



## How Do We Tell the Kids?

*Explaining death, viewing, burial and cremation to children*

### **Important Reminders:**

- It is best to use accurate and real words when we talk to children about someone who has died. Children are very literal so using euphemisms like “passed away” or “lost” will likely confuse the child. Instead, adults should use simple, direct language when communicating with children.
- Let the child’s questions lead the conversation. If they are old enough to ask a question, they are old enough to hear the answer. Their questions give us insight into how they are comprehending the death and what additional information they need or if anything needs clarified.

### **How to explain death to children....**

“I have something sad to talk to you about. I might cry because this is sad news. Papa died. That means that his body stopped working. His heart stopped beating, he can no long talk or think, his body can’t move. That special part that made him Papa and no one else is no longer in his body.

His body stopped working because...

Does that make sense?”

**If the child will see the body of their person at the funeral home, before entering the room, explain...**

“When we go into the room this is what you will see...”

*Describe how is the room laid out, where the casket is located, any flowers or other touches they will see.*

“Papa’s body will be in a special box called a casket”; or “on a special table with a pillow and covered with a blanket”. “His body will be laying down and his eyes will be closed so it kind of looks like he is sleeping. But he isn’t sleeping, is he? He isn’t sleeping because he has died and he can’t wake up. His body will look different because his body isn’t working anymore, so it will be completely still.

Does that make sense?”

*Let the child decide how close they get to the body and don’t force them to go near until they are ready. It’s okay if they choose not to. There will be time later if they change their mind, or you can always take a picture if you think they would want to see it later.*

“If you want to touch Papa’s body, you may. His body will feel more firm because of the work the funeral director does to prepare him for us to see him. His body will be the temperature of the room because his body has stopped working and his blood isn’t pumping through his body like ours is. So to us it might feel cool to the touch but it’s the temperature of the room.”

### **If the body will be buried...**

“The person’s body will be put into a special box called a casket. Usually there are two lids on caskets, one on the top and one on the bottom. On the top you would see the top part of the person’s body, from the waist up. Under the second lid that is closed is their legs and feet. Sometimes because the lid is closed we might think their legs and feet aren’t underneath there but they are.”

*Check with the funeral director, they may be able to show under the bottom lid.*

“After the visitation and funeral service, we will go to the cemetery. The cemetery (sometimes called a graveyard) is a place where people who have died are buried in the ground. At the cemetery, there will be a tent where the grave will be. The ground will already be dug up and inside of the grave will be an outer burial container (also called a vault). This container’s job is to protect the casket and the ground from heavy equipment for when the cemetery is mowed or another grave is made nearby.”

“The funeral director drives a special car called a coach (or hearse) that takes the casket where it needs to go. Pallbearers will carry the casket from the coach to the gravesite. Pallbearers are usually family members that the family chooses to help carry the casket.

Often the person who has led the funeral service will say a few words at the cemetery and perhaps a prayer. Once the graveside service is over the family may leave. After the family has left, the casket will be lowered into the vault, the lid will be closed and they will put earth over it to cover it completely.

Does that make sense?”

### **When the body is cremated...**

“When a body is cremated, the person's body is placed into a special box. Sometimes this is a wooden casket but often it is a cremation container made of thick cardboard and wood. That box is put into a room (or chamber), called a crematory, where it gets very, very hot. The heat helps to change the person's body into cremated remains very quickly. It usually takes about 2 to 3 hours.”

“After the cremation is finished, all that is left are the bones. There are tiny pieces as well as large pieces of bone. These bone pieces are then placed into a machine called a processor, which changes the bones so they are the texture of sand or powder. The cremated remains (or “ashes”) are gray in color – the color of our bones.”

[When a person's body is buried, it takes many many years for the body to change to “ashes” - which means just the bones are left.]

“The cremated remains are then placed into a container or urn that the family has chosen to use. The cremated remains of an adult weigh about 5 or 6 pounds. The cremated remains of a baby weigh just a few ounces.

Does that make sense?”

“Families have many choices when it comes to cremation. They can have a body present during funeral services and cremate the body after. They can have the body cremated before services and have an urn there.

Some families keep the cremated remains at their house in a pretty container, or they might bury them in a cemetery. Sometimes families sprinkle or scatter the cremated remains in an outdoor place that is special to the family or to the person who died. Some even will keep a small amount to put into jewelry or into smaller urns.”