



**THE
HEALING
LIBRARY**

Children's Books
Conversation
Community
Caring

**The Death of
a Loved One**

Librarian Guide

Welcome, friends.

Thank you so much for choosing to lend this healing kit through your library. The creation and implementation of the kit are up to your discretion, but we offer these recommendations to aid you.

The Goal of This Kit

This kit will not completely heal a family. It cannot undo what has happened. Instead, it is intended to start families down a path of healing by

- Offering books to share and empathize with,
- Guiding discussions to ensure everyone feels heard and knows what's happening,
- Activities to provide comfort to family members,
- Suggesting acts of kindness to take away the powerless feeling the death of a loved one can cast over us,
- Sharing community helpers so families know where to start reaching out for continued help.

Together, all these pieces start families down a path of healing of their own design, a path which will be different for everyone. By offering this kit, you are not taking the place of a counselor. You are providing a curated set of resources designed by professionals to aid your community

Who Created This Kit?

This kit was put together by a team of people, including:

- David Moorhead, children's librarian at the Lewiston (Maine) Public Library
- Bonnie Thomas, a licensed children's counselor specializing in art and play therapy



- Megan Emery, guide author and experience designer coordinator at the Chattanooga Public Library
- Kirsten Cappy, a children’s literature advocate and owner of Curious City

Lending Period

Ultimately, it’s up to you. Therapist Bonnie Thomas suggests giving families approximately 2-4 weeks with the kit, with additional time as needed.

Assembling the Kit

Based on the books and replaceable materials you choose to include, you may put this kit into one of the following:

- Backpack
- Wheelable bag/box
- Duffle bag
- Canvas tote

Providing Materials for the Activities

It’s up to you to determine how many activities you’d like to provide materials for. We suggest each activity be organized into a clearly labeled individual container, such as a clear plastic tote. We have included labels designed for Avery Label 5164.

A few easy and inexpensive options to start with are:

Watercolor Feelings: Suggested Activity Materials:

- Watercolor paint set
- Multiple paint brushes of different styles
- Paper (watercolor if possible)

Splat!: Suggested Activity Materials:

- 2-4 “splattable” objects

Start a Journal: Suggested Activity Materials:

- Stapler loaded with staples
- Any size paper to be folded & stapled into a journal
- Stamps and a stamp pad, especially individual letters

Make a Memory Book: Suggested Activity Materials:

Suggested activity materials include:

- Stickers
- Especially hearts, stars, and happy faces
- Tissue paper
- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Cardstock
- Glue
- Stamps and a stamp pad, especially individual letters
- Scrapbook papers
- Scissors that cut interesting edges
- Ribbon scraps

Write a Letter: Suggested Activity Materials:

- Stationery paper with envelopes
- Set of colored pens

Get Planting

- An easy-to-grow seed such as a marigold
- Growing instructions

Consider Local Materials

There may be local organizations or individuals that could further help a family in need.

Consider including brochures or a custom resource page to your kit.

Materials to Replace After Each Lending Period

- Any/All Handouts
- Activity Materials

When the Kit is Returned

Upon the borrower's returning the kit, the librarian should ask whether there is anything more the library can do to help. There is a lot of information included in the kit which may leave the family with questions, new research to complete, or community partners to seek out. Even if they don't need any assistance upon returning the kit, it's a good idea to offer a gentle reminder that the library is here to help them should they need it.

Designing Your Own Materials

You are, of course, welcome (and encouraged) to create any additional materials. To assist with design:

- Header font is Montara 24 pt.
- Sub-header font is Montara 16 pt.
- Content font is Archer 12 pt.
- The labels were designed with the Avery Label 5164 template
- The Healing Library logos can be found at: CuriousCityDPW.com/category/healing/

Share Your Library & Follow Others

Please share your ideas and questions about the Healing Library with librarian Megan Emery at meganfemery@gmail.com.

We will share new ideas and implementations at:

CuriousCityDPW.com/category/healing/



Book Discussion



Book Discussion



Discussion Guide



Book Discussion



Community Helpers



Acts of Kindness



Activity

Write a Letter



Activity

Watercolor Feelings



Activity

Splat!



Activity

Start a Journal



Activity

Get Planting



Activity

Make a Memory Book

Tag Templates



Death of a Loved One



Death of a Pet



Alzheimer's & Your Family



Death of a Pet



**THE
HEALING
LIBRARY**

Children's Books
Conversation
Community
Caring

Family Materials

Welcome, friends.

This kit has been designed for your use to heal as a family during a period in your lives when you're experiencing the death of a loved one.

Inside you will find:

- Children's Books with Discussion Guides
- Discussion Guide
- Activities
- Acts of Kindness
- List of Community Helpers



This combination offers you an assortment of ways to move forward in a healthy manner. A variety of art materials have been included that you're welcome to use for projects listed in the Activities Guide. All the handouts inside are also yours to keep if you think they'll continue to be of use to you and your family.

This kit was assembled by a team of people that include a children's librarian, a licensed children's counselor specializing in art and play therapy, a children's literature advocate, and a programming librarian.

This kit is designed to start your journey of healing, but not to complete it. Just as your loved one was unique and special, the grief process experienced by you and your children will also be unique. The resources listed and Community Helpers Guide will assist you in taking the next steps.

Thank you for taking this step in your healing process. We wish you peace.



Discussion Guide

Grief is actually a healing process that takes place after traumatic experiences such as the loss of a loved one. It is a serious matter, but also an opportunity for growth individually and as a family. Loved ones pass away in a variety of ways, some of which are peaceful and expected and others of which are sudden or violent. No matter how it happens, a loved one's death will most likely result in an sense of loss for your child. The loss felt during any of these experiences is painful for all family members, but adults, wanting to minimize the grief in their children, can often unintentionally make things worse than they are. Parents often lie to their children in an effort to soften the blow because they are inadequately prepared to discuss loss, death, and grief with children.

This guide will give you strategies to talk to your children in an honest way so they understand what has happened and can heal in a way that affords growth, better preparing them to deal with difficult times as they grow older.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Each Child is Different

It will be no surprise to you that each child will process and express their grief differently. Some will do so verbally; some will do so through imaginative and dramatic play; others will express themselves through drawings and art; and still others through physical activity. Each reaction is important, and no one way is “better” than another. Our Activities Guide offers various opportunities for your child to explore and process their feelings.

As you begin discussing the issue of death with your child, keep this in mind: If you're talking with a child who does not verbally respond, it does not mean they “aren't listening.”

They may simply be processing information differently. We suggest switching over to an activity from our Activities Guide to provide the child a physical opportunity to share their feelings and communicate with you.

