



Seeing the person who has died

Making the decision about whether or not a child should go and see the person who has died is often a difficult and painful one. Adults are often unsure about whether this will be helpful or not, or if the child will be too distressed by the experience. However, sometimes by thinking we are protecting children we are actually excluding them and they may feel hurt and resentful if they do not have the opportunity to say goodbye.

At SeeSaw we are often asked to help families think through their decision, and we always suggest that the first thing that adults do is to find out what the child wants. However, in order for the child to be able to make the decision they will need to know:

- Where they will be going.
- Why they might want to go.
- Who will be going with them.
- Description of the room where the body will be (it is helpful if the adult can visit beforehand so they are better prepared themselves for what the room and the body looks like and therefore be able to answer children's questions).
- How the body will feel and look – remember, as the room will be cold, the body will feel cool to the touch and will look different. It would be helpful if the child understands that, because the person has died, they no longer feel the cold, they do not get hungry or feel pain – it is not like being asleep - and they cannot be woken up.
- That it will be fine if they want to touch, or kiss or talk to the person who has died – but they will not respond.
- That it is OK to take along a drawing or letter or something they may wish to leave with the person – or if they do not wish to go themselves, an adult could take their offering on their behalf.
- They can stay as long or as little as they like.
- They can change their mind about the visit at any point.
- That whatever they decide to do is fine – even if it is different from what other members of their family want to do.

Children may need to hear this information several times – patience, reassurance and understanding will be needed to enable them to make their choice.