

# Grief Education Series



## Helping Children Understand Loss & Grief

As adults, we often use words that can be difficult for children to understand, especially when it comes to medical conditions, terminal illness, death, and grief. It is important to remember that children are literal in their understanding and if not given the information they need, they will often “make up the details” in order to create a reality that they can live with.

When talking to children about these concepts, it is best to use simple, honest language and let them lead the conversation. Encourage them to ask questions and be aware of your own responses to those questions. The following is a list of tips to help with these conversations.

- ★ **Listen and Support:** Listen to what the child is asking and provide information based on their questions. Adults often provide more information than is needed in an effort to help.
- ★ **Use simple words:** Being clear and direct is essential when sharing difficult news with a child. Use words like “dead” or “died” versus “went to sleep” or “passed on”. *Utilize the definitions on the following page as a resource to help you explain other concepts.* Allow time for your child to take in what you have said. Don’t be surprised if they don’t respond in a manner consistent with grief. This is normal as children are not able to handle emotional overload.
- ★ **Tell your child what to expect:** Preparing a child for changes in their routine is important. Explain what will happen, providing simple and concrete information. “Today, your friend Sally’s mom will be picking you up from school. I will be at her house by 4:30 to pick you up.” This gives the child a sense of comfort and control.
- ★ **Explain upcoming events:** If the child is going to participate in rituals (funerals, memorial services, etc.), provide them information ahead of time so they will know what to expect. What will they see, hear, smell, and experience? What will other people say to them? Explain the order of the day as simply as you can.
- ★ **Provide comfort and reassurance:** Though this time can be challenging for adults who also experienced a loss, it is important to reassure your child that they will be okay. Oftentimes parents will utilize the support of a good friend who can come alongside the child during this time to “check in” and provide additional support and comfort.



The list on the following page has been a helpful tool in explaining the terms that are used to talk about ideas related to death.

Always remember, you can utilize the support of your Ancora Bereavement Team at **208-452-2672**.

Ashes	What is left of a dead body after cremation; is white or gray in color, and looks and feels like tiny rocks or chunky sand (also called “cremains”).
Burial	Placing the body (inside a casket or urn) into a special place called a cemetery.
Casket	A special box for burying a dead body. Is sometimes referred to as a “coffin”.
Cemetery	A place where many dead bodies and ashes are buried.
Columbarium	A small building at a cemetery where ashes are placed.
Cremation	The process of turning a dead body into ashes. The body is placed in a special box at the crematorium, and it is heated until it turns into ashes.
Dead	When a person’s body stops working. It does not see, hear, feel, eat, breathe, etc. anymore.
Funeral	A ceremony where friends and family get together for a time to say goodbye to and remember or share memories of the person who died. Sometimes the body can be viewed at the cemetery.
Funeral Home	A place where bodies are kept until they are buried or cremated. Sometimes the funeral or viewing can happen here.
Grave	The hole in the ground where the body is buried at the cemetery.
Headstone	The sign that marks the place where the body is buried or ashes are placed. It is often made of stone or metal and may be engraved with the person’s name, date of birth and date of death. The “head” is not placed inside the stone.
Hearse	The special car that takes the dead body in the casket to the grave.
Memorial Service	See funeral for definition of ceremony. Usually the body is not viewed at this ceremony. This also can be called a “Celebration of Life”.
Obituary	A short article in the newspaper that tells about the person who died.
Pallbearer	The people who help carry the casket at the funeral. These people are often specially chosen by the family.
Scattering	When the ashes of the cremated body are emptied onto a special place (in the air, water, or on the ground). Can be a ceremony with family and friends.
Urn	A special container that holds and protects the ashes of the cremated body.
Viewing	The time when people can see the body of the person who died and say goodbye.