Understanding and Explaining Death

Death can be confusing for anyone, but for a child dealing with death for your first time, there's an added layer of fear on top of confusion. Common explanations from parents intending to soften the blow and protect children may unintentionally make things confusing, or even worse, lead to problems in dealing with trauma as they grow older. To give your child clarity and comfort, the best approach is to be honest and consistent. Explaining that a person has died because they became sick or grew old and their body stopped working works well. If your loved one has died unexpectedly, young, or as the result of violence or an accident, your explanation will vary but should still stick to the theme that their body no longer works, so they are not alive any longer.

Your child may ask the same question repeatedly, seeming to forget what you've already told them. This is a natural part of how they process information. If you are also grieving, it may be painful for you to keep repeating the same answer, but keep in mind that a consistent answer is what your child needs to grieve in a healthy way.

Children who have experienced death before may have more experience, but will also still go through the grieving process. Discussing those previous experiences can be useful.

The 5 Stages of Grief

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross identified 5 stages to the grieving process. (Kübler-Ross, 1969) These stages are typically experienced when we suffer a loss, though not necessarily in order, not just once but sometimes repeatedly revisiting a particular stage or stages, not necessarily through experiencing all stages, and with the amount of time spent in the stages being different for everyone. Some may take only minutes to process, while others can take years. It's important to understand that this timeline has nothing to do with the amount of love a person felt for the loved one who has died.

In addition, these stages are not signs of mental illness but rather indicators that your child is going through the healing process of grief.

Denial

The world feels overwhelming and meaningless. Denial allows us to process our loss over an amount of time suitable to each person by suspending belief. When we begin to ask questions, we know that we are beginning to heal. However, as we begin to heal, the feelings we were originally denying begin to surface and must be dealt with. For a child, denial is visible when they are distraught one minute then able to play with friends or toys and seem joyful the next minute. In addition, their repeatedly asking questions is an indicator that they are suspending their denial and processing their grief again.

Anger

This stage of the healing process can feel endless. You question everything with anger, but underneath anger is your own pain. Although we live in a society where anger is not welcome, it can provide you with the strength needed during this period of healing. Anger is also representative of the love that is felt. Your child may feel angry with the person who has died, with you, with their friends, or just angry in general.

Bargaining

If your loved one is currently dying, you may find bargaining taking place with your child: “If she gets better, I’ll never be bad ever again.” If your loved one has already died, their bargaining may sound more like “what if” statements -- “What if I was nicer to him? Would he still be alive?” This stage can lead to feelings of guilt that are sometimes merited and other times are not. If, for example, if your child had a fight with a friend who later died of cancer, your child may feel guilt for their perceived involvement in the death. Don’t be afraid to discuss this guilt with your child and to reassure them that we all make mistakes, we simply need to learn from them. As Buzhardt & Steib point out, “Learning from mistakes is constructive; blaming ourselves for them is not” (Buzhardt & Steib, 2008).

Depression

This stage embodies a feeling of great emptiness that seems to last forever. Often the person experiencing depression withdraws from family, friends, or school. Crying is often

associated with this stage. Please remember that crying is a natural part of many of the steps of the grieving process, and don't encourage your child to "stop crying." They will stop when the time is right.

Acceptance

This stage involves accepting the reality of a new world without your loved one, understanding how to adjust in this world without your loved one, and knowing that you may not feel "OK," but you can move forward. During the acceptance phase, your child may feel guilt over "feeling better." Remind them that feeling better does not mean their love has changed. Instead, it means that they are taking care of themselves, something their loved one would have wanted.

How to Start a Conversation

In conversation, there are three simple steps for parents and helpers to follow: (a) be honest with children; (b) encourage children to be involved; and (c) avoid euphemisms about death. (Corr & Corr, 1996)

Listening to your child's questions will give you insight as to what they understand about death already and what stage of grief they are experiencing.

Outside of Your Home

In addition to the conversations you have as a family, your child may find comfort exploring this matter with others, as well. Peers and the media, for example, may offer alternative viewpoints about what happens when we die.

Preparing your child to expect alternate viewpoints may reduce their confusion. Explain to your child that the world is a big place with a lot of big ideas about everything, including death. (Let your child know that you are sharing these perspectives to provide them with comfort and care.). Suggest that your child discuss these viewpoints with you so they can process this information.

A Few Things to Avoid

A few common tactics parents have developed to try and minimize their child's pain include the following. Also listed are potential repercussions of these actions:

Lying to your child by telling them their loved one has gone to sleep or explaining that death is like falling asleep and not waking up again.

Death is different than sleep. Some people do die in their sleep, but it's important children realize that their loved one has died. Children and their loved ones go to sleep every night, and thinking that their loved one who has died went to sleep and never woke up can scare children into thinking they, or their remaining loved ones, may die when they go to sleep. In addition, this fear may be too complex or frightening for them to verbalize, leaving them feeling scared and helpless.

Telling children their loved one has gone to heaven when you do not believe in heaven.

Your child is likely to ask you questions about what happens to your loved one after they die. For example, your child may ask questions about souls or spirits. Be honest about your own beliefs on the topic. This will spare the child from confusion or any unintentional feelings of being lied to later on.

You can also ask the child what his or her own thoughts and beliefs are, or ask your child what s/he has heard from others about their beliefs. Furthermore, there's nothing wrong with letting your child know you're not sure what happens, if that is true. An open dialogue will allow your child to explore this challenging topic in a way that respects your own cultural and/or religious beliefs as well as recognizing that people have different views about the subject.

Ages Birth Through Preschool

Children of this age do not have a solid concept of what death is. Children mirror and take on the emotions of others at this stage of their life, so it's important you reassure them with love, patience, and kindness.

In addition, you may be going through the grieving process yourself. Don't hide this from your child; instead, model healthy behaviors your child can replicate. If you are crying, let your child know it is because you miss your loved one.

Children ask a lot of questions at this age that may make you sad, but answer them as honestly and consistently as you can. Children also repeat questions at this age as a way to process information. Your honest answers when grieving or feeling better will provide them with what they need for their own healing process.

Grade School and Beyond

Grade school-aged children begin to have an understanding of death that becomes clearer as they become preteens and adolescents. For this age group, the 5 stages of grief will be more apparent, and your attention to verbal and physical cues will help you understand what your child needs to talk about.

In addition, you may be going through the grieving process yourself. Don't hide this from your child; instead, model healthy behaviors your child can replicate. If you are crying, let your child know it is because you miss your loved one.

Specifically, when it comes to caring for adolescents, Palmer, Saviat, & Tourish found in their study that "Providing support to a grieving adolescent or young adult requires 1) understanding normal development, 2) appreciating common grief responses, 3) identifying deviations, and 4) understanding developmentally appropriate interventions. Fortunately, recent research has begun to examine effective approaches to interventions for bereaved teens and young adults." Be prepared for your teen to want to spend time with their friends instead of their family. While you may find this painful, it is simply your teen's way of normalizing the events which have occurred and building their social skills outside the family with this new piece of their identity.

