

After the funeral or memorial service

Following the funeral, whether a child has attended or participated in some way, or not, it is important to remember that there are still choices that children need to be given. Depending on the circumstances these can include:

- Do you want to sleep at home tonight, or somewhere else?
- Would you like to keep anything that belonged to the person who died?
- Would you like to see the death certificate or the notice from the newspaper?
- When do you feel you'll be able to return to school?
- Would you like to talk to anyone about your grief?
- Is there anything you would like to do in memory of the person on the anniversary of the death or on his or her birthday?

Parents, friends, funeral directors and the person conducting the funeral have the opportunity to positively influence a child/young person's experience of the funeral. They can open up channels of communication for the future and make a child feel included instead of excluded. Most children will cope with grief very well without a service like Richmond's Hope.

But when grief is complicated or the circumstances are particularly difficult please don't hesitate to give us a call.

Richmond's Hope offers individual sessions, once a week for 40 minutes, providing children with a safe place to explore how a death has impacted their lives. Using therapeutic play, arts and crafts children are supported to remember the person who died in their own way. At Richmond's Hope they can express their feelings following the death and develop coping strategies.



Mission Statement

We believe that we can make a difference in the lives of children who have been bereaved by supporting them through their grief using therapeutic play providing a safe haven for them to work out their feelings

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE & FUNERALS

UNDERSTANDING
THEIR NEEDS IN
FUNERAL PLANNING
AND SERVICES



Facing a funeral

By the time we are adults most of us will have attended a funeral or memorial service.

For children it is often their first time. The purpose of this leaflet is to try to give some insight into what a funeral is like for a child or young person when a close relative dies. And to look at some of the questions around funerals such as:

- How do children say goodbye?
- Should children & young people attend a funeral?
- What can the family do to support them?
- How can the funeral service address their needs?

Richmond's Hope has been supporting bereaved children and their families since 2003. These are some of the things we have learned throughout that time.

Having choices

Every family has its own traditions and beliefs and these will play a strong role in the planning of the funeral or memorial service.

Many adults wonder if it's a good idea to include children and young people in funerals. Some young people say, "I would have liked to have gone to the funeral, but I was told I was too young", others have said, "I didn't want to go to the funeral, but I was told I was going as our family was going together"

One of the most helpful things parents can do for their children during this time is to give them choices. Children have opinions and want to be heard and feel like they are included. It can be a meaningful and important experience for children to have the opportunity to say goodbye to the person who died, in a way that feels right for them. Providing children with the choice of attending the funeral, or saying goodbye in another way of their choosing, can bring a sense of finality and this can help the grieving process.

In general terms children and young people don't have a fear of death or dead bodies as much as adults think they do.

Children can feel that they haven't had the opportunity to say goodbye if they are stopped from attending the funeral, however there are also children who feel resentful at being forced to attend. If a child makes the decision not to attend the funeral, they shouldn't be criticised for it. They may later regret their decision, but at least it was their decision to make and therefore no blame can be attributed to anyone else.

The funeral

Providing children and young people with explanations and information about what will happen at the funeral can be helpful. Children need to have information that is clear, direct and concrete to help them make the right decision for themselves. When discussing the funeral with a child, it may be helpful to include the following:

- Where will the funeral take place?
- Who will be there?
- What will happen there?
- How long will it take?

Viewing the body

"I need to see my Mum; I need to be sure she died. I'll never believe it if I don't see her for myself, I need to say goodbye" (Child aged 8)

Some choices can be more difficult to make than others. For example, many parents feel uncomfortable with the idea of a child viewing the body of the person who died, they feel that this may be too distressing for a child and want to protect them from further hurt. Children's imaginations can often be worse or more frightening than reality, and because children have a natural curiosity, viewing the body can help them understand that the person is dead.

It is important to use concrete words, like died or dead, as children can often become confused by other explanations. For example, a lot of people often use the term, "it looks just like they are asleep".

Although this term seems kinder to use, children can often become confused and worried that when they, or someone else, go to sleep they too might not wake up.

Again, choice is important for a child. If a child decides they do not want to view the body, but everyone else in the family does, they should not be made to feel wrong. Children need permission to choose and reassurance that whatever they decide is okay. Again here is a list of facts that a child may find it helpful to talk about before viewing the body.

The Body:

- Is in an open or partially open coffin
- Is in a cool temperature
- Doesn't move
- Can't talk and doesn't see you
- Won't come back to life
- May be puffed up
- May have markings, etc, from injury/illness
- Will look and feel different than the person did before the death
- May have a different smell

Here is a list of possible ways a child or young person may choose to be involved in the funeral process:

- Attending or not attending the service
- Selecting a coffin
- Deciding whether to view the body
- Choosing special objects to put in the coffin
- Choosing a grave stone and what will be written on it
- Choosing a location to spread the ashes
- Selecting flowers, music and/or readings for the service
- Closing the coffin for the last time, or being involved in that process