

Practical Ministry Skills: Funerals



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources and Christianity Today International, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

This special theme of BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is designed to help church leaders and pastors prepare for a funeral and comfort those who are grieving. You may use it either for your own instruction or to give to those close to a grieving person. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

At the top of each page is a suggestion for who may benefit from that handout. For example, pastors and church leaders could use "Educate a Congregation about Death" (p. 3) as they develop a teaching curriculum. And those who have grieving friends may benefit from "Twenty Things to Do for a Grieving Friend" (p. 8) or "How to Speak to Someone Who's Grieving" (p. 9). You could give parents "Answer a Child's Questions about Death" (p. 10–11) or "The Grieving Processes of Children" (p. 12).

We hope this theme may be a blessing to your ministry.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

To contact the editors:

E-mail BCL@christianitytoday.com

Mail BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS, Christianity Today International
465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188

PRACTICAL MINISTRY SKILLS**Educate a Congregation about Death**

Tackle the taboo subject of death head-on with these important strategies.

1 Corinthians 15:12–58

Congregations need to be equipped to face the trauma of death with both realism and faith.

Lay a Theological Foundation

Those who want nothing to do with theology—”Boring,” “Too dry”—automatically shift into theological high gear when death intrudes into their lives. People want answers to help them carry on when they are reeling from the death of a loved one.

Our congregations need a theological framework for death that includes three main concepts. The foundational concept is the goodness of God. If people are to love and trust God in times of grief, they must be convinced of God’s goodness.

The second concept is that death is evil. Scripture declares that death and pain and grief are unnatural, contrary to God’s intentions for his creation. To be sure, for the Christian, death is the experience by which one passes into eternal life, but Scripture would have us view death primarily as an ugly and painful intrusion into God’s creation.

Hope is the crowning piece of a theological framework that enables a congregation to deal with death. “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,” Paul told the Corinthians, and in this mighty event is the promise of our own resurrection to eternal life.

Develop Educational Programs

At some point theology must get practical. The obvious, and perhaps best, strategy is to cover the topic of death in Sunday school lessons, youth group programs, and Sunday services. A field trip to a local funeral home can help church members learn, in a non-crisis situation, how to arrange a funeral and what the funeral should accomplish. Parents can help children learn about death by taking them to a funeral and discussing the experience.

One congregation did a six-week Sunday evening series on preparing for death. The pastor used short case studies on death-related issues, had someone speak on a near-death experience, and arranged a presentation on making a will. That series triggered dinner conversations, stimulated reflection, and helped a wise pastor share the load of grief counseling for many years to come.

Provide a Context for Grieving

Our church has a sharing time in the morning worship service. Hurts and doubts are expressed, as are joys and triumphs. This announces to everyone present that real life and real faith can coexist. It also reminds us that some of life’s experiences are bitter pills to swallow, no matter how strong our faith is.

Learn in Crisis Situations

Sometimes the best preparations for death come through last-minute responses in the midst of a crisis.

When a young mother of three children was diagnosed with terminal cancer, we decided to cancel adult Sunday school classes and hold a group session of prayer. This time allowed the church to support Martha and her family in prayer and to stand with one another in the midst of the fear and faith, confidence and confusion, hope and hurt we all were feeling. Out of that session grew a prayer group to support this woman and her family for the duration of her illness.

With proper preparation, congregations can discover that even our final enemy is unable to kill a lively faith or deaden a life-giving ministry.

—RICK MCKINNISS



Arrange a Funeral Service

A funeral honors the life of the deceased and gives hope to the grieving.

Philippians 1:21

Planning the Service

A pastor's involvement usually starts with the phone call that brings the announcement of death. I visit the family as soon as I can. My first priority is to hold their hands, let them cry, and give them support in a variety of ways.

Seldom do I start any funeral arrangements during this initial visit. It's too harsh to talk of caskets and burial plots in those first few minutes.

On my second visit, I try to build a consensus of what should take place at the funeral service. I prefer to have as many of the family members present for this as possible. I determine who is in charge and who is going to make the major decisions.

