



The Irish Childhood  
Bereavement Network

# Factsheet: Explaining Cremation to children

## **EXPLAINING CREMATION TO CHILDREN**

As cremation is a very recent funeral ritual in Ireland. Many adults are asking the question: "How do we explain cremation to our children?"

Before we do so it is important to inform ourselves about cremation so that we are comfortable with what we are trying to explain. A leaflet produced by The Glasnevin Trust guide entitled:

**Questions about CREMATION** is a very useful guide.

This is available at [www.glasnevintrust.ie/funeralservices//Questions-about-Cremationpdf](http://www.glasnevintrust.ie/funeralservices//Questions-about-Cremationpdf).

This document addresses adult questions but how do we explain cremation to children?

### **Our language**

- Firstly we need to be careful about the language we use. Younger children may not understand that the dead don't feel and they could become distressed if we use words like burn as they associate it with fire and see fire as dangerous and fearful.
- We need to give time and thought to the conversations we might have with the child about cremation
- We need to consider the age of the child and their personality when preparing to speak with them. An anxious child may find the explanation difficult.
- Never assume the response the child will give to the information. They may know more about cremation through T.V and media than we realise
- It is important to explain cremation in the context of other funeral rites such as burial.
- Generally it is the deceased person's wish to be cremated rather than buried
- Now that they are dead the person doesn't need their body any more so they want to have it cremated

### **Simple explanations might include:**

#### **For younger children:**

The person's body is turned into fine powdery ashes in the crematorium. These will be placed in an urn (A pot that will hold them). Afterwards these will be returned to us. When they come we may scatter them or bury them in a special place that the person wanted them to go.

#### **For older children:**

At the end of the funeral service in the crematorium the coffin passes through some curtains and we don't see it anymore. It will be taken away to a special place where it will be turned into ash. We don't see this happen. There are special people to do this work. When they are finished they place the ashes into an urn. The person who died (name) wanted their ashes scattered at the sea or in a place that they loved. So we will carry out their wishes in a short time from now.

- Be led by the questions that follow
- Ask if the child understands



This is an example of an urn that might be used today. Urns have been used for hundreds of years for burial. We see pictures of them in many cultures and see examples in many museums. This conversation is one, we might have with children regarding funerals and death not when the child is bereaved but when a funeral occurs in our local community. It allows a child to take in the information factually with much less emotion than when bereaved.

Book:

Where is Daddy's Body Now Elkie Barber

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For further information see: [www.childhoodbereavement.ie](http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie)

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