



## Explaining Cremation to Children

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The concept of cremation may be scary for some children. They may have heard adults use words such as "oven" and "burn", or may picture in their minds that cremation is like setting the person's body on fire. It is important to use simple, concrete language, and avoid using words that may frighten children when talking about cremation.

First, it is important to emphasize that when someone dies, what's left is just their body -- the part of the person that made them special is no longer there. They cannot see, hear, think, talk, breathe, or FEEL anything anymore. After someone dies, the family calls the funeral home to help them care for the body. There are two ways to care for the body after a person dies: burial or cremation. Whether the body is buried or cremated, the end result is the same: only the bones remain.

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### Following is a suggestion on how to explain the cremation process to a child:

“When a body is cremated, the person's body is placed into a special box. Sometimes this is a wooden casket but often it is a cremation container made of thick cardboard and wood. That box is put into a room (or chamber), called a crematory, where it gets very, very hot. The heat helps to change the person's body into cremated remains very quickly. It usually takes about 2 to 3 hours.”

“After the cremation is finished, all that is left are the bones. There are tiny pieces as well as large pieces of bone. These bone pieces are then placed into a machine called a processor, which changes the bones so they are the texture of sand or powder. The cremated remains (or “ashes”) are gray in color – the color of our bones.”

[When a person's body is buried, it takes many many years for the body to change to “ashes”.]

“The cremated remains are then placed into a container or urn that the family has chosen to use. The cremated remains of an adult weigh about 5 or 6 pounds. The cremated remains of a baby weigh just a few ounces. Does that make sense?”

“Families have many choices when it comes to cremation. They can have a body present during funeral services and cremate the body after. They can have the body cremated before services and still have an urn there.

Some families keep the cremated remains at their house in a pretty container, or they might bury them in a cemetery. Sometimes families sprinkle or scatter the cremated remains in an outdoor place that is special to the family or to the person who died. Some even will keep a small amount to put into jewelry or into smaller urns.”