If there's a question about the decisions, I'll sometimes say to those gathered, "I know we are all involved and want to do what's right, but I understand Peter is in charge of making the arrangements. Peter, what do you think we should do?"

For the service, I try to honor personal requests—a favorite hymn or Scripture passage. I gather the obituary information or have one of the family write it up for me. Prior to the service, I verify the accuracy of my information and the pronunciation of names with someone in the family.

Primarily, I want to explain to the family the sequence of events and how they will likely feel during the service. I talk about the value of tears. Walking the family through the service in advance sets them at ease and enables me to accomplish more when the service actually happens.

During the Service

Christ's death and resurrection supply meaning to our deaths. His resurrection provides a stream of grace that enables us to cope with grief. This message must be heard above all the emotion and tradition in a funeral service.

I want people to feel I've prepared the service just for them. At some time during the service, I speak directly to the key members of the grieving family, addressing each by name.

At times I ask someone capable of public speaking to make remarks about the life of the deceased. This is particularly helpful when I haven't known the person. When I know the person well, I try to go beyond giving the essential facts by recalling positive experiences.

I vary the sequence, but somewhere there's a hymn, usually a solo, and, depending on the circumstances, a few comments on the life of the deceased. I always include a message based on Scripture. I pray at least twice during the service, once asking for the Lord's presence and help during the service, and once asking for the Lord's counsel, comfort, and wisdom for the grieving family.

At the Graveside

Many people have told me the burial service was the hardest part of their grief experience. So I suggest having the burial before the service to relieve the family of some of this pressure and to free them to hear the comforting words of the service.

I tell the family the graveside part is short, so they're not surprised by its brevity. I may have them sing a chorus to involve them in the burial, helping them express their grief and affirm their faith. Since the grave is a temporary resting place for the body, I don't dwell on the end of life but on the hope of the resurrection.

Following my benediction, I greet each member of the immediate family by name. I then leave the family alone to say things they might feel uncomfortable saying in my presence.

—CALVIN RATZ



Help Families Deal with Death

The church plays an essential part in supporting the grieving.

Romans 8:28

Encourage a Hopeful Faith

We can expect God to work for good in all things, even death. While everything that happens to us is not necessarily good in itself, under the direction of the Father, every situation blends together for ultimate good.

We can expect God to finish what he has begun in our lives. This is the promise of Philippians 1:6. In the time of trouble, our faith may seem small, but God will nourish it until it grows to the size he desires.

Be Empathetic

When we have genuine empathy, we can be more helpful resources in times of grief. We can offer the following:

Build a relationship. Let the person know you are truly interested in his or her problem. It is easy to show disinterest through our posture and listening behavior. Communicate by words and actions, “I want to enter your private world, understand your hurt, and help you deal with it.”

Explore feelings. Encourage people to express how they feel. Grieving people often feel guilty, angry, numb, or resentful. I’ve found people won’t admit these feelings if I haven’t first built a relationship with them and then given them verbal permission to express these emotions.

Ease feelings of guilt and responsibility. Though unrealistic, these feelings are powerful. You can help the grieving person see that these feelings are rarely realistic. None of us knows what is going to happen.

Determine possible alternatives. Help the person think through the strengths and weaknesses of available choices. “Do you feel ready to go back to work?” “Would a vacation be helpful?” “Have you considered living with your mother or sister for a few weeks?”

Help people follow through. Once a decision is made, people in deep grief sometimes need help carrying it through. A regular phone call asking “What are you going to do today?” can help the person make it through each step.

Help with the Details

The bereaved face a myriad of details to take care of. Good pastoral care helps lift the burden of these details. A church can establish the following procedures.

Alert appropriate support groups. In most cases the person and family involved will be part of a Sunday school class, choir, or small group. Let them know the situation so they can offer help.

Initiate pastoral care. Someone should meet with the family, offering to be available for counseling, helping with calling family members, or taking care of other needs that may arise, such as helping to select funeral home services.

