



Talking about viewing a body...

Why should children view a dead body?

When someone that a child loves dies, the first thing to do is to explain what death means. You can say, "When a person dies, their heart doesn't work anymore and they don't breathe anymore. Their body doesn't work anymore." Often, actually seeing that the dead body doesn't move or breathe assists him in understanding this explanation.

(NB. Teens do understand what death means so their ideas should be acknowledged.)

Even though it may be difficult, viewing the body of a loved one can be a learning experience for your child. It is a time when he can say goodbye to his loved one and, once again, realize that the death really did occur.

If he still chooses not to see the body, he should not be forced to do so.

What should I do to prepare my child for the viewing?

If you are going to a morgue or funeral home, find out what the surroundings will be like and describe them to him. Let him know who will be there and reassure him that someone will be there to help. It is wise to have another trusted adult there who can focus on the child if you need time to be with the body of your loved one.

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

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

What do I do when we actually get there?

At the morgue or funeral home, the funeral director or nurse, chaplain or social worker will get the body and show it to you. If it is a small child, you may hold it and show it to your child. You and your family may spend time saying goodbye.

What about after it's over?

Spend time with your child. Ask him about the experience and answer his questions. This will also help to soothe his fears and worries. He may ask the same questions over and over again at other times as he makes more sense of the death. Encouraging him to talk about his questions and fears will help him on his healing journey.

