

Should My Child Attend a Funeral?

Many experts agree that funerals and memorial services can be very beneficial for children. They can help bereaved children move forward in their grief process and begin to heal. When asked, adults who lost loved ones as children and weren't allowed to attend the funeral usually say they regret not being there. As sad and difficult as funerals are, they're an important part of mourning, and we only get one chance to attend. But every child and situation is unique. Here are a few tips to help you decide if your child should attend:

How connected were they to the person that died?

Kids may perceive relationships differently than we see them. Ask them about their connection to the person, and what it meant to them. Children can react differently than we expect and that is okay. Even if they seemed to have a close relationship with the person who died, they may not want to attend a funeral. And other children may want to attend just because they have a curious personality or because their friends are attending.

Have you explained what it will be like?

It is important for kids to know what they will experience at a funeral. Find out as much as you can about the service and help them understand what to expect. In addition to any specific religious rituals, they will have to sit still for long periods of time, they will see a lot of crying, they may see pictures of the person who died, etc. It is especially important to let them know if there will be an open casket and what that might be like. Answer questions. Invite children to ask questions at any point over the days leading up to, as well as during and after the service. Check in with children several times over this period.

Are they expressing the desire to attend?

Your child's personal choice is your most helpful guideline when making your decision. In general, if a child is expressing a desire to attend, they will likely benefit from having the experience. Even young kids can benefit from being involved in an important ritual and getting a chance to say goodbye. But it is okay if they don't want to attend. Listen to them and be careful not to project your own desires or needs on your child. It can be comforting for parents to have their child with them but that isn't a reason to force them to attend. If they choose not to attend, help them come up with other ways they can remember and honor the person who died.

Can you attend with them?

A parent or other loved one should attend with younger children. Kids need the safety, comfort and support of a trusted adult who knows them when they go through the intense and emotional experience of a funeral service. Even if they seem to be fine with going on their own, it is recommended that you attend with them. Teens often want to attend

together and may not need their own parents to be with them, but it is recommended that at least one adult accompany the group and it is always preferable for parents to attend if possible.

What are the benefits of children attending funeral or memorial services?

- They feel included and affirmed.
- They are comforted by the support of friends and family.
- They learn more about their own grief when they see the different ways people grieve and give and seek support.
- They appreciate participating in an important event or ritual.
- Problems may develop when children are not included. They may feel hurt, discounted, excluded, or unimportant especially if they hear everyone else talking about it afterward.

What are some potential drawbacks if your child isn't ready?

- They may have increased anxiety or fearfulness
- They may have distress or troubling memories about things they saw or experienced
- They may feel a lack of control and dysregulation if they are forced to attend

During the Funeral

Give children as much choice as possible. To participate actively or sit quietly, to stay for the entire service or part of it. It's helpful to tell children they can leave the service at any point, or take a break for a short time if they wish. Follow their lead and check in regularly. Be conscious that they may be ready to leave sooner than you like.

Afterward

Have a conversation after the funeral. Ask your child what they thought of the service and how they are feeling about it. Find out if they have any questions. Check in periodically over several days. Teachers can also check in with students after they have attended a service.

If you need support as you make this decision, feel free to reach out to the Counselor, Social Worker or Psychologist at your child's school.