

Helping Children and Youth Through the Funeral Process



While many of us naturally want to protect young people from the sadness of a funeral or memorial service, in fact children and youth often find it helpful to be included. The key is to provide them information about what to expect, and choices about how involved they want to be in the planning and the event.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO HELP PREPARE FOR THE DAY:

- Prepare the child or youth for what lies ahead. Explain the purpose of the funeral, visitation, memorial, and burial ceremonies, including a description of the setting, who will be present, and what will happen.
- Include the child/youth in decisions such as choosing the clothes and special items that the person who has died will wear and have with them if there is a casket.
- Offer for the child or youth to help create a story board of the person who died. This may include photos of the person from childhood and adult years, and some with themselves. They may have suggestions for personal items of the person who died to add to the story board for display. Give the child or youth the option to add their own written message or art to the story board.
- The child/youth may want to place a special private message or drawing in the casket or with the container of ashes.
- You may want to help the child/youth to purchase two identical keepsakes such as stuffed animals, charms or other token items that they feels connects them to the person who died. One is for the casket and the other for the young person to keep.
- Offer for the child or youth to participate in the service. Some ways they could be involved, include: read a statement they wrote to honour the person who died; read a passage from a book that reminds them of the person who died; sing a song or play a piece of music that has special meaning; share a memory of a time with the person; help carry the casket.
- The funeral or memorial service can be an opportunity for extended family and friends to share memories about the person who died. Consider placing journals around the room and invite visitors to share a story. Or ask people to write their stories and forward them by letter or email for the child/youth, to help build a larger bank of memories for the young person to have into the future. Such a request also encourages continued connection to the grieving child/youth and family well after the funeral has ended.
- Have a plan 'B' for the child or youth. Some children want to be present for the full event, while others may become overwhelmed or tired part way through. Having a separate room with toys, arts/crafts, video devices, and snacks, provides an emotional escape. Having a key supportive adult who agrees to watch over a younger child allows for the parent to be present during the service and have space to mourn. If you know a child or youth for whom a close family member is dying, the Lighthouse for Grieving Children offers telephone and in-person consultations to discuss the situation and assist with creating a support plan. **905-337-2333**