



Talking about cremation...

Won't my child be frightened if I talk to her about cremation?

We teach children to stay away from fire because we don't want them to be burned, hoping our explanations give them a healthy fear. It is natural to wonder about telling them that someone we love will be put in the very situation we caution them about.

When talking about cremation, it is usually more our own fear that makes it a difficult topic to talk about. Telling her the truth using simple terms in language that makes sense to her age level is better than letting her imagination fill in the blanks.

How should I explain cremation to my child?

The first thing to remember is to avoid using words such as 'fire' or 'burn' that may sound frightening. Instead, you might say, "Uncle Bill's body is placed inside a casket or large box and a very high heat changes it into what is called the remains. Remember that being dead means that the body doesn't work anymore so it will not feel anything during the cremation."

Remains are mostly fine white or gray ashes. After the cremation is over, the remains are placed in a container called an urn which the family can take home with them.

What if she wants to see the ashes?

Make sure that you have seen the ashes yourself and then describe in a simple, concrete way what you saw. She can then make up her mind if she still wants to see them. After she sees them, ask if she has any questions or anything she would like to talk about.

How should I explain what will happen to the ashes after we take them?

Depending on cultural and family traditions, your family will decide what to do with the ashes. Some families have a funeral where the remains are buried in the ground. Others have a memorial service where friends and family gather to honour the person who died either with or without the ashes there. Still other families do not have any event at all.

After the event is over, the remains may be kept in your home. Sometimes weeks or months after, the remains are scattered over a favourite spot.

The important idea is that, by explaining truthfully and simply what is happening, your child will begin to feel safe and comfortable asking questions or sharing feelings and fears with you. Building the trust and openness early on with her helps her confide in you as she grows.

