



End-of-life Information: School Age Series

Talking about viewing your baby's body...

Why should children view their brother or sister's 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 the child in understanding this explanation.

Even though it may be difficult, viewing the body of a sibling can be a learning experience for your child. It is a time when she can say goodbye to her brother or sister and, once again, realize that the death really did occur.

If she still chooses not to view the body, she 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, find out what the surroundings will be like and describe them to your child. Let her know who will be there and reassure her that someone there will help. It is wise to have another trusted adult there who can focus on her if you need time to be with the body of your child.

If you are going to a funeral home, have a clear explanation about the surroundings. Explain what the casket and your child's 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?

The funeral director or nurse, chaplain or social worker will get your child's body and show it to you. 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 some time with your child. Ask her about the experience and answer her questions. This will also help to soothe her fears and worries. She may ask the same questions over and over again at other times as she makes more sense of the death. Encouraging her to talk about her questions and fears will help her on her healing journey.