Where to Draw the Line with the Truth

Being honest about your loved one's death is important. There are instances when you should consider what your child needs to know and provide that information delicately

while still being honest. For example, if your loved one is killed in an automobile accident, simply telling your child their loved one was hurt so badly the doctor couldn't make him/her well again will be enough. A detailed post-mortem discussion is not necessary to help your child.

Remembering Your Loved One Together

If your child is having a hard time coming to terms with the death of your loved one, discussing all the wonderful points of their life may be helpful. In addition, explaining to your child that although everything dies, the way we humans live as opposed to how our pets live and how plants live can be comforting. We humans are very lucky to have the long lives that we have, as well as the ability to accomplish the variety of wonderful things we're capable of. Even if your loved one has passed away prematurely, you can share stories of their talents, accomplishments, and brilliance together.

Such discussions about your loved one can provide comfort long after they are gone. Your family will have stories to share that will comfort everyone. These questions may spark this sharing:

How did they make you a better person?

What are your favorite memories with them?

What are some things about them that made them unique and different from other people?

Keep the Conversation Going

To keep your conversation going, we've included discussion guides with each book in this kit, based on what we've gone over in this Discussion Guide. We recommend reading through each book's guide before sharing it as a family.

Resources

Corr, D. M., & Corr, C. A. (1996). **Handbook of Childhood Death and Bereavement**. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). **On Death and Dying**. New York: Macmillan.

Palmer, M., Saviet, M., & Tourish, J. (2016). "Understanding and supporting grieving adolescents and young adults." *Pediatric Nursing*, 42(6), 275-281.



Healing Activities

These activities can be done independently or together. Follow your instincts when determining when to participate individually or as a family. While there may be suggestions for ages that are most appropriate for each activity, do not let this information stop you from using the activity if you know it's the right one for your family.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Participate in a Memorial Service

Attending the memorial service held for your loved one may be something your child wishes to participate in. It is up to your family to determine whether your child is ready for this activity. Listening to them and watching their progression through the grieving process will give you clues.

If your child is not ready for this, you can always choose to hold a ceremony of your own for you and your child. Allow them to assist in planning such a service with you; this will provide a way for your child to assist in honoring your loved one. Some activities you may want to suggest to your child include the following:

- Telling stories about your loved one
- Reciting a poem
- Planting a plant in their honor
- Playing music or a favorite song
- If there is a grave site, you may also choose to visit it after you've completed your family's memorial service

Watercolor Feelings

Mixing watercolors together allow your child to create an image that matches their feelings at that moment. This project is about process rather than creating a finished product. The process can be soothing as the child mixes the paints, and it can also be emotional. Allowing kids to explore what color matches their current mood has no right or wrong answer. Give yourself and your child the opportunity to explore their feelings verbally while you paint together.

Splat!

This activity is suggested by Camilleri as helpful when kids don't feel like talking (Camilleri, 2007). You already know that some children express their emotions verbally, and others do better expressing their emotions in a physical way. Find a nice flat wall that you can throw things against, then explain that you're going to say something that makes you angry each time you throw a fake object that splats against the wall. You can go first and show your child how it's done -- throw your tomato and shout out something that's making you mad. Let your child take a turn, then pick up more tomatoes and go again! If the mood starts to lighten, you can switch things up and start shouting things that make you happy.

You can use this when your child is in the Anger stage of the grieving process, or any time they need to express themselves or feel out of control.

Create a Grieving Kit

This activity is one for a parent to create for the child. Put together a portable box filled with a variety of soothing items for your child to use to manage their feelings during the grieving process. Some examples are as follows:

- Silly putty or a squeeze toy for when they're angry
- A balloon to blow up when they need to let out a lot of air at once or bubbles for when they need to practice carefully inhaling and exhaling

- Tissues for when they need to cry
- A special item from your loved one for remembering them and providing comfort
- Fidget items to assist with self regulation when anxious, distracted, or worried
- A card or note to remind your child how much you love them

Start a Journal

Expressing feelings reflective of the grieving process as well as thoughts about death and artwork can be very helpful for children who sometimes have a hard time getting the right words out.

With older children who are experiencing difficulty sharing their feelings, you may be able to get them started by showing them a photo of them and their loved one. Camilleri (2007) suggests writing prompts like “Write a journal entry as yourself at the time of this picture. Example: “I am Catherine. I am 8 years old and I feel...” or “Write a letter you would have liked to receive from someone in the picture. Example: “Dear Catherine...” They can also write a journal entry from the other person in the photo or simply tell the story of the day the photo was taken.

Write a Letter

Sometimes when people die we wish we could have one more conversation with them, especially during the Bargaining stage of grief. To help get these feelings out, you can write a letter or a card to your loved one who has died letting them know thoughts or feelings you wish you had been able to express before they died. If children are too young to write, they can dictate their message to you, and you can do the writing for them.

Reliving Good Times

You or your child may have a particular activity you used to enjoy doing with your loved one who has died. When you’re missing them, you can always dive into that activity together and share stories. Make a favorite dish, take a walk in a favorite place, play a board game, or do anything that was especially pleasurable for your loved one.

Make a Memory Book

These days our phones are filled with pictures along with our social media sites. Printing these photos and taking the time to make an album in memory of your loved one will spark discussion and creativity while creating a memento your family can use to remember your loved one or simply to visit when they feel sad and miss your loved one.

Beyond the photos you can include:

- Mementos from times together, such as ticket stubs, receipts, cards, etc.
- Written poems, stories, or memories
- Any samples of the loved one's handwriting from grocery lists, post-it notes, etc.
- Drawings of your loved one, or of memories or funny stories you shared

Get Planting

Creating a physical space of beauty to honor your loved one can provide your child with a place to visit to remember them. Are there plants that were significant to your relationship? A particular tree, bush, or flower you have memories of enjoying with them? You can also relate to your child that caring for this new plant or garden is a way to continue their love for whoever has passed.

Resources

Camilleri, V. A. (2007). **Healing the Inner City Child : Creative Arts Therapies with At-risk Youth**. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.



