

Books on Death, Dying, and Grief for Parents and Children

These books are available locally by order through Waucoma Bookstore, or on-line through the Barr-Harris Children's Grief Center or Amazon.

For Pre-school and Early Elementary School Children

Brown, Laurie Krasny and Marc Brown. *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death.*

This book explains death in a way that pre-school children can understand.

Bunting, E. *The Happy Funeral.* New York: Harper and Row. .

This is an exceptionally interesting book about a little girl who participates in the rituals of her grandfather's funeral.

Clifton, Lucille (1988). *Everett Anderson's Goodbye.* Reading Rainbow.

An African-American boy copes with the death of his father.

Grollman, Earl A. (1990). *Talking About Death.* Boston: Beacon Press.

This is a most practical guide for parents and other adults who are faced with explaining death to a child while at the same time often struggling with their own feelings about death. It addresses many questions children may ask and provides suggestions for responding, keeping in mind the developmental age of the child and the unique circumstances of the individual loss. It provides read-along passages for children whose parents who may need some help finding the words to express their responses.

This book would be most helpful if read by parents first, before using the read along passages, as the author is sensitive to the grief process of the adults as they help their children cope with their own thoughts and feelings about death.

Earl A. Grollman has written many excellent books about death.

Hickman, M.W. (1984). *Last Week My Brother Anthony Died.* Abington Press. .

A poignant, touching story told through the eyes of a girl whose infant brother died of congenital heart disease. The family minister is sensitive and helpful and the story ends on an upbeat note.

Mellonie, Bryan and Robert Ingpen (1983). *Lifetimes*. Bantum Books.

This is a simply written and informative book about the life cycles of all living things. It tells about beginnings (birth) and endings (death) with living in between as natural and inevitable. It is a beautiful book for parents and young children to read and discuss together. It describes different lifetimes for different living things as well as lifetimes that are shortened due to unusual circumstances.

Parker, Marjorie Blain. Illustrator: Janet Wilson (2002). *Jasper's Day*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press.

This is a beautiful book about a terminally ill dog who has been part of a loving family. As the dog's pain becomes less amenable to medication, the family makes a difficult decision and plans how they will spend Jasper's last day before bringing him to the vet.

The unity of the family and its relationship to the pet who has given them such pleasure is told poignantly but straightforwardly as they are brought together at the final goodbye.

Shook-Hazen, B. (1985). *Why Did Grandpa Die?* Racine, WI: Western Publishing Co.

A little girl's reaction to the death of her grandfather makes for a compelling story. There is age appropriate confusion, bewilderment and boredom with the mourning rituals. This book is good because there is a consistent honesty in the child's feelings.

Tiffault, B. (1992). *A Quilt for Elizabeth*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation.

This is a beautiful story about a little girl whose father gets sick and dies. After a while the girl and her grandmother decide to make a quilt from her father's garments. This book is highly recommended because it deals with the loss and mourning in a highly creative manner.

Vigna, Judith (1991). *Saying Goodbye to Daddy*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.

This is an excellent book about a kindergarten girl whose father dies in a car accident. She has a difficult time coming to terms with the loss. She uses denial and avoidance to diminish the pain of the loss. However, the reality of the funeral confronts her with what she is missing. Her mother and grandfather are there to help her with the confusion and denial. Because she goes through a range of emotions, this books is highly recommended.

For Elementary School Children

Carrick, C. (1976). *The Accident*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, Clarion Books.

The story is about a little boy's reaction to his dog being run over by a truck. The boy's feelings are captured accurately with much emphasis on the anger at the truck driver, parents and himself. The story is limited in scope and time frame (only one day). However, it focuses accurately on the boy's reactions and it portrays the adults as helpful.

Claudy, A.F. (1984). *Dusty Was My Friend*. Human Sciences Press.

This is a beautiful, well-told story of an eight-year-old boy whose ten-year-old friend died in a car accident. This is an excellent book for anyone who has lost a close friend.

Graeber, C. (1982). *Mustard*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co.

This is an excellent book about the aging and death of a cat. The book has no shortcomings and is highly recommended because of its realism and sensitivity.