Arrange the funeral service. Once the family has decided the time and place for the service, offer them all the church resources available (accompanists, soloists, the chapel, etc.). At the same time, watch that the grieving family does not overdo. The family may have known five ministers through the years, and they want all the pastors to have a part. Gently try to guide the family. Say, “I know how you feel, but my experience tells me the service will be too long; you’ll suffer too much.” Try to be flexible and yet make the funeral worshipful and strength giving.

Follow up. Within ten days after the funeral, send a personal letter to the family and make a follow-up visit. If necessary, arrange for extended counseling.

—PAUL L. WALKER



Deal with Untimely Deaths

Sharing in someone's grief journey can give profound comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

For some, death slips through the door marked “merciful healer” and liberates a person from pain, illness, and a worn-out body. For others, death bursts through the door marked “obscene intruder.” It comes as a vicious thief who robs the victim and family of health, happiness, and much of the abundant life Christ taught was God’s intention. These deaths are untimely—suicides, accidents, murders, terminal illnesses, or stillbirths. These deaths are the hard cases.

For all the good things we can do for families in the hard cases, we can do just as many bad. That’s the challenge.

What to Avoid

Don’t have all the answers. When we are confronted with a hard case, there are no easy answers. Nothing we say or do will bring back a dead son or reverse a car accident. No answer we give will make a suicide easy to think about. We must rid ourselves of the notion we can fix painful situations by providing answers to questions that are unanswerable.

Don’t lack sensitivity. Some time ago I sat with the family of a dying woman. One of her daughters had called in a minister to lend emotional and spiritual support. He fidgeted in his chair and glanced frequently at his watch. When the daughter finally told the minister he could go, he compounded his mistake by offering to stay longer. The daughter icily told him that wouldn’t be necessary. It was a long time before that woman went back to church.

Don’t give a canned response. We can resort to canned statements because of our discomfort; a worn cliché appears an easy way out of an awkward situation. We become more effective in handling the hard cases when we allow ourselves to grieve along with the bereaved. The best thing we can do is ask ourselves what gives us the most courage and strength in such situations. We work best with what we know and have ourselves experienced.

What We Can Do

Acknowledge this is an abnormal time. This helps the grieving place their unpleasant feelings in perspective. Often, a grieving person will feel he or she is losing touch with reality. Our honest acknowledgement can help the bereaved see this is something we do not normally encounter; it is a time for unusual feelings and reactions. This offers the hope that feelings will return to normal once the worst of the grief is overcome.

Allow for honest ventilation of feelings. In the case of a murder, suicide, child death, or other difficult situation, certainly there should be anger. Often guilt or other feelings will manifest themselves. By reminding people these are a sign neither of mental instability nor a lack of faith, we can provide a place from which the bereaved can begin working back to where things are normal and life is good.

Emphasize God’s presence. Even though grieving people may be angry at God to the point of rage, God’s love is still important to them. While we may not know why a fatal accident happened, or why a child contracted leukemia, or why a woman killed herself, we do know God is present and on our side.

—ROGER F. MILLER



Burial or Cremation?

Is it okay for a Christian to be cremated?

Romans 5:20–21

In the ancient world, cremation was the normal practice of Greeks and Romans. Many of them believed in the immortality of the soul and saw no reason to give special attention to the body. Hindus, with their doctrine of reincarnation, still practice cremation. At the other extreme were the Egyptians, who mummified their dead, preserving the corpse indefinitely.

As the catacombs in Rome attest, the early Christians insisted on burying their dead. Christian gravesites were called *coemeteria* (cemeteries), which literally means “sleeping places,” reflecting belief in a future resurrection.

Why were Christians so concerned about proper disposal of the body? Here are four reasons: (1) The body of every human was created by God, bore his image, and deserved to be treated with respect because of this. (2) The centrality of the Incarnation. When the Word became flesh, God uniquely hallowed human life and bodily existence forever. (3) The Holy Spirit indwelt the bodies of believers, making them vessels of honor. (4) As Jesus was buried and raised bodily from the dead, so Christians believed that their burial was a witness to the resurrection yet to come.

