

SEEING THE PERSON WHO HAS DIED

After a death, families are faced with lots of difficult choices and decisions at a time when they are at their most vulnerable.

Making the decision about whether or not a child should go and see the person who has died can be complex and painful. Adults are often grieving themselves, and find it hard to judge if the child will be helped or traumatised by viewing the body.

However, children may feel hurt if they do not have the opportunity to say goodbye, and this hurt can lead to resentment and upset. The starting point should always be finding out what the child wants.

HOW CAN A CHILD BE SUPPORTED WHEN MAKING THIS DECISION?

Children can be supported to make their decision by being given information which might include:

- Who they will be going with and where they will be going to see the body, including a description of the venue if that's possible.
- What the body might look like – if the adult can view the body themselves beforehand then that can help with answering any questions from the child.
- Reassurance that the dead person can't feel any more – that the person isn't hungry, cold, frightened or in pain.
- That the person isn't sleeping so they can't wake them up.
- That they can stay for as little or as long a time as they want.
- That they can talk to the person and touch or kiss them, but they won't get a response.
- That they can take a gift for the person if they want to – a letter or a drawing or a special token.
- That if things don't feel right they can leave at any time, either before they have seen the body or whilst they are seeing the body, and that any decisions they made beforehand about their visit can change if they don't feel right on the day.

All of this will help them to make a decision about why they might want to go and see the body. Remember, it's all right not to have all the right answers. Sometimes there just aren't right answers, but it's still important to discuss the questions and reach a decision together.

