

Children and Grief Funerals and Memorial Services

Adults often wonder how to help children understand funerals and memorial services. This may be the first time the child has experienced a death loss or attended a funeral. The following are suggestions and ideas that may help in preparing them for the experience.

Talk about the reasons we have funerals and memorial services

- A time to remember and say good-bye to a loved one or special friend.
- A time to say thank you for being a part of my life.
- A time for friends and others to show the family they care and want to be supportive.

Prepare them for the funeral or memorial service

- Tell them about what will happen during the service.
 - People may share prayers, stories, memories, music or singing.
 - People may bring flowers, plants, cards and gifts.
- Prepare them for an open or closed casket and what the body may look like.
- If the body is cremated explain that a very hot heat quickly turns the body into soft ashes that are placed into a special container called an urn. Sometimes families will scatter ashes or bury them as part of the service.
- Explain that many feelings and emotions will be experienced by adults and children at the service. There will be crying and sadness because it is hard to say goodbye. People may be hugging to show they care and there may even be laughing, but this doesn't mean that people aren't sad. All feelings are OK.

Give them the choice if they want to attend the funeral or memorial service

- Tell them what they can expect and give them the choice to attend or not.
- If their first response is no, give them another opportunity to choose closer to the time of the service.
- Recognize they may be scared or feel uncertain.
- Be prepared to follow through with their choice and support them even when others might disagree with them attending.

When the child attends the funeral or memorial service.

- Have a trusted adult be available for your child. Parents aren't always able or available to deal with the needs and questions of children during a busy and demanding time.
- Children may need to take a break. Bring some toys or books for them and allow them to leave and play when appropriate.
- You and your child may wonder "what do I say" to the family and others at a service:
 - A hug or a sign of your sadness for their loss.
 - Telling them you care about them.

- Encourage the child to participate:
 - Write a card, note or letter to the family.
 - Write a letter to the deceased.
 - Draw a picture.
 - Bring a flower or light a candle.

Check in with your child after the funeral or memorial service

- Ask them how they feel and if they have any questions.
- If they have experienced another death loss in their life this may bring up feelings and memories.
- What do they feel like doing? Do they want to return to school? They may want to go home and be close to family and friends.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child, you are welcome to contact Pathways for Grief and Loss at 970-663-3500 or visit our website at www.pathways-care.org