

THE FUNERAL

Important things to consider about the funeral or memorial service:

Age - When deciding whether your child should attend a funeral or memorial service, age is not the most important consideration. Your child is part of the family, and children who are old enough to love are old enough to grieve. No child is too young to attend a funeral, provided that the child is prepared for what will happen and what they will see at the funeral home, and is lovingly guided through the process.

Shutting children out makes them feel alone, and conveys the idea that death and grief are too horrible to be faced. Children need to learn that special, loved people do die – but also that there will always be somebody to take care of them.

Explaining death - Offer the facts in a simple, loving and honest way.

- Begin by finding out what the child already knows or thinks they know about death.
- Keep it simple, but note that children usually know when grown-ups are not telling everything and are avoiding certain things.



- Avoid euphemisms such as, “passed away,” “sleeping,” and “lost.” Use factual words like “died”.
- Explain how we might feel when someone dies. Our feelings might include feeling sad, angry, confused, tearful.
- Don’t be afraid to show your own feelings. Let your children know that you are grieving too, and that it is safe and ok for you to grieve together.
- Explain what ‘dead’ means. This might help – *Grandma died when her heart stopped beating. She doesn’t breathe in and out anymore. She doesn’t eat or sleep or go to the toilet. She can’t hear or see or move or feel pain. Being dead is different to being asleep. When you are asleep your body parts are working but when you are dead your body parts have all stopped working.*



After the death of a loved one you may be wondering how and even whether to include your children in the mourning rituals for the person who has died. You may have many questions about how to meet your children’s needs at such an upsetting time.

What your children need most from you is honesty, including accurate, factual information. They need to be able to have their questions taken seriously and answered fully. They need to be able to say how they are feeling and if possible, they need to be included in the decisions that have to be made and the discussions that take place. All of this will help them to understand their feelings and come to terms with the death. Your attention and support at this difficult time will go a long way to helping them cope.

- Encourage children to share their thoughts, feelings and fears about what is happening.
- Explain that all living things will someday die.
- If your children are keen then involve them as much as possible in the activities before the funeral. This might include choosing the casket, placing special notes and mementos in the casket, choosing special clothes for the dead person to wear, choosing songs, music and readings.

The funeral service, the burial or cremation and the wake – Talk as much as possible in advance of the funeral service so that children feel included, informed and safe in their grief.

Explain:

- Where the funeral service will be held.
- How the casket will be transported.
- Who is going to the funeral and how people will be transported.
- What the service will include – songs, hymns, readings, sermons, prayers, eulogies (speeches) about the person's life. Who is going to stand up and talk if you have that information.
- What the people attending the funeral will do.
- What will happen to the casket and the body of the dead person after the service – burial, cremation.
- That later a monument (a stone or marker) is placed at the grave to mark the place where the body is buried. Explain what will be written on the stone or

marker, e.g. it will have - name, birthday, date of death, and maybe a special saying or poem or a few loving words.

- Explain that the special marker or stone will be there for you all to look at when you visit the cemetery, and that it can help you to feel close to the person who has died because the love you all have for that person is still there.
- That after the service, everyone will gather at the family home or some other location to share food and to chat and share memories about the person who has died.
- If the children are very young, it may be helpful to have an adult who is known to the children and trusted by them but who is perhaps not quite as affected by the death who will be able to take them out of the service and distract them if they become bored or restless or just want to leave.



Summary

Going to a funeral can help children understand the finality of death and joining family and friends in saying goodbye can help the grieving process.

There is only so much preparation that you can do in advance. You can't think of every detail or fully anticipate what will impact on your children and how.

If your children attend the funeral, it can be helpful to continue to talk about the funeral in the subsequent weeks, sharing memories and feelings about various aspects of the day.

Reassurances should be offered to children but in a way that does not merely suppress their pain. Successful grieving, in which you experience and work through loss, can build a child's confidence in their capacity to love and can strengthen their capacity for deep future relationships.

Your decision about whether it is right for your children to be at a loved one's funeral is a personal one. It involves your values, your spiritual beliefs, the circumstances around the death, the extent to which it is important to you to be together as a family at the funeral, and your understanding of your individual children's needs.

With proper support, what you feel is right for your family should turn out to be right for your children.

Balloons Information Sheet 1

