



Explaining Cremation to Children

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The concept of cremation may be scary for some children. They may have heard adults use words such as "oven" and "burn", or may picture in their minds that cremation is like setting the person's body on fire. It is important to use simple, concrete language, and avoid using words that may frighten children when talking about cremation.

First, it is important to emphasize that when someone dies, what's left is just their body -- the part of the person that made them special is no longer there. They cannot see, hear, think, talk, breathe, or FEEL anything anymore. After someone dies, the family calls the funeral home to help them care for the body. There are three ways to care for the body after a person dies: burial, cremation, or donation to a medical school for learning or research. Whether the body is buried or cremated, the end result is the same: the body reduces to "ashes" – or, only the bones remain.

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Following is a suggestion on how to explain the cremation process to a child:

The person's body is placed into a special box and then into a room (or chamber), called a *crematory*, where it gets very, very hot. The heat helps to change the person's body into *cremated remains* (or "ashes") very quickly. It usually takes about 2 to 3 hours. [When a person's body is buried, it takes many many years for the body to change to "ashes".] After the cremation is finished, all that is left are pieces of the bones. There are tiny pieces as well as large pieces. The bone pieces are then placed into a special machine called a *processor*, which breaks up the bones until they are like powder. The powder is gray in color – the color of our bones. The cremated remains are then placed into a container or *urn* which the family has chosen to use. The cremated remains of an adult weigh about 5 or 6 pounds. The cremated remains of a baby weigh just a few ounces. Sometimes the family keeps the cremated remains at their house in a pretty container, or they might bury them in a cemetery. Sometimes the cremated remains are sprinkled or scattered in an outdoor place that is special to the family or to the person who died.

