

Explaining Cremation, Burial, Calling Hours & Funeral

Talk with young children about cremation and burial to prevent confusion. Explain that the person being buried or cremated is dead. Dead means that they are not alive anymore. They cannot see, feel or hear anything. They do not breathe, eat, talk, or play. After a person dies, they do not need their body anymore. Avoid talking about burying or cremating *the person*. Instead talk about burying or cremating *their body*. Explain that their loved one will not feel fear or pain when the body is buried or cremated.

Talking to your child about burial: Burial is when the body of a person who has died is placed inside of a special box. The box is called a coffin or casket. The box is placed deep in the ground. This is only done after a person has died, so they do not see or feel anything. Dead is forever, so they will never wake up in the box after it has been buried.

Talking to your child about cremation: Cremation turns the body of someone who has died into ashes. This is only done after a person has died, so they do not see or feel anything. Sometimes families choose to keep the ashes in a special container, called an urn. Other families choose to put the ashes someplace special, like a garden or lake.

Talking to your child about calling hours: This is a time for family and friends to comfort one another. Sometimes the body of the person who died may be there. Their body might be ashes in an urn, or in a closed casket. Sometimes the casket is open so people may look at the body of the person who died. Some children are very curious. They may want to see or touch the body. That is okay! Tell them ahead of time what to expect. *"It is okay to touch Grandma's hand. Her hand will feel cold."* Some children will not want to see the body. That is okay, too. Trust your child to tell you what feels right for them. Tell your child either choice is okay.

Talking to your child about the funeral: At a funeral, friends and family gather to say goodbye when a person has died. It may include a ceremony where a person speaks to the group. There may be prayers or a religious ceremony. After, there is time talk to each other. People may eat food and share memories of the person who died. At a funeral, children may see adults crying. It can help children who feel sad to know that they are not alone. Adults feel sad, too. Children may also see people smiling, laughing, and sharing memories of the person who died. Invite children to share a memory of their loved with you. Share one of your memories with them.

Avoid talking about burying *the person*. Instead, talk about burying *their body*.



When possible, give children a choice about going to the funeral. If your child will go to the funeral, ask a trusted adult sit with them. Pick someone who knows your child well, like a teacher, neighbor, or babysitter. This adult can focus their attention on supporting the child during the funeral. Tell your child that it is okay to get up and walk to another room if they need a break. The trusted adult sitting with them should go with them. The lobby or other nearby area is a good place to take a break. Bring a bag of toys so that your child can color or play with quiet toys while taking a break. Play is a very important part of how children grieve. Encourage your child to play, even during a funeral. Play helps them to heal.

Learn more at www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/bereavement.