Hesse, K. (1993). *Poppy's Chair*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

This is an excellent story about a little girl who tries to come to grips with the death of her grandfather. She is afraid to touch the grandfather's picture, sleep in his bed, or sit in his chair. The element of fear, an important element of mourning, is handled in a thoughtful manner.

Lowden-Golightly, S. (1993). *Emily's Sadhappy Season*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation.

This is an excellent story about a little girl's reaction to the sudden death of her father from a heart attack. The story is well told and it covers the whole gamut of feelings that the child would experience in response to the loss. It shows how the mother then tries to take the father's place with limited success. The story is realistic and the emotional responses are honest and sincere. These qualities are seldom seen in children's stories about painful subjects. At the end of the story there are some helpful tips for children grieving the death of a parent. This book is highly recommended for children ages 6-10.

Smith, D. B. *A Taste of Blackberries*. Boston: Thomas Crowell Company.

The story of a little boy whose best friend dies and his struggles to come to terms with the loss. The story is about the events leading up to the death, the loss and the funeral. At the end, with the help of adults, there is some resolution of the loss.

Thomas, J. R. (1988). *Saying Goodbye to Grandma*. New York: Clarion Books.

A seven-year-old girl attends her grandmother's funeral. The main strength of this book is that the children continue to be children in spite of the solemnity of the occasion. The story is nicely told and demonstrates that this kind of book can be charming and realistic at the same time.

For Older Elementary and Middle School Children

Coleman, Paul (1995). *Where the Balloons Go*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation.

This is a touching story about a little boy and his grandmother who send balloons into the sky and then wonder what happens to them. Toward the end the grandmother dies suddenly and the boy continues this activity alone. While the story is well told, there is very little about the grandmother's death and the boy's subsequent reactions. Sending the balloons becomes an end in itself while the loss is treated as a secondary issue. Perhaps dealing with the feelings about the loss was just too painful.

Henkes, Kevin (1997). *Sun & Spoon*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

This thoughtful, well-written book describes how a ten-year-old boy deals with the death of his grandmother in a constructive way.

Hermes, P. (1982). *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

This is a touching story of a young girl's struggle to deal with her mother's imminent death and of their interactions with each other. There are some tender moments between the parents and the child as the story builds step-by-step to the inevitable end.

Lorenzen, K. (1983). *Lanky Longlegs*. New York: Atheneum. A Margaret K. McElderry Book.

This outstanding book was translated from Norwegian after winning numerous prizes and becoming part of a TV show. It is about a girl whose little brother dies and whose dog has pups. The book's strength is that basic questions about life and death are handled in the course of daily living. The characters are interesting and they experience a range of feelings about each other. Even though this book is about the death of a sibling, it would be good reading for children who experience any kind of loss.

Paterson, K. (1979). *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Harper and Row.

A well-told novel about two ten-year-olds, a boy and a girl, who become friends and build a fort in a tree together. While the boy is visiting Washington, the girl returns to the tree house. She falls in a creek, is knocked unconscious, and dies. It is only at the end of the book that the boy deals with her death. The reaction to the death is accurate but too brief.

For Middle School Children

Blume, Judy (1987). *Tiger Eyes*. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury Press.

This is an excellent book about loss. It is the story of a fourteen-year-old girl whose father is shot in a store robbery. The story describes the attempt by her, the mother, and the younger brother to cope with the loss in the course of a year. (Also for high school students.)

Fausey, Linda (2005). *Puggy Brown Ears' Purr Song*. Address inquiries to Linda Fausey, 328 N. Walnut, Lansing, MI 48933

This is a beautifully illustrated story about a cat's loss of his best cat friend, the feelings stirred and attempts to deal with the loss. The book illustrates some of the main questions and issues raised in grief and mourning. It describes grief, questions of the unfairness of it all, denial, fantasies of where the person is after death, and the fact that life changes after loss. The book's essential message is that death is paradoxical: the loved one is a part of you and you can keep the memory of the loved one inside you, but you also have to let it go in order to move through the grieving process. This is a good resource for children in late latency and early adolescence who like cats.