Of course, many martyrs were burned to death, but Christians believed God would bring them forth unimpaired at the resurrection. “We do not fear any loss from any mode of sepulture,” declared Minucius Felix, “but we adhere to the old and better custom of burial.” In the context of the early church, cremation was associated with pagan rituals and unbiblical beliefs. Burial seemed to be a more loving and reverent way to bear witness to God’s ultimate victory over death.

What about today? The first cremation in America took place in 1876, accompanied by readings from Charles Darwin and the Hindu scriptures. For many years, relatively few persons (mostly liberals and freethinkers) chose cremation. That has changed dramatically. Only 5 percent of Americans were cremated in 1962; by 2000 it was 25.5 percent. In Japan, where burial is sometimes illegal, the cremation rate is 98 percent. The rise in cremations reflects many factors: concern for land use; the expense of traditional funerals; the loss of community and a sense of “place” in modern transient society; and New Age-type spiritualities.

While Christian tradition clearly favors burial, the Bible nowhere explicitly condemns cremation. Since 1963 the Roman Catholic Church has permitted cremation while “earnestly recommending” burial as the preferred mode of disposal. Billy Graham has noted that cremation cannot prevent a sovereign God from calling forth the dead at the end of time.

The Bible should not be used as a proof text either for the necessity of burial or of cremation. True, there are several examples of cremation in the Old Testament (Achan, Josh. 7:25; Saul, 1 Sam. 31:12; the King of Edom, Amos 2:1), but they involved God’s judgment and curse. When Paul offered his body to be burned (1 Cor. 13:3), he was speaking of martyrdom, not cremation.

When Jesus said, “Let the dead bury the dead,” he was describing the cost of discipleship, not the cost or method of funerals.

The real question for Christians is not whether one is buried or cremated but the meaning given to these acts. Whether final disposition is by burial or cremation, the Christian church should offer a funeral liturgy in which the reality of death is not camouflaged and the resurrection of the body is affirmed. We solemnize the departure of our loved ones by reminding ourselves that we brought nothing into this world and that we can carry nothing out. “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—TIMOTHY GEORGE



Twenty Things to Do for a Grieving Friend

Friends can provide a special kind of comfort.

Job 2:11–13

1. Give him a hug.
2. Attend the visitation and funeral.
3. Buy her a hardy plant.
4. Baby-sit his children.
5. Walk her pets.
6. Make him frozen casseroles.
7. Pray often and specifically for him—and tell him you’re doing so.
8. Bake her cookies.
9. Mop her floors.
10. Help him write thank-you cards.
11. Collect photos of the person who died from friends and relatives, and make an album for him.
12. Buy her a pretty journal.
13. Write out your prayers for him and encourage others to do the same. Put these in a booklet and give it to him.
14. Give her money anonymously (funerals are expensive).
15. Pick up some basic groceries at the store and deliver them to her.
16. Buy her a really comfortable pillow and blanket to help her sleep and keep cozy.
17. Call him every week to check in.
18. After some time has passed, buy her a devotional on grief or a good book on losing a loved one—such as *Will I Ever Be Whole Again?* by Sandra P. Aldrich, or *When Life Hurts: Understanding God’s Place in Your Pain* by Philip Yancey.
19. Encourage him to go on walks or drives with you.
20. Keep inviting her to all the things you’d have invited her to before.

—SHEILA WRAY GREGOIRE



How to Speak to Someone Who's Grieving

We don't have to fix the problem or say anything profound.

Isaiah 61:1–3

Being close to someone who's heartbroken is difficult. We don't want to compound the pain by saying the wrong thing, yet we earnestly desire to help lessen the person's suffering. When our heart breaks for someone else, how can we reflect God's comfort?

Comforting Isn't Explaining God's Will

The need to explain people's suffering is natural. Even Jesus was asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus replied that things aren't always so straightforward. In this case, the man's blindness was so "the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3).

