

First Viewing Support

Anyone can be a 'grief support person' for a child who has had someone loved die. The greatest support comes from being present and listening!

Here are a few key items to consider when helping a child who is viewing their special person who has died:

- Make sure you have seen the deceased and the visitation room before you begin.
- If the rest of the family is also there for the first time, it's a great idea to have them go in for their first viewing while you are visiting with the child. Then check in with them before coming in with the child.
- Introduce yourself and explain what your job is at the funeral home.
- Talk about the building where the child is right now – a “funeral home” and what it is used for.
- Ask them about their special person who died.
- Describe how their special person looks now – be sure to refer to the person's body – i.e., 'in a special box called a casket'; or 'on a special table with a pillow and covered with a pretty cloth'. (Clarify that it looks a lot like sleeping: eyes are closed and lying down, **but this isn't the same as sleeping....**)
- Describe the room, how it's laid out – where the casket is located, are there flowers, etc.
- Ask the child if they have any questions or worries. Ask them if they are ready to go in; when they are ready, walk beside the child as you enter – they may even want to hold your hand.
- Give the child control over how close they would like to be to the deceased, and whether or not they want to touch. They will also determine how long they stay in the room. Talk about what it will feel like if they choose to touch – explain that the person's body isn't “cold” – it is the temperature of the room. **Make sure they know that whatever they choose to do is “ok”.**
- If other family are already in the visitation room, be sure to mention that some people might be crying, others will not; and that the child might cry or they might not – and that's ok.
- If it is a smaller child and they do want to go up close, offer to pick them up, or give them a chair to stand on so they can see better.
- Keep talking to the child while you are in the visitation room – referring to things you mentioned before going in – like the room set-up, flowers, the casket; or notice things about the deceased – like jewelry, or items that have been placed in the casket, etc.
- Pick a time to exit, letting the child know that you were so glad to meet them and learn about their special person who died, and thank the parents for letting you assist.