

Children's Desk – Do's and Don't's

There are many ways parents and other adults can help children understand their loss and assist them through their grief.

Don't lie.



Children can cope with what they know. They cannot cope with what they don't know. For example, do not tell a child the deceased went to sleep and didn't wake up. This can develop a fear of loved ones falling asleep and not waking up! Shielding children from the pain of loss does not work.

Do use simple, concrete language.

Young children are very literal. For example, "A funeral coach (hearse)" is a special car that takes the dead body or ashes to the cemetery."

Do not over-explain.

Be brief, allowing the child's natural curiosity and questions lead the discussion. For example, "a casket is a special box for burying a dead body." There is likely no need to explain the process of embalming, dressing, and placing the deceased into it.

Do show them.

Seeing is understanding, in this case. For example, let the children see the ashes. "They are just like the ashes from the fire-pit at the cottage or when we go camping."

Do not tell a child not to feel bad or to stop crying.

This doesn't work for adults and it surely will not work with children. 'Feeling bad' is a normal reaction to a loss, whether it is a pet or relative.

Don't try to make children feel better by 'keeping them busy.'

As with adults, all this does is postpone or bury the grief work that needs to be done. Children need to feel the pain and sorrow of a loss. Never 'smooth over' a child's grief. Listen to them. Let them vent and cry all they want, and need, to.

Don't let your children grieve alone.

Include them in the storytelling and reminisces about the deceased. Encourage them to tell stories about their loved one, both good times and bad. Let them contribute ideas for the ceremony, and even take part if possible. It makes them feel important and useful during this hard time.

Do let children see adults cry and grieve.

This allows children to know that it is okay for them, too, to cry and grieve. Simply reassure them that no matter how sad you are, you will still love and take care of them.

Do not add to your child's burden.

By turning your child into your personal confidante you are overwhelming him or her with your own grief. Turn to another adult or support group if you need help.

Do not expect a child to act like an adult.

Telling a child that "You need to be the man of the house now, and take care of your mother" is not only unhelpful it is also harmful.

Do not confuse children by not talking about the deceased any more.

It is important to continue using the deceased person's name in your home. Talking openly about the deceased is healthy and healing.

Do not tell your child that God took the deceased.

Share what you wish them to know about your spiritual beliefs. However, from a child's point of view he or she may become mad at God for 'taking' her baby brother or may be fearful that the angels or God may 'snatch' her away, too.

Do be honest.

If a person has died from AIDS or drugs or suicide, and the child is old enough to understand what that means, do not lie.

Child Appropriate Funeral Definitions	
Accident	When something really awful happens. The person's body is hurt so badly that it stops working.
Ashes	What is left of a dead body after cremation. Looks like the ashes left from a fire.
Burial	Placing the body, or ashes, inside a casket, or urn, into the ground, usually in a cemetery.
Casket	A special box for burying a dead body.
Cemetery	A place where many dead bodies or ashes are buried.
Committal Ceremony	The part of the funeral or memorial ceremony that takes place when and where the body or ashes are buried. Also called a graveside service.
Cremation	Putting the dead body into a room with lots of heat until it turns into ashes.
Dead	When a person or animal's body stops working. It doesn't hear, see, eat, breath anymore. The person, or animal, cannot come back to life.
Embalm	When the funeral home gets the body ready to put in the casket so we can see the body at the viewing / visitation.
Funeral	A time when friends and family get together to say goodbye and remember the person who has died.
Funeral Coach / Hearse	The special car that takes the dead body in the casket to the grave at the cemetery.
Funeral Director	A person who works at the funeral

	home and helps families plan the funeral or memorial ceremony.
Funeral Home	A place where bodies are kept until they are buried or cremated. Sometimes the funeral is also held at the funeral home.
Grave	The hole in the ground where the body is buried at the cemetery.
Grave Marker / Headstone / Monument	A stone placed at the grave that marks where the person who has died is buried. It usually includes information such as the name of the individual, date of birth and death.
Obituary	A longer article in the paper that tells about the person who has died.
Old Age	When people have lived a very long time and get very old, their bodies wear out and finally stop working.
Pallbearers	The people who help carry the casket at the funeral and graveside ceremony.
Terminal Illness	Sometimes when people get sick, they don't get better. Their bodies wear out and stop working.
Urn	A small container that the ashes are placed in after cremation. An urn may be made of wood, marble or metal. It might even be a cookie tin or tackle box!
Vault	An outside box that the casket is put into at the cemetery. A smaller box can be used to put an urn into.
Visitation	The times set for people to come and visit the family and view the body before the funeral or memorial.