

Discussing Death with a Child

Q: Should children attend funerals?

A: Yes. Attending the funeral allows the child to be a part of the family at a time when they need love and attention the most. If the child is leery of the funeral, perhaps you can arrange a private moment before or after the service for the child to say goodbye. Or ask your funeral director if their facility has a playroom where that child could stay until the service is complete. The important thing is that the child is with friends and family and not isolated from the situation.

Q: How can I help a grieving child?

A: Here are five simple ways to help a grieving child:

- Be there for the child. Listen when they need to talk, and hug them when they need comfort.
- Share fond memories about the loved one with the child, and encourage them to share their own memories.
- Encourage the child to draw a picture or write a letter to their loved one. These items could be placed in the casket or displayed during the cremation.
- Frame a picture of the loved one for the child or give the child another memento to remember their loved one by. (i.e. coins that were in their pocket, a favorite pin, etc.)
- Involve the child in the funeral. Let them read a poem or letter they have written, sing or play a song during the service, or even just attend the funeral with family and friends.

Q: How can we protect children from the loss?

A: It is impossible to protect children from the pain of losing someone they loved. Trying to hide the death from them will only delay their inevitable realization that the person is no longer a part of the child's life. It is better to include children in the mourning experience and teach them a healthy way to deal with their feelings.