

BEFORE THE FUNERAL

Honest, age-aware preparation for what a child may see and experience.



THE KINDEST PREPARATION IS CLEAR PREPARATION.

Children do not need every detail at once. They do need truthful words, a simple picture of what will happen, and permission to ask, choose, pause, or change their mind.

WHAT THIS GUIDE HELPS YOU DO

1 TELL THE TRUTH

Use clear words such as died, dead, body, funeral, burial, and cremation. Add detail in small pieces.

2 DESCRIBE THE DAY

Explain who will be there, where you will go, what people may do, and what the child may see or hear.

3 OFFER REAL CHOICES

Invite the child to attend, participate, view, step out, or remember in another way without pressure.

4 MAKE A SUPPORT PLAN

Choose a trusted adult, a signal, a seat near an exit, a comfort item, and what will happen afterward.

EVERY SERVICE IS DIFFERENT.

Confirm the actual details with your family, faith or cultural leader, and funeral provider.

WHAT TO EXPECT

WHAT MAY HAPPEN



Describe only what will actually happen. Sequence makes an unfamiliar day easier to picture.

1 BEFORE YOU GO

Say where the service will be, how you will travel, who will come, what people may wear, and about how long you expect to stay.

2 DURING THE SERVICE

People may sit, stand, pray, speak, sing, listen to music, share stories, cry, laugh, or be quiet. None of these reactions is wrong.

3 THE CASKET, COFFIN, OR URN

There may be a closed or open casket, a coffin, an urn holding ashes, or only photographs. Tell the child which one they will see.

4 IF THE BODY CAN BE SEEN

The body will be still and will not breathe. It may feel cool and look different. The person cannot feel pain, fear, heat, cold, or touch.

5 BURIAL OR CREMATION

At a burial, the coffin may be lowered into a grave. With cremation, the body is later turned into ashes. A dead body cannot feel what happens.

6 AFTER THE SERVICE

People may gather, eat, talk, hug, tell stories, or leave quietly. Someone may say they are glad to see you while still feeling sad about the death.

PREPARE THE SENSES

SEE

flowers, photos, special clothing, a casket or urn, people crying

FEEL

hugs, crowded rooms, a quiet bench, cold air, tiredness, many feelings

HEAR

music, prayers, stories, silence, sniffing, laughter, unfamiliar words

NOTICE

adults may be busy or deeply upset; a support adult can stay close

HONEST WORDS

AGE-AWARE PREPARATION

Age is a clue, not a rule. Follow the child's understanding, questions, experience, or need for repetition.



AGES 4-6

Keep it short, concrete, and repeatable. Young children may take words literally and ask the same question many times.

WORDS YOU CAN USE

A funeral is a time when people gather to remember someone who died. Their body stopped working and cannot feel anything now.

AGES 7-9

Explain the order of events and invite practical questions. Correct worries that the person is cold, scared, asleep, or in pain.

WORDS YOU CAN USE

First we will sit together. People may speak and cry. Then we may go to the cemetery. You can stay beside me or take a break.

AGES 10-12

Offer more detail and privacy. Ask what they want to know, what they do not want to see, and how they would like to participate.

WORDS YOU CAN USE

I can explain exactly what will happen, including the casket, burial, or cremation. You can ask now or later and choose your part.

TEENS

Share direct, complete information and include them in decisions without making them responsible for adults or younger children.

WORDS YOU CAN USE

You deserve the full plan. You can attend all, some, or none; sit with a friend; participate; or change your mind at any point.

WORDS THAT REDUCE CONFUSION

USE died, dead, body stopped working, funeral, burial, cremation

SKIP lost, went to sleep, passed away, gone to a better place

BELIEFS CAN FOLLOW THE FACTS.

First explain what happened to the body. Then add your family's spiritual, cultural, or religious beliefs in words the child knows.

CHOICE + SUPPORT

A PLAN THAT CAN CHANGE

Preparation is not a promise that the day will feel easy. It gives the child options and a way to get help.



CHOICES TO OFFER

- ☐ Attend all, part, or none of the service
- ☐ View the body or choose not to view
- ☐ Sit near an exit or in a quieter place
- ☐ Bring a quiet toy, book, photo, or object
- ☐ Make or bring something meaningful
- ☐ Participate, observe, or decide later
Changing their mind is always allowed.

SUPPORT TO ARRANGE

SUPPORT ADULT

Whose only job is to stay available to the child.

BREAK SIGNAL

A word, look, text, or hand squeeze that means break.

QUIET PLACE

A hallway, car, side room, outside space, or quiet seat.

NEXT STEP

What happens if the child leaves or does not attend.

AFTERWARD

Food, rest, play, company, quiet, or a normal routine.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE THE DAY

- What will the child see, hear, and be asked to do?
- Who will explain unfamiliar words or moments?
- How will the child ask for a break or leave?
- Who will stay with the child if the main caregiver cannot?

SAMPLE EXIT PLAN

If I need a break, I will use our signal. My support person will take me to our quiet place. I can decide whether to return. If I do not return, I can still remember and say goodbye in another way.

Leaving is not failing. Changing your mind is not disrespectful.

PRINTABLE PLAN

MY BEFORE THE FUNERAL PLAN

A grown-up can read, write, or draw with me. I can leave any part blank.



THE PERSON WE ARE REMEMBERING

WHAT I KNOW WILL HAPPEN

WHAT I WANT TO ASK

MY CHOICES TODAY

- | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ go to all of it | ☐ go to part of it | ☐ not go | ☐ decide later |
| ☐ view the body | ☐ not view | ☐ take a break | ☐ change my mind |
| ☐ make or bring something | ☐ watch or listen | ☐ participate | |

MY SUPPORT DETAILS

MY SUPPORT PERSON

MY BREAK SIGNAL

SOMETHING I MAY BRING

WHERE I CAN TAKE A BREAK

I CAN ASK. I CAN PAUSE. I CAN CHANGE MY MIND.

There is more than one way to be included, remember, and say goodbye.