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# What about the kids? Creating space for children in a funeral home setting.

By National Alliance for Children's Grief

When someone dies, the entire family is impacted, including the children. A child-friendly space in your funeral home ensures the entire family is cared for compassionately. Funeral homes that are welcoming to children make the family feel comfortable, which can set you apart.

What is a Child-Friendly Space? A child-friendly space is a dedicated space within the funeral home that feels safe and comfortable for children as they cope with and process the death of their loved one. This can look like a wholly defined space or a simple collection of resources based on the resources available to you and your firm. When you have limited space and time, start small.

Regardless of your space or time constraints, a great starting point is to provide simple craft materials to give children an opportunity to find comfort and promote creativity. Suggested items that complement your space and provide additional support to children include blank or lined white and colored paper, pencils, markers (washable), colored pencils, crayons, scissors, and glue sticks. A cart or bookshelf space and a comfy seat will go a long way to creating a safe environment for children during a stressful time. This can be a fixed physical space or something mobile and able to be moved to wherever the child(ren) are located in the funeral home.

If you would like to grow the footprint of your child-friendly space, consider adding items like a few easily played games (Trouble, Jenga, UNO, playing cards, Connect Four, etc.), a little library (see books in the suggested resource list), toys that encourage imaginative and expressive play (doll house, puppets, play doctor sets, etc.), stuffed animals, and fidget items. It is helpful if some of the items create opportunities to explore feelings such as books, coloring pages, prompts, or whiteboards.

If you have the space, it is worth considering if a separate area can be converted permanently into a

child-friendly space. This can be a dedicated space or a multi-purpose space that is converted as needed. In planning this space, regardless of the size of the space, set the intention that this space is for children—plan for child-friendly colors and furniture that is inviting. Decor could include rugs, posters/wall art, chalkboard on the walls, and warm, friendly, and comforting things. For this space, we suggest some of the ideas below.

- Reading space with items such as pillows, a bean bag chair, couches, and books.
- Craft area with items such as lap desks or a table and chairs and craft kits.
- Calming items such as stuffed animals, mindful breathing items (pinwheels, Hoberman spheres, etc.), or aromatherapy.
- Toys can be chosen with many goals in mind. Fidget toys allow for the release of energy. Outdoor playground space can also help with the release of energy. Toys that support children playing together, like Lego or blocks.
- Consider putting a live feed into the room. Can they hear and see what is happening during the services while they are in your child-friendly space?
- If there is an opportunity (i.e., staff that feels comfortable or you are working with a community partner with grief support expertise), purposeful play and conversation with children in this space can ensure there is space for the child to ask questions about death or funerals. Whatever your plan for child-friendly spaces, it is important to consider supervision by a trusted adult should be a component of any plan involving children.

Remember, you don't have to do it alone! This is an excellent opportunity to reach into your community networks and collaborate! Who else has expertise/resources that you can collaborate with? Certified Child Life Specialists, grief centers/hospices that serve pediatrics, or therapists/counselors in your community that work with children can help support you and answer questions about child-friendly spaces and your support of the families you serve more generally.

Accommodating the child in the space and the service. Part of the commitment to child-friendly funeral homes also includes accommodating the child in the practices in the funeral home. This can start from the initial conversation with the family planning to visit the space. As they prepare the children, videos or photos are worth sharing to help them understand what the space looks like. Do you have a virtual tour or photos of the relevant spaces that can be shared with caregivers in advance? This can help to demystify the funeral space for children who have never experienced it.

When the family comes to the space, consider a tour with the child in mind so they can get familiar with the space and can better understand what to expect. Ideally, this would occur before the service. Be sure to identify the spaces the children will be in or other important public areas (i.e., bathrooms). During your time together, encourage open conversation and answer questions truthfully in partnership with the caregiver. Use simple, straightforward, age-appropriate language and listen to their questions. Let their questions guide where they need clarification.

In considering the service, it is always important to consider how to incorporate the child. Share these options with the caregiver and encourage them to discuss those opportunities with the child beforehand. Support this conversation as needed and reassure the child that it's okay to change their mind at any point. Support the family in defining a backup plan if the child is struggling or decides they no longer want to partake in certain aspects of the ceremony. Suggesting that the family designates a 'buddy' for the child can be helpful. Remind the caregiver that the child can choose which rituals and aspects of the end-of-life ceremony they will participate in.

Not all rituals will work and are appropriate for all children- it depends upon their ability to focus, maintain attention, and desire to participate. Fortunately, it does not have to be all or nothing. It's okay for a child to decide not to participate in an aspect of the ceremony. For example, children under the age of four may not do as well during a formal ceremony like a funeral or mass service. Still, they will be perfectly content at a less formal service like a visitation or celebration of life.



NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR  
CHILDREN'S GRIEF

**No Child Should  
Grieve Alone**

- Resources for families and professionals
- A comprehensive listing of children's grief support across the United States
- Education and connection for professionals in the bereavement industry
- Visit [www.nacg.org](http://www.nacg.org) to learn more

Consider sharing options for ways children can participate in end-of-life ceremonies and rituals. These include but are not limited to reading a letter, poem, or passage from a spiritual text, playing music, singing, creating and displaying artwork, putting something inside the casket, grave, etc., serving as a pallbearer, passing out ceremony programs or choosing a special color for everyone to wear in honor of the person.

In closing, consider connecting the children and families you serve to resources and support in the community. The National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG's) website lists providers in communities across the country who provide dedicated support and programs for grieving children and families. You can find services for families local to you on the "Find Support" tab at [www.nacg.org](http://www.nacg.org). Connecting with other children who are grieving allows them to share their stories, understand that they are not alone, and validate and normalize their experiences. This can be incredibly powerful in supporting the child as they adjust to life without their person. The NACG website has a large number of free resources on topics relating to grief and children, and sharing the website with the families you serve ensures they have an identified place to see support.

**About the National Alliance for Children's Grief:**  
The National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG) is a non-profit organization that raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them. Our vision is for no child to have to grieve alone. Through the collective voice of our members and partners, we educate, advocate and raise awareness about childhood bereavement. [www.childrengrieve.org](http://www.childrengrieve.org).



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