

Resources for Talking to Children about Death and Grieving



Prepared by
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The following resources are available at The Ottawa Hospital Patient and Family Libraries. The Ottawa Hospital has two patient and family libraries - one for general health information at the Civic Campus (Main Building, Room D100A) and the Ninon Bourque Patient Resource Library - specializing in cancer-related information - at the General Campus (Cancer Centre, Main Floor).

For adults:

Grief in children. A handbook for adults.

Atle Dyregrov. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008.

Explains children's understanding of death at different ages and gives a detailed outline of exactly how the adults around them can best help them cope.

Grief in young children. A handbook for adults.

Atle Dyregrov. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008.

Explains young children's understanding of death at different ages and gives a detailed outline of exactly how the adults around them can best help them cope.

Guiding your child through grief.

Mary Ann Emswiler and James Emswiler. New York: Bantam, 2000.

How children and teens cope with grief and practical advice to help in the short and long term.

Healing Childrens' Grief: Surviving a parent's death from cancer.

Grace Hyslop Christ. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Intended mainly for health care professionals, but may be helpful for family members as well. The book is based on a study of families where one parent was terminally ill with cancer and how children respond to a parent's death. Recommendations are provided, based on the child/teenagers age.

It's ok to cry: A parent's guide to helping children through the losses of life. An interactive recovery workbook.

H. Norman Wright. 2004.

This workbook is a guide, which will assist anyone helping a child cope with loss in his or her life. Losses are defined as not only death but also serious illness, divorce, trauma etc. The workbook contains scripture to help answer some of the questions that children may have about loss, God and meaning in young lives.

Learning to say good-bye: when a child's parent dies.

Eda LeShan. New York : Avon Books, 1988.

Intended for teenagers and older children too.

Talking about death: a dialogue between parent and child.

Earl A Grollman. Boston : Beacon Press, 1990.

A guide for parents and children to read together. Suggestions for answering children's questions about death are included.

When a parent is sick: helping parents explain serious illness to children.

Joan Hamilton. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 2001.

The book has several chapters on explaining dying and death to children with suggestions for age-appropriate resources.

For teenagers:

Coping when a parent dies.

Janet Grosshandler-Smith. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1995.

The Grieving teen: a guide for teenagers and their friends.

Helen Fitzgerald. New York : Fireside Books, 2000.

How it feels when a parent dies.

Jill Krementz. New York: Knopf, 1981.

Personal stories of 18 children, age 7 to 16, describing how it feels when a parent dies.

The Kids' book about death and dying: by and for kids.

Eric E Rofes. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.

Thoughts and feelings about death and dying, written by children between the ages of eleven and fourteen.

Kid's care (DVD).

Laura Sky. Toronto : Sky Works Charitable Foundation. 77 minutes. 2005.

A documentary film featuring a group of young people who talk candidly about their experiences of loss and what family, friends and teachers can do to help them and other bereaved young people cope with their feelings of fear, anger, isolation and sadness.

Motherless Daughters: the legacy of loss.

Hope Edelman. New York: Delta, 1994.

and

Letters from motherless daughters: words of courage, grief and healing.

Hope Edelman. New York : Delta, 1995.

How a mother's death can shape the life of a girl or young woman.

A teen's simple guide through grief.

Alexis Cunningham. Torrance, CA : Jalmar Press, 2001.

A very quick read – just the basics are included in this book, for this age population.

Will I ever feel good again? When you're overwhelmed by grief and loss.

Karen Dockrey. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993.

Presented as a guided journal. Written from a Christian perspective.

You and a death in the family.

Antoine Wilson. NY : The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2001.

This book aims to bridge the gap between the unspoken and hard-to-communicate aspects of dealing with a death in the family and the questions and concerns of preteen readers. (from the Publisher) Written for ages 10-12.

For children:

Aarvy aardvark finds hope: a read aloud story for people of all ages about loving and losing, friendship and hope.

Donna O'Toole. Burnsville, NC : Compassion Press, 1988.

With the help of his friend Ralph Rabbit, Aarvy Aardvark comes to terms with the loss of his mother and brother. Suitable for children five years and older.

Badger's parting gifts.

Susan Varley. London: Magi, 1997.

Written in English and Vietnamese. Badger's friends are sad when he dies, but they all have a special memory of something that he has taught them. Suggested for children ages 4 – 8 but some readers feel that the book may be too abstract for that age group and suggest that it may be more useful for children older than 8.