Comforting Isn't Fixing the Problem

When Judith lost her daughter two weeks before her due date, many people assured her, "At least you know you can get pregnant." Jeffrey, a pediatrician, often heard, "Think of what a better physician you'll be after having such a sick child." Trying to cheer people by telling them the character-building benefits of their suffering does little to comfort them.

Comforting Is Making Yourself Available

To comfort a friend is to focus on his or her feelings, not yours. Once we recognize we're helpless to explain or fix the problem, we can concentrate instead on meeting our friend's needs as best we can.

Be there. When nine-year-old Randy died after an unsuccessful liver transplant, his mother, JoAnn, was moved when 16 intensive care nurses braved rainy, icy weather for two hours just to be at the funeral. We often underestimate the impact our mere presence can have. A hug, a pat on the arm, or attendance at a memorial service is often as valued as anything else.

Listen. Listening involves encouraging your friend to express her feelings. If your grieving friend says, "I don't know how I'm going to get out of bed tomorrow," help her open up by asking a question such as, "What's the scariest part of facing your day?" Then listen to her answer. Try responding in a way that allows your friend to express what she feels.

Tell how the person/situation affected you. Telling a grieving person how you were affected by his loved one, even if it was only minimally, lets him know you feel his loss, too. Writing that memory on a card or in a letter is helpful.

Tell how you've been praying. In June 1998, Brenda's husband, Rob, died suddenly in a car accident. They had three young daughters. The card Brenda found most uplifting explained in detail how her friend had been praying for Brenda and her daughters. When your prayers are wails, and despair is overwhelming, knowing others are lifting up the things you need can ease some of your burden.

Tell your story. Being able to share with someone, "I remember when I felt as though I couldn't breathe, let alone eat," helps a friend know she's not crazy and that others have also felt that kind of pain. Be cautious, however, about saying "I understand how you feel"; some people might find this presumptuous. Though every loss is different, you can share your stories to let people know they're not alone. This is the heart of the apostle Paul's urging to "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Offer tangible help. If you ask, "Is there anything you need?" few people will feel comfortable admitting they need help. When Kevin's friend Raj said, "This Tuesday I'm bringing you and Marie dinner," they had no choice—and they were grateful. The more specific your offer, the more likely someone will accept it.

Follow through. One of the hardest things about losing someone is that eventually everything on the outside returns to normal, while on the inside you still feel torn apart. Grief doesn't end when the funeral's over. To make a difference in someone's life, follow through with your friends who mourn.

Marilyn remembers with gratitude a woman from her church who sent her a card every few months, long after the others stopped coming. Send a card on the anniversary of someone's death, or on what would have been a birthday or an anniversary. Or you could offer to babysit or prepare a special meal.

— SHEILA WRAY GREGOIRE



Answer a Child's Questions about Death

When we speak openly and honestly with children, we give them hope and comfort.

Mark 10:13–16

When illness, accidents, and death occur in our families, we want to shield our children from the pain—to plug their ears so they won't hear about it and guard their hearts so they won't feel it. But we can't. What we can do is help our children learn to deal with loss. Children will have plenty of questions; we need to be prepared with answers.

What happens when you die?

Visitations and funerals bring on many new questions from children. It can be strange and frightening for them to see someone they love dressed in unfamiliar clothes and lying in a casket.

Children are concerned about the necessities of life. When the concept of a new life in heaven is introduced, they want to know who is clothing and feeding their loved one. They are curious and want details: Does it hurt to die? Will Grandma have a garden? Can she hear us talking? Will she always wear that dress?

What to say: Obviously, we don't have all the answers about death and heaven, but we should address children's questions with age-appropriate facts: "It hurts to be sick, but it doesn't hurt to be dead."

Analogies or common examples also help children get a better understanding of death. Say something like, "When you die, the part of you that laughs and cries and thinks and feels goes to heaven. Your body stays here and doesn't feel anything anymore."

