

FUNERAL OR MEMORIAL SERVICE ATTENDANCE

Parents often wonder if a child should attend the funeral or memorial service of a loved one. What age is appropriate?

A basic guideline is to let your child decide what he or she wants to do. Expressions of grief are unique to each individual. Many children prefer to attend the funeral or memorial service. Some may prefer not to attend. Preschoolers may have a difficult time sitting through a service, but may find it meaningful when they are older to know that they were included and had a chance to say goodbye. Perhaps a friend can assist with the care of an active toddler attending the service.

If your child's parent or other close relative died, invite him or her to participate in the service. Some children like to write and/or read a poem or story about the loved one. Others choose to sing a song or pray. Still others choose to stay in the background. Trust your child to know what is best for him or her in this matter.

Prepare your child for what will be experienced. Will there be a body? A viewing? Will there be highly expressive people at the service? Talk with your child about what to expect. If there is a body to view, explain that their loved one is not hurting, hungry or cold. If your family chose cremation, assure the child that the loved one experienced no pain during cremation. If your child chooses, allow him or her to see and touch the ashes.

Generally, children appreciate being included and being given the opportunity to make their own decisions about participation in services.