Greene, C. (1976). *Beat the turtle drum*. New York: Viking Press.

This is a beautiful story about the love and friendship between two sisters. When the younger one dies after falling out of a tree, the older one (thirteen years old) talks about her feelings in a very honest, sincere and realistic manner. An excellent book for children who have lost a sibling.

For High School Students

Schotter, R. (1979). *A Matter of Time*. New York: Collins Press.

This is a very moving, beautifully written book about a high school girl, an only child, who is coping with her mother's illness and anticipated death.

For Parents

Grollman, Earl A., *Talking about Death*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

This is a most practical guide for parents and other adults who are faced with explaining death to a child while at the same time often struggling with their own feelings about death. It addresses many questions children may ask and provides suggestions for responding, keeping in mind the developmental age of the child and the unique circumstances of the individual loss. It provides read-along passages for children whose parents who may need some help finding the words to express their responses. This book would be most helpful if read by parents first, before using the read-along passages, as the author is sensitive to the grief process of the adults as they help their children cope with their own thoughts and feelings about death.

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Requarth, Margo. *After a Parent's Suicide: Helping Children Heal*. Sebastopol, CA: Healing Hearts Press, 2006.

The book deals addresses a difficult subject that most feel helpless in addressing. It is written to help the surviving parent or caretaker deal with the children's particular grief when their parent commits suicide. It would also help teachers or mental health professionals to become aware of the additional complications for survivors of suicide. The author is a survivor of a parental suicide and addresses the issue in a compassionate and practical manner. The reader will learn what to tell the child, how the child will understand the news depending on his or her age, and what to expect later as the child grows up with this event impacting his/her life. Ms. Requarth also shares anecdotes of children at each stage, which make the book resonate with the reader. The book is practical, hands-on, and gives the reader hope that children may be helped to survive a parent's suicide.

Schaefer, Dan and Christine Lyons, *How Do We Tell the Children?* New Market Press, 1993.

This is a clearly written book by a funeral director that provides helpful suggestions to parents and caregivers on how to inform children of death in many different situations. It respects the child's need to know what has happened in a way that is appropriate for his or her age. It discusses listening to children's thoughts and feelings and addressing common misperceptions. There is an excellent quick reference crisis section at the end of the book that clearly outlines various kinds of deaths, suggestions as to how to explain them to children in different age groups, and how to prepare them for what comes next. Various feelings are described with an attempt to understand each child's unique coping needs surrounding the death experience. This is an excellent book to guide parents whose own grief may be interfering with their thinking about how to help their children.

Seibert, Diana et al. *Helping Children Live with Death and Loss*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003

This book is designed for parents, caregivers, teachers, and other adults who will be responding to children who have experienced a loss. Several topics are discussed: how to answer children's questions about death, how children respond developmentally to loss, choosing literature about death for children, and understanding and responding to specific death and loss situations. The book is written sensitively and empathically so as to help the adult deal with the child's feelings about loss.

Simon, Leslie, and Jan Johnson Drantell. *A Music I No Longer Heard: The Early Death of a Parent*. NY: Simon and Schuster.

This book consists of interviews with 70 people who lost a parent before the age of 19 because of illness, accident, suicide, or murder. The book is notable for the way the material is organized and presented as well as for the comments and conclusions interspersed throughout. The interviews appear in small segments to illustrate the themes of each chapter. Each person interviewed digs deep into his or her own past to describe how, as a result of the loss, life was changed in their family and community relationships and how their orientation towards the future was changed.

The authors are sensitive to childhood idealization of the deceased but honor its uses in coping. They note the role of current, real relationships in the mourning process and show how mourning may be delayed. They acknowledge that childhood parent loss may involve what may already have been lost "before the final loss" and show how ever-present the loss becomes. They underscore the need to construct memories from the time before the event in order to retrieve a past which the bereaved child can use for future adaptations. They are also aware that each child responds uniquely at each stage of development and that children need to be informed in a way appropriate to that age. Finally, both authors share the circumstances and feelings of their own parent loss in childhood and its effects on their lives.

This book is not a how-to for survivors but a very readable resource for anyone who has experienced loss of a parent in childhood or knows someone who has.