Use words of comfort like, "Justin is in heaven with Grandma. And the Bible says that in heaven, we won't be afraid or get hurt or feel sad."

Is Mr. Wilson in heaven?

If the deceased person was a Christian, this is a glorious question. But if we know the person wasn't a Christian—or even if we don't know for sure—it's a tough one to answer.

The concept of hell is extremely difficult to grasp. If your child seems deeply concerned about hell, ask your pastor to talk with you and your child and answer some of the hard questions.

We must admit to our children there is a lot we don't know about life after death, but we can share with them what we do know and what the Bible tells us.

What to say: Let your answer reflect God's love, saying, "We know God loves Mr. Wilson very much and wants him to be in heaven." You can also say, "The Bible tells us God wants everyone to experience grace and forgiveness (2 Peter 3:9). Mr. Wilson had a chance to meet Jesus in his lifetime, and if he did, then he's in heaven."

Where is heaven?

Most children cry when their balloons soar into the sky, but a little girl named Brooke let hers go on purpose. When Brooke's infant sister, Rose, was stillborn, Brooke told her three-year-old brother, Carter, "Heaven is way up there (pointing up), high in the sky, where balloons go for angels to play with in the clouds. Baby Rose is up there playing with the angels, and when we miss her, we can send her a balloon."

What to say: Children are concrete thinkers. The abstract concept of heaven is difficult for them to grasp. Say, "Heaven is where Jesus is. We think of it as up in the sky," or "We can't travel to heaven from earth until we die. It's in another world."

Children also want to know that heaven is a good and normal place to be, so tell them, "Everyone dies eventually. Jesus loves us and wants us to be with him when we die. When we get to heaven, we'll see Grandma again. She'll be waiting for us!"

PRACTICAL MINISTRY SKILLS

Why is everybody laughing?

Sandra was nine years old when her grandfather died. After the funeral, the extended family returned to the house to eat dinner. Sandra was appalled when the adults began laughing and enjoying themselves. It felt wrong to be happy when Grandpa had just died, and Sandra lashed out at her family.

Sandra's Aunt Loreta explained that it helps people grieve when they eat together and share happy and funny memories about the person who died. She assured Sandra that Grandpa would approve of this loving celebration of his life.

Death, funerals, and the grieving process are unfamiliar to children. Young children don't typically have an emotional response to death because they don't understand what death is. So when they ask questions about why people are acting the way they are, it's usually because they are seeking information—something isn't adding up for them.

What to say: Like Aunt Loreta, do your best to take your child's questions at face value and answer honestly. Say, "Remember how Grandpa used to laugh until his belly shook? He would want us to laugh and enjoy life, too. I bet he's laughing in heaven with Jesus right now!"

Sandra was given a great gift. A loving family member saw her distress and comforted her while calmly answering her questions. She was taught that grieving takes different forms and that it's okay for life to carry on.

Will you die? Will I?

My friend Karen's daughter Krystal was five and her son Michael was four when several loved ones died, including the mother of three of the children's friends.

Michael would sit on the sofa with Karen, sharing in her tears of grief. But Krystal played alone. In the weeks that followed, Krystal would periodically tell her mother, "Mommy, sometimes I think bad things." Karen would tell her that was normal and to replace those bad things with good thoughts.

Two years later, Karen arrived at school ten minutes late to find Krystal sobbing hysterically. She had been convinced that her mom had died, too.

Looking back, Karen realized that Krystal's "bad thoughts" were fears associated with death, fears she didn't know how to express. Karen and Krystal have since worked through these fears so Krystal can manage her fears and enjoy life.

What to say: Adults often have a more difficult time talking about death than children do, particularly in talking about our own deaths. We are tempted to say, "No, I'll always be here for you," even though we realize that might not be the case. We struggle to answer this question without frightening our children. But in truth, they are less frightened by the truth than by the unknown. So be honest. Say, "We will all die some day, but we hope it's not for a very long time."

