



formerly HospiceCare of Boulder & Broomfield Counties

COMMUNITYCARE

Hospice | Supportive Services

Children and Funerals

Often families choose to have a ritual and it may be a funeral, a memorial, a celebration of life or family gathering. It is important to let your child know what will happen and include them in the process. It helps them to say good-bye and gives a structure for family and community to mourn together.

- If there is a viewing of the body, explain it in advance. Discuss the environment, that they may see people have strong emotions, and that the body has stopped working. If the body is going to be cremated, the process needs to be explained. Explain that the body can feel no pain and will not wake up because the person has died.
- Explain as many details as your child seems to want or need to know. They should be encouraged to attend a funeral, but not forced. Kids often want to attend, but if they are reluctant they can say goodbye in other ways such as before the service or during a visitation period. Answer their questions honestly.
- Kids grieve in short doses and may need things to keep them occupied during a service especially if it is going to take a longer time period. They process emotions through play, activity, and art and may have a need to do those things before, during or after the service.
- Kids need connection before, during, and after the funeral so they know they are not alone. Modeling how you and your family process grief will make them feel safe. Physical touch can be equally as powerful as what you say- a touch on the shoulder, a hand on the back, a hug. Sometimes it is helpful to have you or a special adult be there with them during the service to explain what is happening.
- Let kids know that they might have all kinds of different feelings at the service and that it is ok to have them and to talk about them.
- This is also a time to discuss with your child what your beliefs are about spiritual matters and what happens after the body stops working. Questions will sometimes arise as a result of attending a funeral. Remember that you may have to have several conversations and you may have to repeat yourself in answering questions, but just keep your answers simple and consistent.

Compiled from Alan Wolfelt, "Helping Children with Funerals"