



## Child Speak for Death and Mourning Rituals

Children are very literal and yet have a rich fantasy life. Language skills are still developing long into adolescence and young adulthood. They also learn myths from other kids in the neighborhood, their family, and their schools. Keep this in mind when you are trying to explain death and mourning rituals. Use simple and honest language and try to let them lead with questions they have.

- Ashes** - What is left of a dead body after cremation; is white or grey 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 the ground at a special place called the cemetery.
- Casket** - A special box (usually 4 sides) for burying a dead body. (In movies, it can be called a “coffin” when it has six sides).
- Cemetery** - A place where many dead bodies and ashes are buried. (One child called it the ‘people park’ because it often looks like a park with grass and trees.)
- 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 ash.
- Dead** - When a person’s body stops working. It doesn’t see, hear, feel, eat, breath, 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 ceremony.
- 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 birthday and date of death. The ‘head’ is not placed inside the stone (also called the grave marker).
- Hearse** - The special car that takes the dead body in the casket to the grave (often at the cemetery).
- Memorial Service** - See funeral for definition of ceremony. Usually the body is not viewed at this ceremony (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.
- 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.

Adapted from Wolfelt, A.D. (1996), Healing the Bereaved Child: Grief gardening, growth through grief, and other touchstones for caregivers. Page 57. Companion Press, Fort Collins, CO.