

# Frequently asked questions

## Is it ok to cry?

It's completely normal to feel sad and cry when someone has died. Sometimes children won't cry in front of mum or dad because they're trying to protect them.

Adults often hide tears from children too. If a child sees an adult crying it can make it feel normal and acceptable for them to do the same.

Letting the tears out can make you feel a bit better. Sometimes it can be helpful for adults and children to cry together then have a hug.

## Is there anything I should or shouldn't say?

Although it's natural to want to protect children, sometimes the language we use can add to confusion surrounding the death. Terms such as "they've gone to sleep" may leave children fearful of going to sleep and never waking up. By saying "they've gone on a journey", a child may expect the person to come back, or be scared of going on holiday.

Children benefit much more by hearing things such as "died", "their body stopped working" and "when someone has died they can never come back". This may seem insensitive but will give them greater understanding of the situation and make them better equipped to cope with it.

## Is it ok to talk about suicide?

Children and young people have a right to know how their significant person died. It can be incredibly difficult to explain and Nelson's Journey can support parents/carers in this. There's a book available to assist adults with this called 'beyond the rough rock' which can be downloaded at [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk).

There's no right time to tell a child about someone taking their own life but the longer it's left unsaid, the harder it becomes.

Sensitive information is always better delivered by someone the a child trusts, rather than hearing it in the playground or seeing it in the newspaper.

It's important to be aware that if this information is withheld from a child, they may become resentful towards the adult who didn't tell them and lose the trust they had.

### **Is it ok to talk about the person who died?**

Talking about the person who has died can help families remember things about them.

Some families find this difficult, especially shortly after the death. But even though no one says their name, everyone could still be thinking about them. This is often referred to as 'the elephant in the room'. Talking about the person and the way you feel about their death can help children to cope – keeping things bottled up can make both children and adults feel worse.

### **Should children see the person's body after they've died?**

As adults, we naturally try to protect children from experiences that will hurt them but sometimes children's imaginations can be worse than reality.

Going to see a loved one's body can be very difficult for all the family. Sometimes, however, it can give children clarity and understanding of what's happened and help them to accept that the person is dead and cannot come back.

Some children may be shocked or scared by seeing the person's body. This is a decision that needs to be made by families, taking the child's wishes into account. If they're not given the opportunity, they may feel resentful in years to come.

If a child wishes to see the body, they can be prepared by being shown pictures of the room or visiting the empty room before seeing the body. You can ask your Funeral Director for guidance.

### **Is it ok to still have fun?**

It is normal to still find things funny and enjoyable even when someone you love has died.

Sometimes people wrongly think that this means you don't miss the person, or that it's disrespectful, but even though someone has died it's still OK to have fun.

### **What do I tell the children about burial, cremation etc?**

Using factual information can be the best way to explain this difficult subject.

Children often find it hard to understand how a person can be buried or cremated and also be a star or in heaven. It's important to explain to children that when you have died and your body has stopped working, you can no longer feel anything.

Different people believe different things about what happens after someone dies – everyone is entitled to their own beliefs, including children.

It's important to make children aware that people have different beliefs and nobody knows for sure. To allow a child to grasp the concept of heaven, you may need to use terms such as 'spirit' and 'soul' and say that it's the spirit that goes to heaven. You can say that the person is put in a special box called a coffin which, at the end of the funeral, is either buried (put in the ground), or put in a very hot oven where the coffin and body are burned (cremated), turning them to ash.

It may seem difficult to explain cremation to children but emphasise that the person can no longer feel pain to make it less daunting.

If we don't give children enough information, they may assume that a burial or cremation is something else entirely and often think something much worse.

### **Can children go to the funeral?**

It's a good idea to ask a child if they want to go to the funeral. If they don't know what a funeral is, describe it and help them prepare for what to expect.

Even young children may benefit from attending a funeral, as it can be a special chance to say goodbye.

Funerals can be a difficult day for all the family. If a parent/carer feels they'll find it too hard to look after the children, they can ask a family member or friend to be there during the ceremony, who can leave the service with them if it gets too much.

Involve children in planning the funeral by asking what flowers they'd like, writing a letter to go in the coffin, or choosing a song to be played that was special to them.

Funerals can be confusing as sometimes they're sad and sombre and can also be a celebration of life. Prepare children for what to expect.

### **Should I make my child go to the grave?**

There are many different ways of grieving. Some people find it helps to visit the grave or site where the ashes are scattered, others find this very difficult.

If you do not have a grave to visit then it may be useful for children to have a special place to go instead to remember their loved one.

Children need to feel in control of their grief and to be given choices and opportunities to grieve in their own way.

If a child refuses to visit the grave, speak to them about why they feel this way and what they think it will be like. It may be that a child wants to go to but not with the whole family, or to do it on their own.

By giving the child options of how and who to visit with, they may benefit from the experience.

If a child vehemently refuses to go, that is their choice and needs to be respected and supported.

### **Should we tell school what has happened?**

It's a good idea to inform school of the death.

Children and young people can be asked how they want to be treated at school – if they want a 'time out card' should they feel overwhelmed in lessons for example.

School needs to know the reasons a child is absent and should be sensitive to the situation a child is in.

It's also a good idea to remind schools about anniversaries such as the person's birthday or the date of the death so they're aware that children may find these days particularly difficult.

It might be a good idea for the child to have a staff member they trust at the school that they can go to if they are struggling or having a bad day.

### **Will my child's behaviour change?**

When someone dies, children and adults experience a range of different emotions and feelings.

Expect a child's behaviour to change following a bereavement as they come to terms with their loss.

Anger is a normal feeling for children and young people to experience and they need to be encouraged to express this in a safe way. Some may start behaving as if they're younger than their years.

It's also common for children to feel unwell or even replicate symptoms the person who died had, such as a headache if the person had a brain injury. Children can experience a lack of concentration, especially in school. It's important to acknowledge how the child is feeling.

### **How long after the death do you get over it?**

When someone you love dies, there is no getting over it.

However, as time passes, you start to feel better and adapt to life without them.

There's no set time in which you should feel better; it could be months, years or longer before things change.

Life will never be how it was before the person died but you'll feel improvements over time and find a new 'normal'.

If someone says: "It's been ages, you should be over it by now," they may not have experienced bereavement themselves.

Everyone's grief journey is individual and there's no right or wrong way to grieve, just take things a day at a time.

People can be affected by a death many years down the line, and they might initially suppress feelings that reoccur in years to come.



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