Give your children concrete information about what would happen to them if you were to die. Tell them, "If I died while you were little, Auntie Ruth would take care of you," or "When I die, I will want you to have a wonderful life here. I'll be waiting for you in heaven."

Why does God let people die?

In the book *Children's Letters to God* (Workman), a child named Jane asks, "Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you've got now?"

Most adults have learned to pretend we have it all figured out, but death is a huge mystery. It's natural for all of us to have questions about why people die.

What to say: Answer honestly. Say, "Death is hard for us to understand. I trust Jesus when he says his children will live with him forever."

Encourage your children to pour out their heart cries to God. These questions are a natural part of the grieving process, so give your child permission to share her confusion, anger, and pain with God.

When children are shaken by pain and death, they need our honest, heartfelt answers to their questions. As we seek to answer them with gentle truth and the promises of the Bible, we find that God's peace comforts all of us.

—SHARON MARSHALL



The Grieving Processes of Children

A child's age plays a big part in how he or she reacts to death.

Psalm 23

Although children aren't always able to express their grief verbally, they may be grieving deeply. Pay attention to their behavior, looking for signs that they're working through the loss.

Birth to Age Two: Changes in behavior (eating, sleeping, playing) indicate grief. Children this young don't understand what's happening, but they feel less secure in reaction to emotions around them. They need nurturing and comforting words. Even if your children are young, explain to them why people are sad or fearful. Your words of truth will comfort them.

Ages Three to Five: Children this age see themselves as the center of the universe. If someone dies, they think they caused it. Guilt is the prime emotion, so assure them that the death of your loved one was no one's fault. If they confess to thinking bad thoughts about the person who died, help them ask God for forgiveness while assuring them that the person's death had nothing to do with their thoughts.

Ages Six to Eight: These children are too old to escape completely through fantasy but too young to go through an adult grieving process. Instead, they will often show signs of depression. Encourage them to write letters or draw pictures in honor of the deceased. Give them permission to cry or express their grief in healthy ways. Help them put words to their emotions. Be a patient listener.

Ages Nine to Twelve: Anger is the dominant emotion for this age group. They know the death is not their fault, but they feel slighted by the one who died, and they are mad! Don't scold them for their anger; teach them how to manage it in productive, positive ways. Journaling can be a wonderful tool for children this age who need a safe place to unleash intense emotions.

Teens: Most teenagers go through an adult grieving process—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance—but they aren't always mature enough to handle the emotions involved. Their reactions could lead to substance abuse, abusing money and credit, or compromising their values. Keep a close eye on teens and model healthy grief. Create a safe haven for teens to talk through their grief by being an understanding listener.

— SHARON MARSHALL



Further Exploration

Resources for Christian funerals.

Caring Through the Funeral: A Pastor's Guide, by *Gene Fowler*. This guidebook helps pastors to minister and care throughout a funeral (Chalice Press, 2004; ISBN 0827204930).

A Grief Observed, by *C. S. Lewis*. This book is C.S. Lewis's honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001; ISBN 0060652381).

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief, by *Martha W. Hickman*. For those recovering from the death of a loved one, this collection of daily affirmations and meditations ease the grieving process and pave the way for healing to begin (Perennial, 1999; ISBN 0380773384).

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Leading Today's Funerals: A Pastoral Guide for Improving Bereavement Ministry, by *Dan S. Lloyd*. This book provides practical information for working with the grieving and arranging funerals (Baker Books, 1997; ISBN 0801090326).

"Reflections," *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* (10-23-00); <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/012/37.118.html>. Quotations about dying and eternity that may be used during funeral services.

Simply Essential Funeral Planning Kit, by *Don S. Cochrane*. This step-by-step kit covers the details of the funeral, including the types of services, professional assistance available, costs involved, and emotional, cultural, and legal considerations (Self-Counsel Press, 2002; ISBN 1551803828).

Weddings, Funerals, and Special Events, by *Eugene Peterson, Calvin Miller, et. al.* This book offers clear, tested counsel on how to prepare for and conduct funerals (Word Books, 1987; ISBN 0917463137).