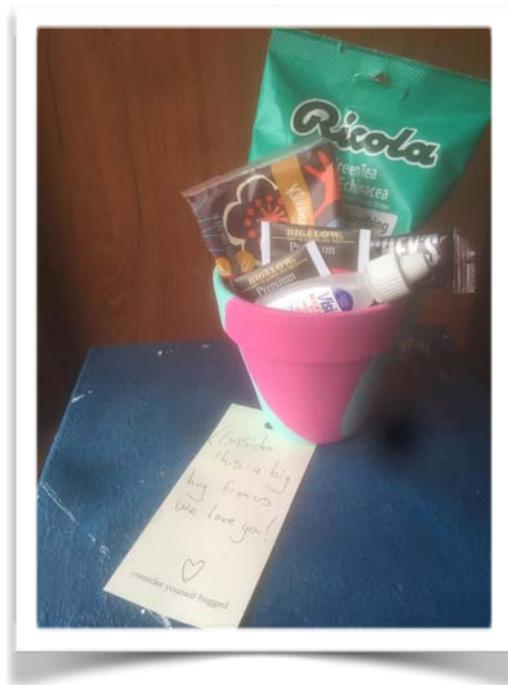
Acts of Kindness

The death of a loved one can leave us feeling small and powerless. Participating in an act of kindness on behalf of your loved one can leave you feeling more powerful and can provide a sense of purpose when that feels missing. You can do these activities as a family, or your child may want to do some on their own.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Show Kindness to Others Grieving Your Loved One

There are probably many people who are also feeling sad over the death of your loved one, such as their caregivers, friends, other relatives, or community members they had an impact on. You can help comfort one or more of them by preparing a care package including tissues, lozenges (or other items to soothe a throat that may be sore from crying), eye drops, a sympathy card. Are there other personal things you could include?



If your loved one had care providers (i.e. hospice workers, nurses or doctors who provided extra good care and support, etc.), you may want to take this time to thank them. Consider sending these people a thank you note or care package as well.

Write a Letter

When a loved one dies, their family members are often sad because they will not be able to create any new memories with that person. Sharing your own stories of the person who died in a letter can give their family members new stories to enjoy again and again through reading your letter. Do you have stories that show how special your loved one was? How funny? How generous? What are special memories you'd like them to know about?

Make a Donation

Sometimes people die from diseases for which specific foundations are searching for cures. Donating money to such an organization in honor of your loved one may provide you with a sense of fighting back against the sickness to which your loved one succumbed. If you don't have enough money to donate, perhaps you could make a care package to send to the people who work there, along with a story about your loved one and why they were so special.

If you offer to pay for a book for a public library, they will often be willing to put a memorial bookplate in the front. This book could be a favorite of your loved one, or it could be one that raises awareness of whatever illness caused the death of your loved one.

Participate in a Race, Marathon, or Fundraiser

Another way to contribute to causes that are fighting to save lives is by participating in a race, marathon, or fundraiser. Through these activities, foundations raise money to research ways to cure diseases or prolong life. Your participation as a family or individual isn't just about donating to a cause that is meaningful to you, it's also about participating in a healthy lifestyle that leads to a longer and more enjoyable quality of life.

Share an Activity Your Loved One Loved

Maybe it's something you did together, maybe it's something they had a special talent for. Regardless, walking in the footsteps of your loved one can provide you with insight into their life that you may not have previously had. Did they play the trombone? Pick one up and try it! Did they love fishing in a special spot? Head over there and give it a try! Did they have a favorite game they always wanted to play? Bust it out, and enjoy it again!

Set a Kindness Goal

Creating something positive out of your loss can give you a sense of purpose and power during a time when you may feel robbed of those things. To honor your loved one, you can set a kindness goal as a family or as individuals. Choose a number of acts of kindness you'd like to do, and begin making the world a better place. These acts could remind you of your loved one or could be things you know your loved one would have liked to see you do.

On pages 24 & 25 of her book **More Creative Coping Skills for Children**, Bonnie Thomas offers the following ideas for ways to connect kindly with others:

- Smile at someone.
- Do a chore at home without being asked to.
- Call a relative to say hello and/or check on them.
- Draw or write a kind note for your younger sibling and put it in their coat pocket, lunchbox, or backpack to find later.
- Pick up litter.
- Tell someone you appreciate them.
- Offer to help your teacher with the classroom clean-up.
- Be generous and share.
- Leave a lucky penny (or other good luck charm) for someone to find.
- Thank someone for doing their job well.
- Read a book to someone younger than you.
- Write a thank you note or draw a picture for your mail delivery person, and leave it in your mailbox for them.
- Use chalk to write a positive message for passers by on the sidewalk or driveway.
- Give a loved one a hug.
- Make a card for your neighbor.
- Add your own ideas!

Resources

Thomas, B., (2016) **More Creative Coping Skills: Activities, Games, Stories, and Handouts to Help Children Self-Regulate**. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.



Community Helpers

The following are suggestions for types of helpers that may exist within your community. Some are resources for you to explore in a face to face setting, others are for you to look up online and continue your reading.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library you are welcome to do so.

School Helpers

Through most schools you'll have access to the following types of helpers:

Teachers & Staff

Preparing your child's teacher about their loss will be important. Your child may exhibit a change in behavior and their teacher will need to know why this is happening. In addition, you can gain insight into your child's journey through their grieving process with the insight the teacher has about times when you aren't around. In addition to their teacher, your child may also have a special bond with someone from administration, someone who works in the school office, or a staff member who works in the cafeteria or on the custodial crew. If your child expresses the wish to discuss their loss with these people, it's fine for you to approach them to ask if they would feel comfortable.

School Guidance Counselors

Starting with a school guidance counselor is a great option because these professionals can provide a child with a few check-ins to ensure they are making healthy progress. Second, if the child needs more regular, intensive visits, the guidance counselor can recommend a counselor in the community. Finally, sometimes guidance counselors work in conjunction with graduate student interns who may also be able to offer your child support.

Especially if you cannot afford a counselor on your own, your school's counselor can help your child begin to make sense of their emotions. The amount of time your guidance counselor has available to help your child will vary. You can contact your school's administration to set up an appointment. Even if you can afford private counseling, alerting your school guidance counselor to the event that has taken place will help everyone. You can also discuss the option with your child ahead of time to ensure that they feel they're a part of the process.

School Social Workers

If your child already receives social work services at school, per an IEP (Individual Education Plan), you may want to inform that social worker so they can be better prepared to support your child during this time.

Family Members

Beyond your child's immediate family, there may be other family members who can help your child gain perspective and continue healing. A favorite cousin, aunt, or uncle is someone they may feel comfortable opening up to and who can then share with you what your child is experiencing. A family member may also be able to add some distraction and fun for your child. Encourage them to do something fun together to help your child focus on something more pleasant for a while.

Religious & Spiritual Leaders

No matter what religion you practice, there are people within that community for you and your child to communicate with. Especially if your child is struggling with the idea of faith at this time, these helpers can provide comfort and explanations that you, in your own period of grief, may not be able to offer. Even if it has been a long time since you practiced your religion, they will be prepared for you.

If you would like to reach out to a religious leader for the first time or to the religious leader of a new faith, this is also all right. In your journey of healing, seeking answers to new questions can be expected. Religious and spiritual leaders might provide support to a grieving child and family in the following ways: 1) Provide comfort and support around

issues regarding death, dying, and grieving; 2) Aid in discussions about their particular version of faith/spirituality as it relates to life and death; 3) They often have resources of their own, such as church libraries or elders that can provide additional information and support to families; and 4) the actual community that the church (or other entity) belongs to sometimes offers outreach, meals, and other community support that can help a family in a time of grieving.

