

COLUMBUS  
COMMUNITY  
DEATHCARE

## GUIDE TO **PET** **HOME** **FUNERALS**

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## WHY HAVE A HOME FUNERAL FOR A PET?

This is an entirely personal choice, and there is no one right direction for each person. A home funeral is the best choice when a family or individual wants to focus on processing the loss and grief emotionally and spend little or no money. Taking care of your pet's body at home can:

**Allow the work of processing loss to happen on your timeline.** You control how long your family sees the body, how long the funeral lasts, and can adjust based on when everyone is ready. In other situations, you may only have a few moments with a pet's body before it's taken away, and you may not be present at all.

**Help children understand death.** Often pets pass away in a vet's office, and children may only briefly see the pet or not see the pet's body at all. Death becomes something vague, where someone disappears. Pet death is often the first death children experience in life. Allowing them to ask questions and process it fully can help them figure out what "dead" is — that it is not sleeping, and it is not disappearing.

**Help you grieve better.** There's nothing wrong with cremation itself, but when a pet dies and is immediately cremated with no ceremony, there is no story through which we can cognitively stitch together this big transition: death itself may happen quickly, but our acceptance and coping does not.

# Getting Started



**1. Plan your timeline.** First, determine when you will do each stage of the process, keeping in mind that you probably want an uncooled pet to be buried or transferred to the crematorium within 24-36 hours. If there are people you'd like present, pick a time for the ceremony & burial that allows plenty of time for the other tasks as well as rest and care for your family, then contact those folks to invite them to attend.

**planning** → **body preparation** → **gravesite preparation** → **ceremony & burial**

**2. Choose a covering.** How would you like your pet's body to go into the grave? You may choose to wrap them in one of your old shirts, their favorite blanket, or any sheet or material. *Any type of fabric can function as a **shroud**.* The other option would be to put them in a box of some type, and *any rigid container can function as a **casket**.*

Either option is a fine and the choice is based on personal preferences. Caskets do usually require larger graves be dug, so keep that in mind. On the plus side, they can allow for decoration as well — art can be glued, painted directly on, decoupage.

[IMAGE PLACEHOLDER: DIFFERENT PET LAYOUTS - SHROUD, CASKET, ETC.]

### 3. Gather materials and supplies.

- **Ceremonial needs.** Candles and jars or lanterns, incense, small fire pits, and matches are all opportunities for folks to focus on a quiet visual element progressing while experiencing their own feelings. Music is easily streamed via any speaker and phone or other devices. If it is cold outside, grab blankets for folks.
- **Tribute items.** These should be things that your friends or family can drop into the grave or have cremated with the pet's body, sort of offerings of your love or memories of them.



*Favorite toys, treats, food items chews.*

*Collars, leashes, clothes, snuggle items.*

*Art or notes that the family makes for the pet.*

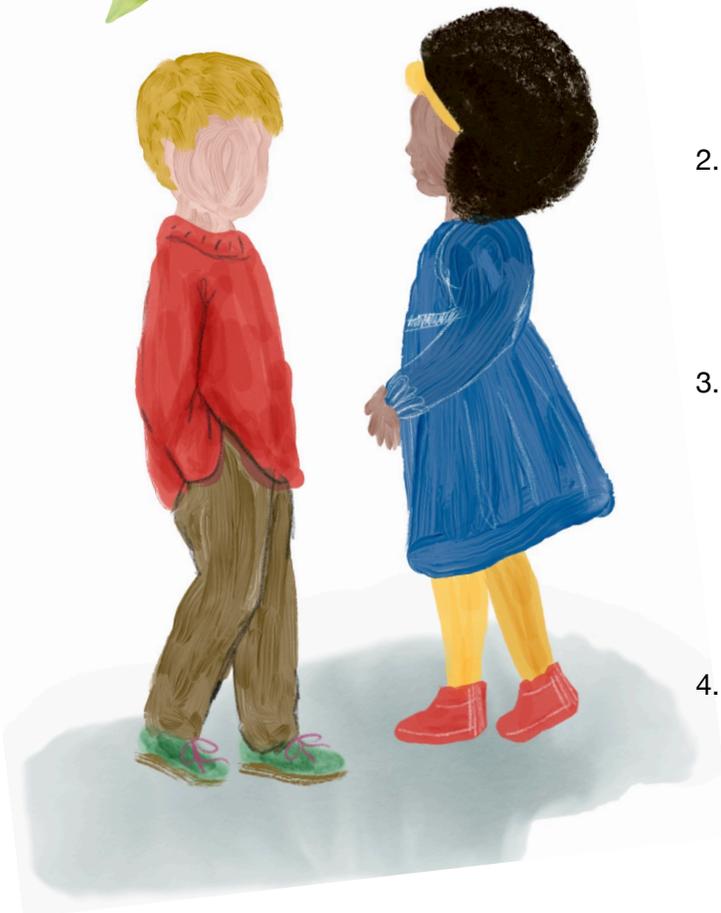
- **Art supplies.** Pen, markers or crayons, paper, and scissors allow folks to write notes or thoughts about the pet, which may be more comfortable than saying them aloud. Kids and anyone who is challenged with verbal expression especially benefits from other ways of articulating loss.
- **Garden tools.** If burying, find or borrow long-handled (1) *shovels*. One is fine, more if you have helpers. Gather some (2) *outdoor materials that are heavy enough to keep animals out* — rocks, stepping stones, pavers, bricks, or heavy pieces of wood to put on top of the grave. (3) *Garden shears, snippers or heavy-duty kitchen scissors* will work for cutting greenery.
- **Optionally, gather grooming tools and products** if you want to tidy your pet up beforehand. This isn't necessary, but may be desirable if the pet was ill or wounded, or if grooming was a loving act during the pet's life. Wipes or wet washcloth, a comb or brush, a collar or neckerchief — choose whatever you would have used normally.
- **Absorbent materials** like a diaper, pads, cleaning cloths, old towels will do for putting under your pet's body to catch waste that may be released as the muscles relax.



# Exposing Children to Death

What is helpful for a child, and what will be traumatic for them to see? What is too hard or too sad? Families worry a lot about “getting it right.” Across child development experts and veterinarians who work with families daily, there are some agreed upon tenants to good death education.

1. **Death is part of the lifecycle.** Study the science and lifecycles of different creatures in your family — frogs, gnats, whales, barrel sponges. Some live for mere days and others centuries. Show that death in the animal kingdom is part of the food chain; watch food decomposition time-lapse videos so children understand the concept. Lastly, help them see the give-and-take relationship between death and birth.
2. **What weirds you out may not bother them.** Tongue hanging out? Your kid may just see that factually. Adults have a lifetime of associations to attach, and we tend to project them on children when we gauge what will be disturbing to them.
3. **Don't confuse death with sleep.** Your dog isn't “being put to sleep.” Death isn't a long sleep. You don't want your child to think that going to sleep at night is connected with dying. Teach your child about the vital organs and how to detect their own heartbeat and breath. Show them a time-lapse of a tree or flower through the seasons, using all its energy then wilting. Explain that all living things are similar.
4. **Teach, ask, and respect.** Teach your young child the basic concepts, preparing them for what they might see or feel. Then ask them if they want to be involved or not. Respect their answers, letting them navigate this with your guidance.



*Always Remember*  
Cece Meng

*Cry, Heart, But Never Break*,  
Glen Ringved

*The Goodbye Book*,  
Todd Parr

*The Dead Bird*,  
Christian Robinson

