your vows/promises to your little one.

Some couples also choose to engrave their child's initials or family name into their oathing stone.

### **Promise Stones**

Using promise stones has a similar feel to using an oathing stone but is a way of involving all your guests in the ceremony.

You'd need to source a shiny wee pebble for each of your guests to lay out as they make their way into the ceremony. Then, during the ceremony I'd ask them to pick up their stone and infuse it with their promises, well wishes and hopes for your little one as they learn and grow.

You'd have a jar, vase or wee bucket set-up somewhere in the room too, and at the end of the ceremony I'd ask your guests to add their promise stone so that you can collect them, take them home, and display them somewhere special.

### **Costs**

My fee for writing and conducting your naming ceremony is **£200**. This includes a presentation copy of your script on card and a bespoke certificate for your wee one. I don't charge travel expenses, unless I need to stay overnight to conduct your ceremony, or I need to get a ferry to your ceremony.

Humanist Society Scotland is a charity, and part of your fee helps to support the various campaigns HSS is involved in. You can find out more about these [here](#).

Booking me through Humanist Society Scotland also ensures that you are covered by 'The Promise', which means that should anything unexpected happen to me (eek!) another registered celebrant will be with you on the day to deliver the exact naming ceremony we have agreed together.

I'll support and advise you at every stage in the process of planning your naming ceremony. I can be as hands-on or hands-off as you want me to be. We'll meet at least once (either in person or online), but I'll be available by e-



mail or phone whenever you need me – with no query too small. I love what I do and I don't take days off when it comes to my families!

## **Contacting Me**

The best ways to contact me are either through e-mail or via WhatsApp.

E-mail works best when we have documents to share, or formal plans to make. If you've just got a quick question or thought about your naming ceremony, then absolutely feel free to send me a message or a voice note on WhatsApp.

Whichever way you choose to contact me, you'll find I'll get back to you really quickly.

When it comes to your naming ceremony, there are no silly questions!

**E-mail:** [jamie.innes@humanism.scot](mailto:jamie.innes@humanism.scot)

**WhatsApp:** 07815992006

## **Privacy Notice**

Your privacy is important to me. For full information on how any data you share with me is used, [please click here.](#)

