



Schuler-Lefebvre

FUNERAL CHAPEL

Dedicated To Those We Serve

Caring Connections:

*Should Children
Know About Death?*

Yes.

Learning to accept death is a natural experience in life which must not be ignored. Talking about death is necessary. It is a vital part of every child's development.

Permitting the child to be part of the experience, both in their attendance at the funeral and in discussing the death, helps to relieve their fears and anxiety. It can also provide a mutual source of support. Fear and mystery may be avoided by an honest explanation of death. Each time a child inquires and is denied an honest response the child will use their imagination to create an answer. The longer such mysteries persist, the more difficult they are to correct.

Should Children Attend The Visitation, The Funeral Service And The Cemetery?

Giving the children the choice of involvement in the rituals of the visitation, the funeral service and the cemetery indicates that their role as a member of the family is valued and respected. If they are excluded from this choice you may raise fears in their minds that you are hiding something from them or that they are not really included in the mourning process. The reality of death is reinforced by viewing the body. This is as important for the child as is the adult. Arrangements can be made with the funeral director for private viewing time prior to visiting hours this way children may feel more comfortable and better able to express their feelings. They may also see that the emotions of the adults present are a natural expression. The funeral is a ceremony which expresses a tribute to a life lived. The ability to comprehend a funeral service will vary according to the maturity of the child. Children should be encouraged to attend. If they decide they do not want to go, they will appreciate they had been asked. The decision must be theirs. A final resting place affords a lasting memory. Being aware of this location helps the child identify the whereabouts of the deceased. If the child does not attend the cemetery the day of the funeral service the child may be taken at a later date. By attending the visitation, the funeral and the cemetery a child's questions may be answered. A drawing, a card or an action of tribute can help the child to be a part of the ceremonies and can be healing experience.

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How Should I Explain Death?

Honestly

Give a brief explanation and answer their questions honestly. It has been said, "Don't tell a child what they will need to unlearn later". This is good advice. Don't use "beautiful lies" to shield children from death. Our intent may be well meaning but we will surely add to the confusion of a child as he or she grows older if we are less than honest. In talking about death, a child does not need to know every detail. Give only that information asked for or required.

Simply

Too much information clouds a developing mind. Do not give more information than is required. Children have a very short attention span as well as a limiting retaining information. Use language the child can understand. Do not fear the words "death" and "dead".

Lovingly

Individual warmth and reassurance should be shared. For a child, closeness and involvement confirm their world is still together and they will be cared for. Let children know that it is natural to feel sad and different at such a time. Do not hide your tears. A child needs to know that it is acceptable to cry.

When?

General age grouping often indicates which aspects of death most concern the child. However, no two children are the same in their maturity and their ability to understand.

Age 2 - 4:

Children at two to four years of age have little understanding of the meaning of death. The death should be shared with a child by explaining what has happened in simple terms.

Age 5 - 7:

Children of five to seven have a feeling for loss, but it is not easy to grasp. It must be explained to them. Let them know a death has taken place by allowing them to be present at the funeral home and the funeral service. Clinical studies show that denying a child the experience of sharing their loss through emotions may result in adjustment problems later.

Age 8 - 10:

Children in this age group have a capacity to grasp life's mysteries. They will remember the experience vividly. Do not avoid letting them attend the service. They have emotions too. The should be expressed.

Age 11 - 12:

Children of eleven or twelve know what death is. They will want to be helpful so as to resolve their own feelings of loss. Provide the opportunity for them to participate in the arrangements and service.

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Age 13 - 16:

Clinical studies show that teenagers often have more intense grief than other age groups and may refrain from expressing it. Encourage friends to share their grief and attend the service. This gives them the support they need. They want to think of themselves as adults, so treat them as such.

Each child is an individual and will not react the same.

Most will want to share in the funeral experience.

Remember...

Just as a tree must be exposed to rain, snow, wind or forces other than sunlight in order to grow, children must also face the unfortunate aspects of life.

When Dr. Wm. Lamers, Jr. was asked the question, "At what age should a child attend a funeral?", he replied, "If the child is old enough to walk, let them walk with you into the funeral home, if not old enough to walk, carry them with you".