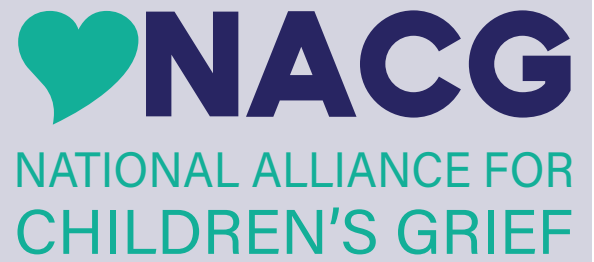


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CREATING SPACE FOR CHILDREN IN A FUNERAL HOME



Introduction

When someone dies the entire family is impacted, including the children. Having a child-friendly space in your funeral home ensures the youngest grievers are taken care of with compassionate care. Funeral homes that are welcoming to children not only make them comfortable, but their caregivers as well which can set you apart.

This guide for creating a child-friendly funeral home has options for all providers at different levels of staffing, time, space and resources. It is designed to help you in creating a space that can meaningfully support the families you serve.

What is a Child-Friendly Space?

The goal is to create a space within the funeral home that feels safe and comfortable for children as they cope and process the death of their loved one.

You don't have to do it alone!

There are local expertise and resources that can support you in supporting your families. Some examples of partnership opportunities include:

- Certified Child Life Specialists
- Grief centers
- Hospices
- Therapists/counselors in your community that work with children
- After school programs
- Faith based organizations

Welcoming the Child Into the Funeral Home

Create a tour of your facility that incorporates all of the spaces a child may be in and partner with the child's caregiver(s) to ensure this happens before the services. Facilitating a child's familiarity with the funeral space and what to expect will support their understanding and help provide reassurance. During your time together, encourage open conversation and provide truthful answers to all questions asked.

Additional supportive options to consider:

- Do you already have a "virtual tour" on your website?
- Do you have pictures of relevant spaces you can provide to show families and their children before arrival?

Creating a Space for All Sizes

Based on the resources available to you and your funeral home consider incorporating the following suggestions...

Children's Corner

Regardless of space or time constraints, provide simple craft materials to allow children to express their thoughts and feelings while promoting creativity. These items do not require staff supervision; however, it is important to ensure children have a trusted adult to stay with them. Please consider using the suggested resource list to incorporate items that could complement your space and provide additional support to children.

Some materials you may consider are:

- Different types and colors of paper
- Lined paper or cards
- Scissors
- Glue
- Writing utensils such as pencils or pens
- Coloring utensils such as colored pencils, crayons or markers

Children's Center

When you have limited space and time, start small. A cart or bookshelf and a comfy seat will go a long way in creating a safe environment for children during a stressful time. This can be a fixed physical space, or something mobile that can be moved to where the children are.

You may consider adding items from the list above, plus:

- A few easily played games such as Trouble, Jenga, UNO, Connect Four
- A little library (see books in Suggested Resources List)
- Toys that encourage imaginative and expressive play such as a dollhouse, puppets, play doctor sets
- Fidget items such as a fidget spinner, fidget cubes, stress ball, slinky, sensory tangle

Children's Room

Is there a separated area that could be converted permanently into a child-friendly space? Is there a separate and private room that can easily be transitioned into a child-friendly space when needed? 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.

When creating your space, consider incorporating the following items:

Craft Area

- Lap desks or table and chairs
- Craft Kits
- Different types and colors of paper
- Writing and coloring utensils
- Scissors
- Glue

Calming Items

- Mindful breathing items such as pinwheels or hobermen spheres
- Aromatherapy

Reading Space:

- Pillows, bean bag chair, or couches
- See the Suggested Resource List for books to fill your reading space
- Consider books “just for fun” such as iSpy

Toys and Games:

Toys and games can be chosen with many goals in mind.

- A few easily played games (ex: Trouble, Jenga, UNO, Connect Four)
- Toys that allow for the release of energy such as fidget toys
- Toys that allow for play with other children such as Legos or blocks
- Toys that encourage imaginative and expressive play (ex: dollhouse, puppets)

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 are no misconceptions about death or funerals.

Suggested Resource List

The inclusion of any organization or resource in this Resource List does not imply or constitute an endorsement or recommendation, nor does exclusion imply disapproval.

National Alliance for Children's Grief

There are a variety of resources available for free and for purchase, but the following are especially beneficial resources for funeral homes and families.

- [NACG Resource Library \(nacg.org/resources\)](https://nacg.org/resources)
- ["Grief Talks: Talking to Children about Death & Dying"](#)
- ["Grief Talks: Talking to Children about End of Life Rituals"](#)
- ["When Someone Dies: A Family Activity Book"](#)

Funeral Service Foundation (funeralservicefoundation.org)

- [Youth and Funerals Booklet](#)
- [When a Child Dies Booklet](#)

Books

- [The Centering Corporation \(centering.org\)](https://centering.org) has a lengthy list of books that can be supportive for families and grief professionals alike. Specifically for funeral homes, the following list is a good place to start. Please keep in mind that some of these books will mention specific after death beliefs that may not be applicable to all families or be inclusive of all cultures.
- In Loving Memory by Lacie Brueckner & Katherine Pendergast – two versions; for burial and cremation
- Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute? and What Happened to Daddy's Body By Elke and Alex Barber (3+)
- Lifetimes by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (3+)
- The Next Place by Warren Hanson (5+)
- What Does That Mean? A Dictionary of Death, Dying and Grief terms for Grieving Children and Those Who Love Them by Harold Ivan Smith and Joy Johnson (8+)

Online Resources

- [Kids and Funerals Article](#)
- [After a Death: An Activity Book for Children](#)
- [How to offer First Viewing Support for Kids, handout](#). A "how-to" for being present with a child who is viewing their deceased loved one for the first time.

For Kids with Autism

- [NACG Supporting Children of All Abilities who are grieving Toolkit](#)
- [Eluna article about helping children with Autism with social stories](#)
- Book: I have a Question about Death by Arlen Gaines and Meredith Polsky

Note: When a child or teen has died, please be prepared to have many children from the community in your facility. This lends itself to additional opportunities for your funeral home to personalize the funeral service to honor the deceased child and ensure the services are a welcome and comfortable place for visiting children. For more information and ideas, see “When a Child Dies” from the Funeral Service Foundation listed in the suggested resource list.

The NACG has a range of free resources available on our website to support professionals and caregivers. You can access them at www.nacg.org/resources.

Thank you to the the following NACG members who contributed to this toolkit: (listed alphabetically by last name)

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