



## Talking about viewing your baby's body...

### **Why should my child view her brother or sister's dead body?**

When someone a child loves dies, first explain what death means. Say, "When a person dies, their heart stops beating; they stop breathing; their body stops working." Seeing that the body doesn't move or breathe may assist her in understanding this explanation.

Although it's hard, viewing a sibling's body can be a learning experience. It's also a time to say goodbye to her brother or sister as she begins to realize that a death did happen.

If she chooses not to view the body, she should not be forced to do so.

### **What should I do to prepare her for the viewing?**

Pre-schoolers respond more to the unspoken or body language than to words. She may read the worry or sadness in your actions. If what you need to say is hard to say directly, try saying it through play with a doll or other toy. Starting may seem hard, but she will quickly respond and may take the lead. Big Teddy Bear might say to Little Teddy, "I'm a bit nervous about going to the morgue." Or you can use symbols to talk about what will happen. You might use her favourite movie or book character, toy animal, star in the sky or flower to lead into the discussion. "You know when that your favourite toy got broken?"

If you are going to a morgue or funeral home, find out what it looks like and describe it to her. Tell her who will be there. Reassure her that someone there will help you. Take along a trusted adult who can tend to her if you need time to be with your child's body.

If you are going to a funeral home, explain what the casket and body will look like.

Wherever you go, explain that people may cry and be sad but that is a natural reaction. Explain also that the crying will stop and the sadness gets better over time.

### **What do I do when we actually get there?**

The funeral director or hospital staff will show your child's body to you. You may hold it and show it to her. You and your family may spend time saying goodbye.

### **What about after it's over?**

Keep it simple. Stop talking when she chooses to stop. Don't over-explain. Share what's in your heart – sadness, fears, anger – and find out about her feelings too.

Be honest and real with her. Children are naturally wise about important things. To avoid topics such as sadness, death or telling the truth may be confusing and frightening for her, however together you can get through these very hard times.

