

## **Helping Your Child Say Goodbye**

Sometimes it seems easier to leave children out of farewell rituals. Wakes and funerals are long and tiring. For adults in mourning, having to make all the arrangements, greet all the visitors, and find the time to say their own goodbye can be stressful.

For almost every child, the benefits of saying goodbye and being included in the farewell ritual are great and far outweigh the concerns. The following suggestions may be of help when planning how to include children in this very important family event.

- ❖ If at all possible, let children see the person who has died.
- ❖ Explain to children where they will see the person and how the person is different.
- ❖ Use the correct language - "Grandpa has died" or "Grandma is dead": never use euphemisms.
- ❖ If children have questions about changes in the person's appearance, answer them with enough information to be accurate. Too much information is not helpful.
- ❖ Allow children to view, touch or talk to the person who has died, but do not prompt them or insist that they do.
- ❖ Ask someone - a relative, friend, or familiar sitter - to provide care for the children during the wake, funeral or memorial service. The designated person can keep track of the children, make sure they are fed, answer questions they may have, take them out for a break or home if the day gets too long or they're at the limits of their attention span.

Children who are old enough may be included in funeral arrangements. Even very young children can choose the kind of flowers they would like to give and may bring the flowers with them. Older children can do readings or assist with music selections. Many children write a letter, draw a picture, or choose a keepsake to put into the casket.

Grief often looks very different in children than it does in adults. While some children may be tearful and appear sad, many more tend to play and socialize their way through the farewell ritual. They often recount the wonderful things said about the person who has died and talk about all the people who came to the funeral. Children will remember having been part of the important goodbye and are affirmed by participating in it. With thoughtful preparation, we can safely and meaningfully include children in our farewell rituals. There may be no greater opportunity to share with them what it means to be family.