



Preparing Children for Funeral or Memorial Services

Since the beginning of time human beings have practiced funerary rituals to memorialize someone who has died. These rituals help the bereaved begin their mourning process and have a supportive element that benefits both adults and children. **Consider the following guidelines when making decisions whether or not to include a child.**

1. Allowing children to attend wakes, viewings, services etc. gives children the chance to remain in close proximity to surviving family members. In this way their fears of further abandonment are eased.
2. Attendance at these rituals helps children with the crucial task of understanding death. The more they are included in family rituals and conversations about the death, the better able they will be to understand the finality of death and mourn the loss.
3. Participating in the mourning ritual gives children the opportunity to honor and memorialize their person that died.
4. Invite children to attend by saying “please join us when we all go to say good-bye for the last time”.
5. Offer simple, concrete age-appropriate explanations for each ritual, preparing them for what to expect and who will be there.
6. Designate a person close to the child that is **not** the most directly impacted by the death to companion the child during the memorial rituals.
7. Share information about where you are going, what to expect, who will be there, etc.
8. Give the child the option to stay for all or part of the time, to view the body or not. Let them know they can change their mind if they want and that there is no penalty for not attending.

Ways a child can participate in mourning rituals:

- Choose flowers, decorations, music, readings or write their own thoughts to share
- Make a video or collage or set up a memorabilia table
- Help select the casket or urn
- Decide whether to place something in the casket or cremation box
- Select clothing for the deceased
- Help construct wording for the headstone
- Discuss where to scatter the ashes adhering to legal guidelines
- Help close the casket and/or serve as a pall bearer
- Light a memorial candle
- Plan a balloon or dove release
- Discuss the option to join a grief support group
- Help children make decisions regarding how to mark the anniversary of the death and other special occasions

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