

We have prepared some information regarding the question of funerals and young people. This may be of some assistance to you now and in the future.

The general summary is that it is preferable to offer young people (kids/teens) the choice of attending or not.

If they wish to attend, parents can prepare their child by explaining what will happen, that people will be sad and most likely some people will be crying.

If they wish, they can say something like... "I'm sorry that [the person's name] has passed away. I will miss them too."

If they do not attend, they can do other things to remember the person like writing a card or a letter.

See also below

1. *Kids and Funerals*
2. *Funerals are not the end. They help us start to remember the person in a good way.* – From *Good Grief When Someone Dies* booklet.

This website is more specific and recommended by the **Headspace** organisation:

<http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Home.html>

## Kids and Funerals

<http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/kids-and-funerals/>

These lessons have been adapted from the book *What About The Kids: Understanding Their Needs in Funeral Planning and Services*.

By adulthood, most of us have attended a funeral. But what is a funeral like for a child or teenager who unexpectedly loses a parent, sibling, grandparent or friend? And how do children say goodbye? What do they need, and how can families and funeral services address their needs?

Too often, kids feel like the "forgotten mourners." They are seen but not heard or spoken to at a funeral. Often what they get is a pat on the head, or hugs from adults they don't even know. Many adults still wonder if it's a good idea to include children in funerals at all. While every family has its own traditions and beliefs, and these will play a strong role in funeral and memorial service planning and decisions, parents may not be aware that one of the most helpful things they can do for their children during this time is to give them choices. Children appreciate having choices as much as adults do. They have opinions, and want to be valued enough to be allowed to offer them. And they don't like to be left out of anything, even a funeral. It is 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 to them. Saying goodbye is never easy, but it helps bring a sense of finality to the death that is helpful in the healing process.

### To attend or not to attend the funeral

*"They didn't let me go to the funeral. They said I was too young. I'm still mad."* - Paul, 8.

People often wonder at what age a child should attend a funeral. Age is not the most important consideration. Generally speaking, young children don't seem to have the fear of the deceased or dead bodies adults think they do. What works well is to invite children or

teenagers to the funeral, without forcing them to make a particular decision. Children who are not allowed to attend a funeral may feel they didn't get their chance to say goodbye. On the other hand, children who were forced to attend a funeral may feel resentful. Children should not be criticized if they don't want to attend the funeral. They may regret the decisions they make, but they won't have the added issue of resentment for not being allowed to make their own choice.

In order to make their choice, children need explanations and information about what a funeral is and what is going to happen. After a death, the world as they know it is completely changed. Additional surprises and unfamiliar situations can complicate the grieving process. Not unlike adults, kids like to be filled in on the basics of who, what, where, when and why. Kids also expect us to be clear, direct and concrete in our explanations. Teenagers appreciate this too. They are experts at discerning when adults are beating around the bush. When explaining the events of a funeral to child, it's best to "tell it like it is." Typical aspects of the funeral that may be discussed include:

**Who...** will be at the funeral or memorial service?

**What...** is going to happen?

**Where...** will the service take place?

**When...** will the funeral happen?

**Why...** are we doing this?

What happens, or doesn't happen, at a funeral will be remembered forever by a child. Parents and other caregivers have the opportunity to influence a child's experience by including children in the one way they most deserve and request: informed choice.

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## Attending Funerals or Memorial Services (excerpt)

by Robin F. Goodman, Ph.D.

[http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/attending\\_funerals\\_or\\_memorial\\_services](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/attending_funerals_or_memorial_services)

### The meaning of rituals

Understanding the function of rituals can help adults make decisions about children's participation. The funeral or memorial service is only one event in the goodbye process. These rituals are important as concrete markers in time. Although planned activities and services do not provide emotional closure for all feelings, they do signify the end of life and the beginning of a period of change. Feelings about, and reactions to, a person who has died change throughout one's lifetime. With the accumulation of new experiences comes meaning.

### Planning for participation at funerals and memorial services

The following points are helpful to consider in helping a child participate in rituals and services.

- To help a child decide if he or she should attend a funeral or memorial service, or when a child expresses a desire to attend, describe what will take place in simple, clear language. These services are unlike any other experience. Parents and teachers should explain what the child will see and how people may react. At any age, children can become confused by the events that take place at these rituals and by seeing other people's expression of strong emotions.
- Inquire about the child's wishes. Attendance should not be a requirement, but it should be an option. It is important to stress that although the funeral occurs at a particular time and place,

