

# Preparing children for the funeral

## Tips for talking with children about death

1. Use simple and age appropriate language.
2. Listen to the question and respond to what they ask.
3. Be honest. Admit when you don't know the answer to a question about death, funerals or your feelings.
4. Reassure children that it is okay to feel a range of emotions when someone dies.
5. Encourage your children to use various forms of expression, such as drawing, signing or playing.

**Making the decision whether to include a child at the funeral can be difficult.** Children sometimes want to be involved and this can be good for them if they are listened to and supported through the experience. **You may like to consider the following:**

### **Funerals serve a purpose – they help the family and community to reflect on the person's life:**

Attending a funeral can help children understand the physical reality of death: that the person who died cannot come back. Being at a funeral with grieving family and friends may help them express their grief. While being at the service can be distressing, it may be harder on children to be left out of something so important to the family.

### **Some parents/caregivers give children a choice whether or not to attend:**

Before asking the child to choose, describe what will happen at the funeral. Tell them what they might see or hear if they attend, including what will occur, and how people will behave (people may be crying, a special area for the family may be set aside, there may be a viewing of the loved one – which they don't have to see). Tell them about alternative arrangements to attending. For example, they can stay with a neighbour or friend of the family. If they don't attend, offer to say something or read something on their behalf, and explain that they can participate in memorial activities at a later time, including creating their own memorial.

### **If your child is attending the funeral, before you go, review what they can expect will happen:**

Talk to your children not only about what to expect, but also about how you and others may react. Assure them that this is your way of being sad today and that you are okay. Consider whether you will be able to accompany and support your child or whether you need to have another family member or friend there to support them. Prepare the companion to both comfort your child and take them out for breaks from the service as needed, so that you don't have to worry them. Before the event, remind them about anything they may need to do.

### **There are alternative rituals to attending a funeral you may prefer to do with your children:**

Some examples include: Light candles at home or in a public place to remember the person who died; Create a ceremony consistent with your culture and tradition; Say prayers at home or in your place of worship; Write notes or make cards for the family members and/or the person who died; Share with each other feelings and memories of the person who has died.

### **Choosing to view your loved one:**

Some people are reluctant to do so while others feel a strong need to do this. It is helpful to listen to your own feelings about what you need. It may help a child to describe what the experience might be like.

### **People also have different views on speaking about suicide at the funeral:**

Some find it too difficult, while others would prefer to be direct about it. These differences of views can sometimes cause conflict and distress. Finding a balance and respecting differences can help as this conflict can lead to further distress.



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The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. 2016. Guiding Adults in Talking to Children about Death and Attending Services [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/talking\\_points\\_about\\_services.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/talking_points_about_services.pdf)  
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