

# Is there a good way to explain cremation to a child?

Explaining cremation can be a challenge. Many adults are squeamish and uncomfortable about the process themselves. Even those who are strong advocates for cremation will admit that having to explain it to a child seems daunting. Most of us would prefer to explain the process in respect to a family pet or to someone the child does not know very well or feel deep attachment to. Even that is not easy and sometimes fate is not so kind as to allow us those opportunities.

There is a calm and undramatic way to prepare a child for the return of a loved one's cremains. The first step is to make sure that the child understands that death is the end of all life in the body – that the person's body does not think or feel or breathe, that the person's life in the body has ended and that the body left behind when someone dies is like a fallen leaf or a broken twig. The next thing is to explain that the body of the loved one (not the loved one) will be cremated, consistently using the words "Grandma's body", not "Grandma".

Explain that the remains or cremains of the body will be returned in a container called an urn and that the urn is not very big. From this point, provide information based on the questions the child will ask. *Ask the child if he or she has any questions.* If the child asks how the body gets smaller or what it's like, say, "Cremation is a process that makes the body kind of like sand." If the child asks how, say, "The process uses heat." If the child asks, "Is it fire?", answer by telling him again that the body is no longer alive and that it is just left behind, like a fallen leaf. When you are sure the child understands, you can say, "Yes, the way that cremation happens is with heat or fire."

The key to explaining cremation is to be led by the child to reveal the level of detail she needs to understand. Using non-dramatic words to describe the process is also important. If the child seems shocked, explain that bodies are cremated every day – that we believe it is an honorable way to take care of the body after someone has died. Most children will accept the idea fairly easily when provided with a thoughtful, careful explanation.