

# THE FUNERAL

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.

## 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.

### Inclusion

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.

