

Kaleidoscope

Guidelines for Children and Funerals

Often, adults are unsure of how to deal with the topic of children and funerals. Remember a child seeks understanding and reassurance from the adults in his or her life. The following are suggestions for helping with the decision of whether children should attend a funeral or services and how to prepare them for this experience.

Should the child attend the funeral or ceremony?

After the child is given some information about the funeral, wake or services, allow him or her to make the choice of whether to attend or not. Children should not be forced to attend a funeral, however be prepared to follow through with the child's decision. If they choose not to attend, it may be important to try and understand why so that you can talk with them about any fears they may have.

If the child chooses not to attend, other ways of saying goodbye can be provided, whether at this time or on a later date. Participation can give the child a sense of ownership of the funeral process. Such as picking out flowers, drawing a picture or writing a note to be placed in or around the casket, creating a collage of pictures, or making a card for the family.

How can Children be prepared?

1. Discuss the events of the day, including the service, procession and cemetery.
2. Children need to be prepared for what they will see, hear, smell, touch and taste at a funeral. For example; the aroma of flowers in the funeral home and that many people send flowers to comfort the family and show how much they loved the person who died. Also, if it is an open casket, the person will look like they are sleeping, so review the differences between sleep and death (i.e. when you are dead you do not breathe and your heart does not beat). Preparation reduces anxiety and unexpected surprises.
3. If the body is to be cremated, help the child to understand that this is another way to care for the body after death. It is important to explain that cremation is a process using a high degree of heat to reduce a body to small particles that look like fish bowl rocks or white sand. Cremation doesn't hurt as the person is dead which means their body does not work anymore.
4. Review what will be expected of the child and assign a special close relative or friend to be with them if the parents are involved in the event.
5. Discuss possible feelings that adults and children may experience and how these feelings may look (i.e. sadness and crying).