

## Tips for explaining cremation to children

Cremation can be a difficult topic to discuss, even for some adults. It is natural for children to be curious about cremation. When answering a child's questions about the subject, keep in mind the following:

- Tell a child only what he or she is able to understand. There is no need to be dishonest or evasive, so start with simple words and phrases. Add more explanations or detail when your child asks questions or shows you she understands.
- It is not unusual for a child to ask the same question over and over. Repeating questions and seeking answers helps the child make sense of and adjust to the loss of a loved one.
- It is important to point out that once a person dies, the body completely stops working and doesn't feel anything.
- Cremation is one way of caring for the body after someone has died. Whether a body is buried or cremated, the body turns to ashes or dust. Cremation just makes this happen faster.
- Explain to your child that the body is placed in a closed container or casket and is taken to a place called a crematory. At the crematory, there is a special room where the container is placed. It is a very hot room with heat so hot that it makes the body turn to ash. Avoid words such as fire or burn as these may frighten a child.
- Let your child know that the cremated remains are placed in a different container—sometimes a box or an urn—and returned to the family. Your child may want to look at the contents. If this is the case, look at them yourself first so you can describe them to your child. Very often, the cremated remains look like fine gray or white sand.
- Depending on the age of your child, you may wish to include him or her in the planning of what will be done with the cremated remains. For example, some families choose to bury the remains or scatter the ashes in a meaningful place.

If you have questions about this information or how to talk with your child, ask your nurse to call the child life staff: St. Paul Campus: (651) 220-6465, Minneapolis Campus: (612) 813-6259.