Mentors or Role Models

There are many adults or older children your child may look up to. Athletic coaches, arts directors, music tutors, librarians, neighbors, friends of the family, babysitters, after school care providers, camp counselors, and others are all types of mentors with which your child may interact regularly. If your child feels a connection with one of them and would like to discuss their loss, it's fine to reach out to the mentor or role model and ask if they'll talk with your child.

Community Centers

There are a number of safe places your child may already be involved with, such as the YMCA, after school programs, Boys & Girls Club, your local recreation center, or community action agencies. These organizations may have the mentors and friends your child needs right now, but in addition they may also be able to suggest low-cost or no-cost support.

United Way

Your local or regional United Way will have a variety of information available that can help you find counselors, assistance, and more. To find your local agency, perform a web search for "United Way" and your town or county. Your local library can assist with this search if you need help.

Libraries

Your local library will be able to assist you as your journey continues. They can help by locating additional community helpers and resources, finding the next book, website, or

music to use in your healing journey, and more. In addition, their interlibrary loan programs will be able to expand the materials available to you. Give them a call or stop by to learn more.

Counselors

Parents often try to help their children during their period of grief but lack the training to properly discuss difficult topics like death, grief, and loss with children. We hope that this kit will provide you with the framework to honestly grieve with your children so that they heal and grow from this sad experience. However, if you feel you or your child are experiencing depression or anger that has gone on too long, we recommend you reach out to a counselor who can assist you.

Counselors can be found for different age groups, genders, communities, religious beliefs, or specific causes of death.

Support Groups

A support group is a gathering of people who are going through the same experience that are typically led by a counselor. These groups provide an opportunity for an individual or a family to meet others who are currently going through the same experiences. Like counselors, there are support groups to be found for different age groups, genders, communities, religious beliefs, and specific causes of death.

We recommend that you attend a support group and talk with the counselor about your situation before bringing your children, to be sure it is a good fit for your needs.

Medical Workers

If your loved one required medical care before their death, those workers may be able to offer support as well. Explanations of what happened from hospital staff, nurses, doctors, caregivers, or hospice workers can all provide insight. Your child may have questions for these workers dealing with illness, death, the afterlife, or their jobs.

If your loved one died due to violence, an accident, or suicide, the same can be said for emergency responders who assisted your loved one.

If your loved one died under the care of any medical professionals, it's important to let your child know that everyone, including these workers, are sad about what happened.

Resources

“Five Stages of Grief” by Elisabeth Kubler Ross & David Kessler. Retrieved February 13, 2017, from <http://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>



**THE
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Book Discussions



Book Discussion: Always and Forever

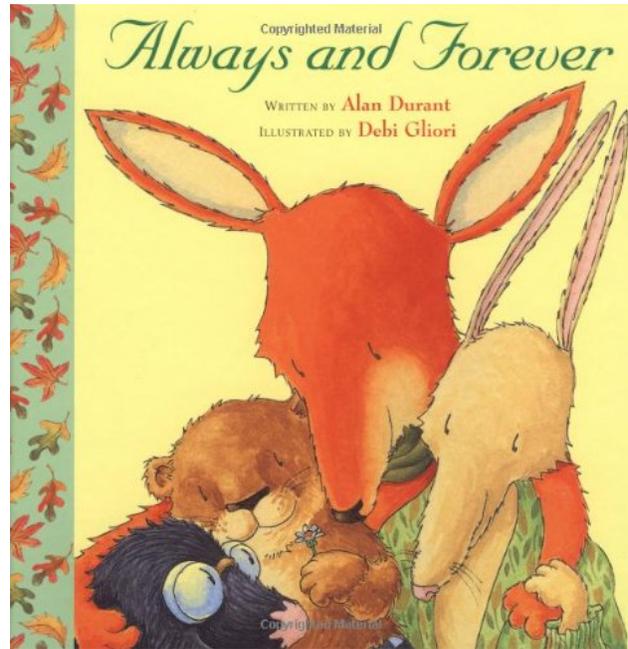
Always and Forever

By Alan Durant

Illustrated by Deb Gliori

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

This is a gentle classic when it comes to the subject of death. The message of moving on and appreciating your loved one who has died will prove useful when it's time to focus on feeling better as a family.



Below are some helpful notes you can use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you've recently lost. You don't need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you're reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Pages 1 & 2

“They’re all so good at different things! What are some things _____ was good at?”

Sharing your memories of _____’s talents can provide your child with a whole new side of their loved one they didn’t know about. Are there any stories you can think of your child would enjoy?

Pages 3 - 6

*Death can be confusing for children. It’s important to clearly, consistently, and patiently explain death to your child. You may find this explanation useful or you may prefer the explanation in the back of the book **Something Very Sad Happened** by Bonnie Zucker & Kim Fleming where they suggest the following for letting your child know about death: “his body stopped working so he died. When someone dies, they cannot eat, sleep, or breathe anymore.” (pg 23) Whatever message you choose remember to be consistent so your child can understand what happened in a realistic way.*

If you’re planning a funeral for your loved one this may be a good opportunity to begin explaining what you’ll all be doing at the funeral.

Pages 7 - 10

Your child may feel reclusive after your loved one dies. This can be a natural part of grieving. If they are having a hard time expressing their feelings using words you can try some of the project in this kit’s Activities Guide to offer them a creative outlet to express their feelings.

Pages 11 & 12

“It’s okay to cry, especially when you’re sad. You may feel sad for a little while or a long time. Both are okay and if you need hugs I’ll be here for you.”

Page 13 - 18

“I love these funny stories about Fox! Can you tell me any funny stories about _____?”
If you have funny stories to share do so!

If sharing stories seems to make your child feel better they may enjoy journaling about their loved one. Check this kit to see if there are supplies to get him/her started.

Pages 19 - 22

Sharing in your loved one’s hobbies can leave you with a connected feeling to them after they have died. Are there activities your loved one did you and your child could try together?

Pages 23 - 26

“The love we shared and the memories we created with _____ mean even though _____ has died we can still feel connected to them. Any time you want to share stories about _____ we can, you just have to ask.”

Resources

Zucker, B. (2016). **Something Very Sad Happened: A Toddler’s Guide to Understanding Death**. Washington, D.C.



