



SHOULD CHILDREN ATTEND THE FUNERAL OR MEMORIAL SERVICE?

Helping Families Make an Informed, Child-Centered Choice

Families often wonder whether a child should attend a funeral, viewing, visitation, or memorial service. There is no single answer that fits every child or every family. For many children, being included can help make the death more understandable, provide a chance to say goodbye, and show how family and community remember someone who died. What matters most is preparation, choice, and supportive adult care.

START WITH THE CHILD, NOT ONLY THEIR AGE

Age is important, but it is not the only consideration. Think about the child's temperament, relationship with the person who died, understanding of death, wishes, previous experiences, and the type of service being planned. A well-prepared younger child may cope better than an unprepared older child.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- The child may want to attend because other family members will be there.
- They may be curious about what a funeral or memorial is like but also feel nervous.
- They may change their mind more than once as the service approaches.

GENTLE REMINDER

Children generally cope better with experiences they have been prepared for. If a child attends, tell them what to expect before they walk through the door.

GIVE THE CHILD A REALISTIC CHOICE

When possible, explain what attending would involve and allow the child to choose without pressure. Avoid making attendance a test of love or courage. A child who does not attend can still participate in meaningful ways, such as creating a drawing, choosing a photograph, writing a note, lighting a candle, or visiting a meaningful place later.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP

You might say, "There will be people there who are sad and some may cry. You can sit with Aunt Maria, and if you want to leave the room, she will go with you." Or, "You do not have to decide this minute. I can tell you more about what will happen."

PREPARATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Describe the setting, who will be there, what the child may see and hear, how long the service may last, and what people may do. If there will be a viewing, explain clearly what the body will look and feel like and that the person cannot see, hear, breathe, or feel anything.





ASSIGN A SUPPORT PERSON

Choose a trusted adult whose primary responsibility is the child. This person should be able to leave the room, answer questions, take a walk, or go home with the child if needed. Ideally, it is someone other than the child's most intensely grieving caregiver.

WHEN A CHILD CHOOSES NOT TO ATTEND

- Respecting a child's choice does not mean excluding them from the family's grief. Tell them what happened afterward, answer questions, and offer another way to remember or say goodbye. Children can remain connected to the ritual without physically attending every part.
- REMEMBERING DEVELOPMENT MATTERS
- A child's understanding of a funeral changes with age. Younger children may focus on concrete details; older children may think about meaning, relationships, or how others will react. Preparation should match the child's developmental understanding.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

The goal is not to make a child attend or keep them away. The goal is to help them participate in a way that is informed, supported, and appropriate for them.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

What does this child know about the service? Have they been given enough information to make a meaningful choice, and is there a trusted adult available to support them?

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY HELP

If the circumstances of the death or service are especially traumatic, complicated, or likely to expose the child to distressing details, consider guidance from a qualified child bereavement or mental-health professional.

A GENTLE CLOSING

Attendance itself is not the measure of whether a child has said goodbye. What matters is that the child is informed, included in an appropriate way, supported, and given permission to participate at a level that feels manageable.

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