Checkers and Dotty saying goodbye...

Ellie Mruzek. Monroe, MI : Nurse Ellie Productions, 2000.

The booklet is specifically designed to help guide a young child through the confusion and pain of saying goodbye to a loved one who has died. (Taken from the publisher's website) Suitable for younger children, under the age of 5.

The Fall of Freddie the leaf: A Story of life for all ages.

Leo Buscaglia. Thorofare, New Jersey: Slack Inc., 1982.

Also available in video.

Discusses life and death as part of a natural cycle. Written as a story for children, but may also be helpful for preteens and adults who need comfort when grieving.

Fox Song.

Joseph Bruchac and Paul Morin. New York: Putnam, 1993.

Grade 2-4-Jamie, grieving over the death of her great-grandmother, remembers and describes some of the special times they shared. (Excerpt taken from School Library Journal review.) Suitable for children aged 6 and up.

Gentle Willow: a story for children about dying.

Joyce C Mills. Washington: Magination Press, 1993.

For ages 4-8. The book "alludes to the metamorphosis of caterpillar into butterfly, and it describes death as change of form rather than an ending. It also talks about how the living can comfort the dying and how we cherish memories of them after death. All of this is brought up very tenderly, in the context of a squirrel whose friend, a tree, is dying." (except taken from a review posted on Amazon.com).

Geranium Morning.

Sandy Powell. Mineapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 1990.

This book is about two friends who lose parents, one suddenly in an accident and one by illness, and how they learn to deal with their grief. Suitable for children ages 6 and older.

Gran-Gran's best trick: a story for children who have lost someone they love.

Dwight Holden. Washington: Magination Press, 1989.

True story of a girl's experience with her grandfather's illness and his death from cancer. Suitable for children 5 to 8.

Grandma, I'll miss you: a child's story about death and new life.

Kathryn Slattery. Elgin, Ill: Chariot Books, 1993.

This book is written from the Christian perspective: Katy misses her grandma, but is comforted to know that grandma is beginning a new life in heaven. For ages 5-10.

Help me say goodbye: activities for helping kids cope when a special person dies.

Janis Silverman. MN : Fairview Press, 1999.

This is an "art therapy book that encourages children to express their feelings in words or pictures. Discusses what to say and do, how to deal with feelings, and how to remember friends and relatives that have died. For parents, teachers, and therapists." (from Amazon.com)
Suggested for children aged 4-8.

I heard your daddy died.

Mark Scrivani. Omaha, NE : Centering Corporation, 1996.

Our facilitators who run a 3 to 5 year-old grief support group have used this book and the children just loved the book. It is an easy read and their are questions to ask grieving children which are helpful in understanding their grief. It is a nice interactive book and can be used with children up to age 10. Great book for children who have lost a father. (review from Amazon.com)

I heard your mommy died.

Mark Scrivani. Omaha, NE : Centering Corporation, rev. 2005.

This book can be used as a vehicle for talking about feelings and ways to cope with the death of a loved one. It includes many ideas to help the child to remember their parent. It is written for children 2-6.

I miss you : a first look at death.

Pat Thomas. Hauppauge, NY : Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 2001.

Written by a psychotherapist and counselor this book explores the issue of death for young children. The main character in the story is a little girl and the person that dies is a grandmotherly figure. It does a good job of covering various aspects of dying, the funeral, saying goodbye etc. It would be suitable for children 4 – 8.

Mama's going to heaven soon.

Kathe Martin Copeland. Minneapolis, MN : Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

A compassionate story that will assist children and caregivers in talking about the anticipated death of a parent. The story addresses some of the children's confusion because their mom is sick, their sadness they feel when they learn that their mom is going to die and their questions about what will happen when she dies. On the final pages of the book there is a useful list of suggestions for caregivers to further assist them when talking to children about death. Suitable for children 3+.

My Grandad.

Sheila Isherwood. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1994.

This book deals with the subject of death in a thoughtful and positive way. A girl's grandad has died, and she looks back on the happy times they enjoyed and the things they did together. Written by a mother and daughter team as a response to their own bereavement, this is a helpful, gentle approach to dealing with the death of a loved one. Interest age 4+.

Sad isn't bad : a good-grief guidebook for kids dealing with loss.