Book Discussion: The Dead Bird

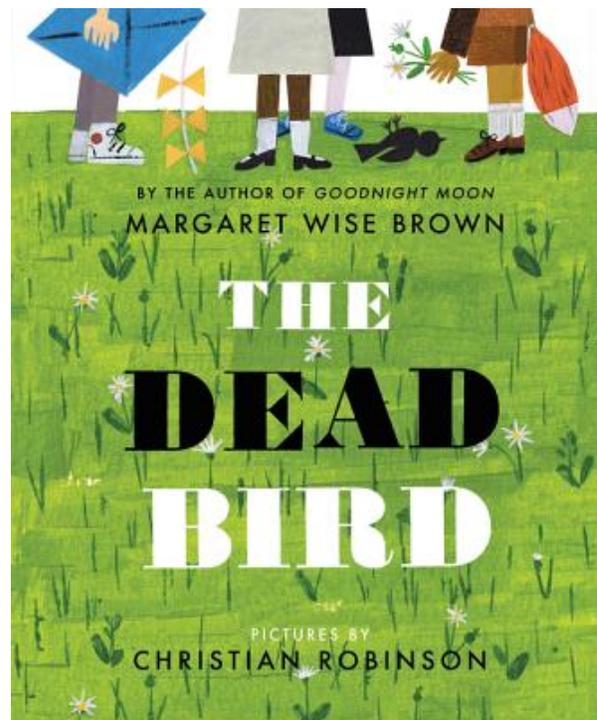
The Dead Bird

By Margaret Wise Brown

Illustrated by Christian Robinson

HarperCollins

This book with simple illustrations and limited text covers the period immediately following death. It tells the story of children who discover a dead bird then perform an impromptu burial ceremony for the bird. It will be reassuring to children who find themselves bouncing between feelings of sadness and “feeling okay” after the death of your loved one. It will also be particularly useful for families who are preparing for a memorial service to celebrate their loved one.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you’ve recently lost. You don’t need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you’re reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Endpapers

These depict the park where the story takes place.

Pages 1 - 4

*This could be a good time to remind your child what death means. Death can be confusing for children. It’s important to clearly, consistently, and patiently explain death to your child. You may find this explanation useful or you may prefer the explanation in the back of the book **Something Very Sad Happened** by Bonnie Zucker & Kim Fleming where they suggest the following for letting your child know about death: “his body stopped working so he died. When someone dies, they cannot eat, sleep, or breathe anymore.” (pg 23) Whatever message you choose remember to be consistent so your child can understand what happened in a realistic way.*

Pages 5 - 8

*This part of the story may inspire questions from your child about what happens when we die. The book **Lifetimes** by Bryan Mellonie may be a helpful book to read next if they’re curious about the differences and similarities between the way animals and humans live and die.*

Pages 9 - 12

If your family is preparing for a funeral this text can provide a simple way to explain to your child what a funeral is.

Also, the children do not have sad faces at this point in the story because they are happy to be able to honor the bird with a funeral.

Pages 13 - 16

This part deals more with the details of their funeral. To allow your child an opportunity to be a more active participant in the funeral, you could ask questions like the following:

“Look at the beautiful flowers the children chose to honor the bird with. Would you like to choose some flowers to honor _____ with? What do you think we should get?”

Your child may not know the name of specific flowers. Instead you could encourage them to choose a color or to look at some flowers at the store with you.

“They chose some very special things to bury the bird with. Is there anything you would like to bury with _____? You could make a drawing or write a note to bury with _____ if you don’t want to bury an object with them.”

“Would you like to choose a specific song to play at the funeral? What do you think _____ would have liked to hear?”

Even if you don’t have the ability to play music at the funeral you could listen to the song before or after the service.

“I like the way the children are all holding hands when they’re signing. Hugs and holding hands can help make us feel better when we’re sad. You can always have a hug from me or hold hands if you want to.”

Pages 17 & 18

“It’s okay to feel sad, especially after someone as special as _____ has died. When we’re sad we cry and that’s okay too.”

Pages 19 - 22

Your loved one's final resting place might have a headstone, a bench, a garden, or it may also be somewhere meaningful their ashes were scattered. Sharing the details with your child will be helpful as they imagine going to that place to honor their loved one.

Pages 23 & 24

“Although we may be sad when we bury _____ it won't always be a sad place. It will be a place where we can go when we want to feel close to _____.”

Resources

Zucker, B. (2016). **Something Very Sad Happened: A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death**. Washington, D.C.: Magination Press

Mellonie, B. (1983). **Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children**. Toronto: Bantam Books



Book Discussion: In My Heart: A Book of Feelings

In My Heart: A Book of Feelings

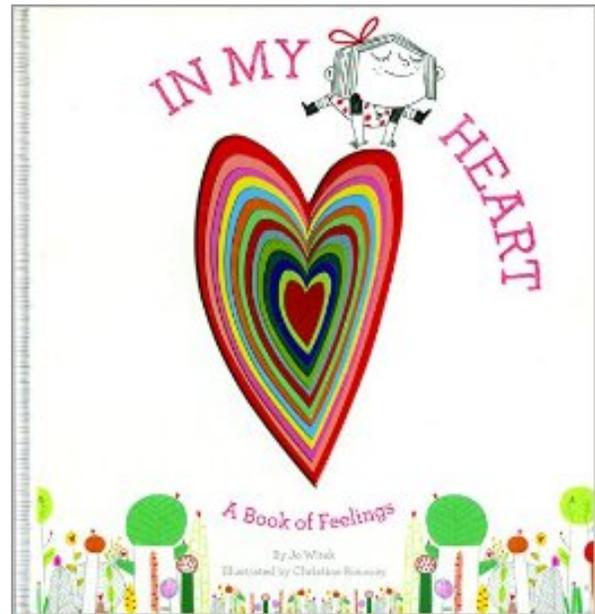
By Jo Witek

Illustrated by Christine Roussey

Abrams Appleseed

This colorful book about our many kinds of feelings will speak to any child. Use it to take the pulse on what your child is feeling and to let them know that all feelings are normal and you're always available to talk about how they feel. In addition, use the book as a springboard to launch into the Activities

Guide in this kit and get your child to express their feelings creatively.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you’ve recently lost. You don’t need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you’re reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Cover

Welcome your child to touch this book, the heart feel especially nice.

“I like the way this book looks! I like the ways this book feels! Will you touch the heart? It feels wonderful!”

“This book talks about all the different ways we feel sometimes. When I read a page will you tell me if you’ve ever felt that way?”

Pages 3 & 4

“Have you ever felt this way? You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Pages 5 & 6

“Have you ever felt this way? You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Pages 7 & 8

“There may be times you feel angry that _____ died. You might feel angry for no reason or you might even feel angry at _____. Both are normal ways to feel. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Anger has its own stage in the grief process. Your child may experience anger multiple times during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

When your child does feel angry there are suggestions for ways to express their anger in healthy ways in this kit's Activities Guide.

Pages 9 & 10

“When someone dies we can feel like we have a broken heart. It’s okay to feel like this, especially if you’re missing _____. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way, I’ll give you extra kisses!”