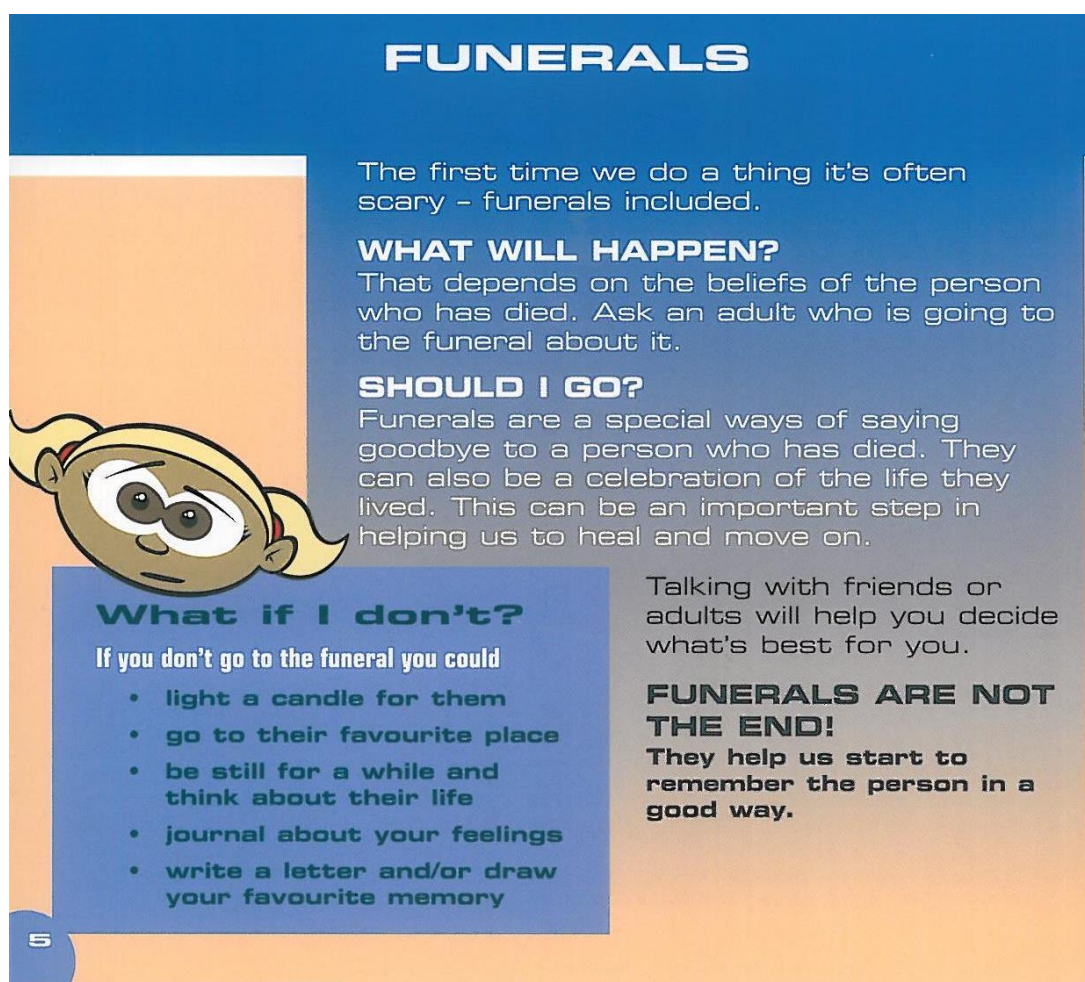
children are not bad or unloving if they do not attend. It is not their only chance to say goodbye. School-age children and teens can help decide if and how they want to be included.

- Explore different kinds of participation. Private rituals may be preferable for some children. Attendance at the funeral or memorial service is only one way for children to participate and be involved. For example, writing a poem or letter that is read aloud or put in a casket by an adult, or visiting the grave site and bringing flowers after the burial are some other ways of saying goodbye.
- Remember that attendance does not have to be all or nothing. Parents and teachers should think through the different activities and structure different options, such as going to the funeral service but not the burial, spending an hour at a wake and then going out with a family friend.

### About the Author

Robin F. Goodman, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist specializing in bereavement issues.

## Good Grief... *When Someone Dies...* booklet (excerpts)



**FUNERALS**

The first time we do a thing it's often scary - funerals included.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN?**  
That depends on the beliefs of the person who has died. Ask an adult who is going to the funeral about it.

**SHOULD I GO?**  
Funerals are a special ways of saying goodbye to a person who has died. They can also be a celebration of the life they lived. This can be an important step in helping us to heal and move on.

**What if I don't?**  
If you don't go to the funeral you could

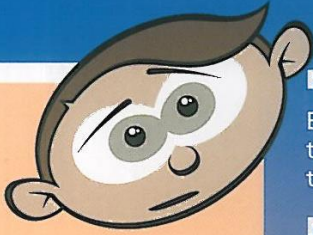
- light a candle for them
- go to their favourite place
- be still for a while and think about their life
- journal about your feelings
- write a letter and/or draw your favourite memory

Talking with friends or adults will help you decide what's best for you.

**FUNERALS ARE NOT THE END!**  
They help us start to remember the person in a good way.

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## A BIT LATER...



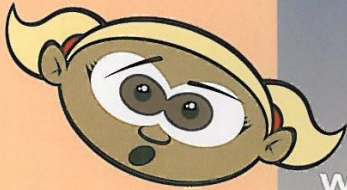
### FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Everyone is trying to come to terms with the loss. Talking and sharing memories of the person can help.

### MY FRIENDS ARE ACTING WEIRD!

Try to think how you would feel in their shoes.

- **they might not want to talk to you in case they upset you**  
it doesn't mean they're ignoring you - it shows they care
- **they might talk to you about it when you don't want to**  
let them know when you do want to talk and when you don't



### WHAT ABOUT SCHOOL?

It can be hard to concentrate at school at times like this.

- **talk to your teacher about it or get a friend to do it for you**
- **your teacher can tell other school staff if you want them to**
- **they'll help you if you're falling behind**