Michaelene Mundy. St.Meinrad, IN : One Caring Place, 1998.

Another book written for children and their caregivers who are coping with loss. The book does make reference to God and assumes the child is in a traditional two-parent household. The suggested reading level is for children ages 4-10.

Sam's dad died : a child's book of hope through grief.

Margaret M. Holmes. Omaha, NE : Centering Corporation, rev. 2005.

After his father dies, Sam tells how he feels and what he can do so he doesn't hurt so much. Suitable for children ages 5-9.(from Amazon.com)

Samantha Jane's missing smile: a story about coping with the loss of a parent.

Julie Kaplow. Washington, DC : Magination Press, 2007.

The story of a young girl whose father has recently died, which deals with the full range of emotions, questions, and worries that children have when a parent has died. Offers ways to remember and honor the lost parent... (from Amazon.com) Suggested reading level is for children ages 4-8.

Saying goodbye to grandma.

And

Saying goodbye to grandpa.

Moshe Haveli Spero. New York: Pitspopany Press 1997.

These books explain to children the Jewish mourning practices. The introduction details the steps that parents can take to help their child through the bereavement process. (from the publisher). Recommended for children, ages 4-6.

Tear Soup: a recipe for healing after loss.

Pat Schwiebert. Oregon: Grief Watch, 2007.

A beautifully illustrated book written for all ages on the topic of grieving

Waiting for the whales.

Sheryl McFarlane. Victoria, BC: Orca, 1991.

A young girl shares her grandfather's love of nature and watching for the orca whales each summer. When he dies, her mother explains: "your grandfather's spirit goes to leap and swim with the whales". Suggested for children ages 4-8.

Water bugs & dragonflies: explaining death to young children.

Doris Stickney. Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997.

After a water bug suddenly leaves her pond and is transformed into a dragonfly, her friends' questions about such departures are like those children ask when someone dies. (Summary provided in the book)

When dinosaurs die: a guide to understanding death.

Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. Boston: Little Brown, 1996.

This book is direct and honest about the subject of death. It covers every aspect of death from old age to accidental to suicide. The death of a pet is also covered. Also looks at several belief systems of what happens after we die. Publishers Weekly suggests that it is suitable for children ages 5-9. Other reviewers suggest the book may be too graphic and recommend reading only portions of the book to the child.

When I die, will I get better?

Joeri and Piet Breebaart. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1993.

Kindergarten-Grade 3-Fred and Joe are rabbit brothers who live happily in their home at the edge of the wood, until one morning Joe does not get out of bed. At first Doctor Owl thinks he can cure him, but the little rabbit dies. The rest of the story tells how the neighbors help prepare for the burial, how Fred puts his brother's favorite books and toy into the coffin, and promises to play in the field close to the grave every day. After the funeral, Fred wants to be alone and is very angry; but gradually he and his parents, with the loving support of their friends, begin to feel better. Eventually the boy is able to laugh and play again. Straightforward, simply told, and moving, this book does not gloss over the finality of death or the sadness and anger that results, but makes it clear that the bereaved do return to normal life in time. The tone is gentle and honest. The plain, almost childlike, but expressive colored-pencil illustrations are very much in keeping with the mood and purpose of the text. (Review from School Library Journal) Suggested for children aged 5-8.

When someone very special dies: children can learn to cope with grief.

Marge Heegaard. Minneapolis: Woodland Press, 1988

A practical format for allowing children to understand the concept of death and develop coping skills for life. Suitable for children 9-12.

When someone you love dies: an explanation of death for children.

Robert V Dodd. Nashville: Abindon Press, 1986

This book is written for children to read, to help them know what happens and what to do when someone they love dies. Suitable for children 8 and up.

Why did grandma die?

Trudy Madler. Austin, Texas: Raintree Steck-Vaugh, 1992.

A young girl comes to accept her grandmother's death as part of the life cycle, by attending the funeral and talking to others about her feelings. For children ages 9-12.

Wishes for one more day.

Melanie Joy Pastor. New York: Flash Light Press, 2006.

"An excellent book that will resonate with many children who experience the death of someone they loved . . . addresses the unpredictable and varied range of emotions, the different perspectives of adult and child, and the idea of how memories can be comforting." —Dr. Patti Homan, program director, PATHways Center for Grief & Loss

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