

Children And Funerals

There is often a dilemma as to whether children should be put through the 'ordeal' of attending the funeral of a parent, grandparent or sibling. Research shows that, generally, it is a good idea for children over the age of 5 at least to be given the choice as to whether or not they would like to attend. This is the conclusion of a retrospective UK study of 100 individuals who suffered the bereavement of a parent before they were 18.

Conclusion

The results of the 'Iceberg' project revealed that young people often lack both information and control after the death of a parent. The empirical results also support the notion that it is a good idea for children to be given the choice of whether or not to attend the funeral of the parent . . . in terms of children finding attending was a positive experience. There were no negative outcomes and, although none of the younger children (under 5 at the time of the funeral) attended their parent's funeral, they also expressed feelings of both regret and exclusion.

None of the young people attending the funeral of their parent reported any negative effects and, on the contrary, most of them felt it had been a positive and helpful event. Of those not attending the funeral, three quarters, with hindsight, wished that they had taken part. If children are not given the choice there is a danger that they will feel excluded and isolated from the family at this difficult time.

It seems there is nothing to lose, but much to gain, by children attending the funeral, with the 'golden rule' of giving children the choice, neither forcing them to attend, nor forbidding or distracting them from attending. It also seems important to prepare children for the experiences of attending the funeral.

Recommendations

That young people should be given the choice of whether to attend the funeral of a parent. In order that the choice is informed children need to be carefully briefed about what will happen at the funeral. We can help you with this.

Preparing young people could involve them visiting the church and crematorium prior to the funeral, and have an active role involvement such as choosing music, readings and hymns as well as seeing the order of service before the funeral.

John Holland, Educational Psychologist, City Psychological Service, Hull, UK: Should Children Attend Their Parent's Funerals in NAPCE, Blackwell Publishing 2004.

At Heart And Soul Funerals we certainly have the experience to help parents and carers to give children the information and explanations they need to make informed choices about the funeral, and to find ways to gently involve them in the preparations and the ceremony on the day if they wish to.

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