

INVOLVING CHILDREN & TEENS IN FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICES



The information in this handout is provided by the Healing Patch. It is our hope it will provide you with some support and comfort during a difficult time.

Parents and/or caregivers often wonder if a child should attend the funeral or memorial service of a loved one. Prior to making the decision, it is helpful to understand the degree to which a child understands death. Below are age-appropriate suggestions, which will hopefully make the process less stressful for all of those involved.

Infants & Toddlers (0-2):

Although they cannot comprehend that a loved one has died, they can sense sadness in those around them, especially those caring for them. They will also sense changes in “routine.”

Preschoolers (3-5):

They are slowly beginning to realize that people and animals die. They tend to be more preoccupied with the physical aspect of dying and may ask questions such as, “Are your eyes closed when you die?”

Children (6-9):

Death is more real. They begin to realize that death will happen to their loved ones and begin to understand the “finality” of death.

Adolescents & Teens (10 and up):

Adolescents have a clearer understanding of death and can understand the biological facts of death. Most likely, they understand that death is “final.”

Funerals and memorial services can be beneficial in a number of ways. Ultimately, in consideration of the child’s age and level of understanding, the parent or caregiver should allow the child to decide if they choose to participate and at what level.

If children are discouraged or prohibited from attending funerals, they may believe that death and funerals are events to be feared – and their imaginations can be unleashed. They may also begin to question whether or not it is safe to attend.

A child may also have feelings of regret or resentment as they grow older if they begin to feel as though they were unable to say goodbye and be provided “closure” surrounding a death of a loved one. Trust your child to know what is best for him or her in this matter. Generally, children appreciate being included and the opportunity to make their own decisions about participation.