Pages 11 & 12

“Feeling sad happens to a lot of us when someone we care about dies. It’s okay to feel sad and to cry. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Sadness is typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 13 & 14

“Just like this little girl, you won’t feel sad forever. We can talk together to feel better and we can do things that make us feel better. What are some things we can do that make you feel better?”

“Feeling better” is common during the Acceptance stage of the grieving process.

Pages 15 & 16

After a child experiences a death it is not uncommon for them to experience worry or fear about more people they care about dying, or even themselves dying. If your child is going through this support them by encouraging them to ask questions and then reassuring them.

“There’s a lot about death that’s confusing or scary. Do you have any questions for me or anyone else? You can always come talk to me when you have questions.”

If you don’t know the answers to your child’s questions you can write them down to figure out later.

Pages 17 & 18

“Have you ever felt this way? You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Pages 19 & 20

“Wanting time alone or not feeling like talking is something we all go through. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Feeling quiet or seeking out isolation is typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 21 & 22

“How do you feel right now? You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”



Book Discussion: Life is Like the Wind

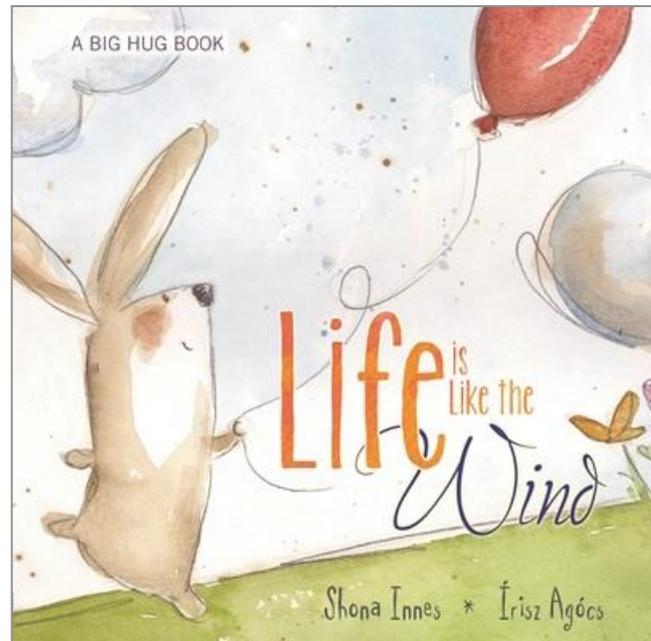
Life is Like the Wind

By Shona Innes

Illustrated by Irisz Agocs

Barron's Educational Series

This charmingly illustrated story will be useful for a variety of readers. Those who are looking to explain death to a younger child will benefit from its caring explanation. Families who wish to discuss the many viewpoints people have on the afterlife will enjoy the multiple explanations and conversation the book.



One way the book is helpful for all children who have experienced death is that it shows animals and insects both alive and dead without being scary.

Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain its hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you’ve recently lost. You don’t need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you’re reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Endpapers

The art on the endpapers matches the base used for the sky inside almost every illustration. If your child enjoys this book you may suggest trying to create paper together and replicate the look of the endpapers.

Pages 1 - 10

*These pages are a very kind explanation of death. You may find this explanation useful or you may prefer the explanation in the back of the book **Something Very Sad Happened** by Bonnie Zucker & Kim Fleming where they suggest the following for letting your child know about death: “his body stopped working so he died. When someone dies, they cannot eat, sleep, or breathe anymore.” (pg 23) Whatever message you choose remember to be consistent so your child can understand what happened in a realistic way.*

If you feel you want to discuss what happening in this section you might like these discussion prompts:

Pages 1 & 2

“Look how happy that rabbit is! What are some things that make you that happy?”

“What are some things that made _____ happy?”

Pages 3 & 4

“What are other things that life makes us do?”

Pages 5 & 6

“They sure look happy. What are some things about life that make you happy?”

Pages 7 -10

These pages might provide you with a nice chance to begin discussing your beliefs of the afterlife with your child.

These pages might be useful for discussing what to expect if you’re attending an open casket funeral.

Pages 11- 16

These pages begin to discuss some of the different viewpoints people have about what happens after we die.

Your child may hear a variety of theories about what happens after we die from people trying to help. Let your child know what you believe but also that it’s alright for people to have differing viewpoints. Let your child know that if they have questions they can always come to you to ask them.

If you feel you want to discuss what happening in this section you might like these discussion prompts:

Pages 11 & 12

“If your life could enter into another creature what creature would you wish you could become?”

“What creature do you think _____ would have liked to become?”

“What would your favorite things be to do in heaven?”

“What do you think _____ would like to do in heaven?”

Pages 13 & 14

“What trees or plants would you want to give life to?”

“What trees or plants do you think _____ would most like to give life to?”

If you're planning on planting flowers at a grave or creating a memory garden this would be a good time to start discussing what kind of plants you'd like to choose to honor _____.

Pages 15 & 16

“No matter what the love that you and _____ had will never leave. Just like the love I have for you.”

Pages 17 - 22

This section discusses ways people react to the death of a loved one.

Pages 17 & 18

“It's okay to feel sad about _____ dying. I'm sad too. When we feel sad we cry, just like the elephant.”

Visiting your loved one's grave may make you or your child feel sad. Remind them that the grave is a place to remember and honor your loved one who has died and it's okay to feel sad.

Page 19

If your family is religious, this would be a good time to share any prayers your child may find helpful during their grieving process.

Even if your family is not religious your child may want to have quiet time to talk to _____ or to try prayer. Do not discourage them from this, exploration during trauma is normal.

Page 20

“What are each of these animals doing”

“It looks like the bear has found some photos of his duck friend who died to hang in his house and remember Duck. We can hang some photos of _____ if you’d like.”

“The rabbit has found some of his friend’s old things from when they were alive and they look like they’re making her happy!”

“Do you have anything special that belonged to _____ that makes you feel happy?”

“Would you like something that belonged to _____ to remember him/her by?”

“The turtle has planted a flower. Probably because his loved one who died loved plants. Do you think we should grow a plant to honor _____? What kind of plant do you think they would have liked?”

Page 21

“Sometimes we can feel powerless after a person dies. One way to make ourselves feel better is to do nice things for others that our loved one would have done or would have liked to see us do. What are some ways that _____ was kind to others? Would you like to try and do those things? Should we set a goal for ourselves?”

There are helpful suggestions in the acts of Kindness Guide within this kit that may be of use to you if you decide to do this.

Page 22

“If you feel like you need time to be alone with your thoughts that’s okay. If you wind up with questions from that time I’m here to help you.”

If your child is having a hard time expressing their feelings through words there are helpful activities that will provide them with an outlet in the Activities Guide within this kit.

Pages 23 - 26

This final sections leave us with advice on taking care of ourselves to maximize our lives. After a death children may become worried that you, other loved ones, or even they will die. If your child has expressed concern about this reassuring them with positive ways to stay healthy can help.

Pages 23 & 24

“These three things are so important to stay healthy.”

“What are your favorite healthy foods to eat or cook?”

“What are your favorite exercises and ways to take clean and care for your body?”

“What are your favorite things to do that make you happy?”

“How do you help take care of other people in our family?”

No matter their answers to these questions you can make a commitment to do them together.

Pages 25 & 26

If your loved one had a long life you can talk about the ways they were healthy and took care of themselves to live for so long. You can also talk about what things your child did with or for them that let them have such a long life.

If your loved one has died of an early age or due to an accident or violence you can mention that their life stayed with them as long as it possibly could and you can discuss the ways that your child’s impact had on making their life better.

Page 27 - 29

These pages are a nice time to reiterate to your child your beliefs on what happens after we die.

Page 30

This note from the author contains more tips you may find helpful in explaining death to your child and in understanding, and assisting with, their grieving process.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library you are welcome to do so.

Resources

Zucker, B. (2016). **Something Very Sad Happened: A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death**. Washington, D.C.: Magination Press



Book Discussion: Lifetimes: the Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children

Lifetimes: the Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children

By Bryan Mellonie

Illustrated by Robert Ingpen

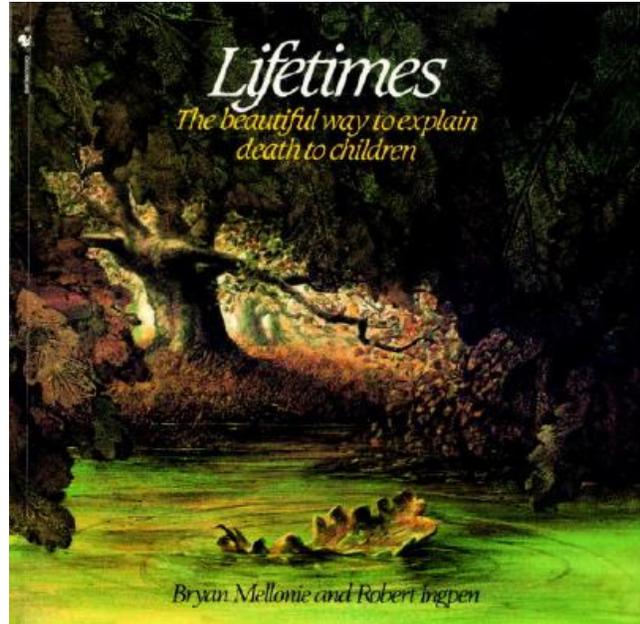
Bantam

This direct yet gentle story introduces death as a part of the lifecycle. It does not require much analyzing as it deals so well with the subject.

Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you've recently lost. You don't need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you're reading with.



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Discussion

Pages 1 & 2

“Those eggs are a beginning, aren’t they? What do you think is inside those eggs?”

Pages 3 & 4

“How about these shells? They don’t seem like a beginning, what part are they?”

“What do you think lived in those shells?”

Pages 11 & 12

If you are experiencing the loss of someone due to illness or injury these pages may be especially helpful in explaining what happened.

If you are experiencing the loss of someone who is young these pages may also be of use to you.

Pages 13 & 14

This may be a nice time to explain that it’s okay to feel sad when someone dies.

It may also be a good time to let your child know that you, other relatives, and any caregivers, nurses or doctors who worked with your loved one are also sad.

Pages 19 - 28

If your child has experienced death before, especially the death of a pet, these pages can be used to draw comparisons and to explain differences between the way animals and people live.

Pages 31 & 32

These pages can be used to prompt stories of all the wonderful things your loved one

experienced during their life. Encourage your child to share stories of what they enjoyed about, or enjoyed doing with, your loved one.

Older loved ones who have died will have many stories about their lives, younger people will have more stories about all the people who loved them.

Pages 33 & 34

Especially with younger children, you may end up hearing the same questions again and again. This is how they process traumatic information and grief.

The statements on this page can be a gentle way to reiterate to children what has happened. Your consistency will comfort and reassure them.

Pages 35 & 36

These pages are especially useful if you plan on making a memory box, photo album, or scrapbook. There are instructions in the provided Activities Guide to get you started if you want to make any of these things.

If you'd like to get started on such a project, it's a good idea to involve your child. You can use the following questions to start the process:

“Look at those items! I bet this person had an interesting life!. What do you think these items tell us about this person?”

“What are some interesting items you remember _____ having?”

A child may feel a bond to their loved one who has died through a seemingly random object. This is natural and should not be discouraged unless it is causing harm or distress.

If this is the case we recommend you seek the additional help of a counsellor. You can look at the guide of Community Helpers in this kit for ideas on what to do next.



Book Discussion: Missing Mommy: A Book About Bereavement

Missing Mommy:

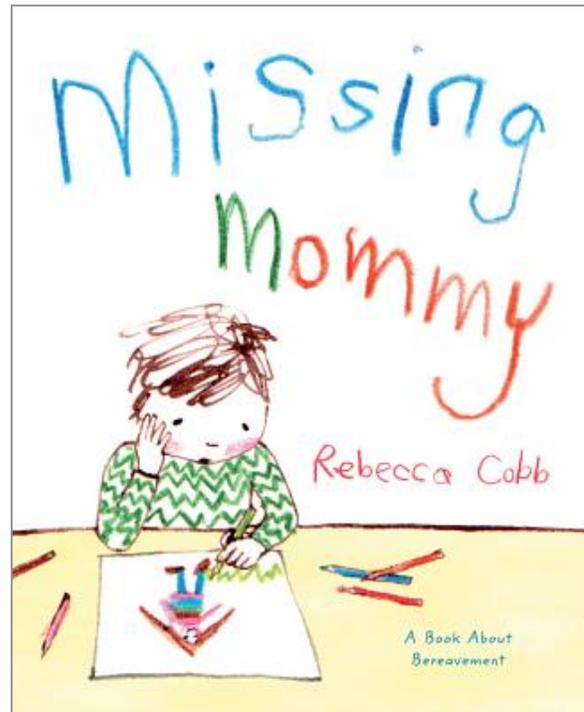
A Book about Bereavement

By Rebecca Cobb

Illustrated by Rebecca Cobb

Henry Holt & Company

The text and images in this picture book capture what death feels like for a little boy whose mother has recently died. It will be useful for parents who have lost a spouse. It will also be useful in understanding what your child is going through.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in itali**c**, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you’ve recently lost. You don’t need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you’re reading with.

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Discussion

Endpapers

What at first appears to be the squiggles of a child’s drawing are actually a mirrored pattern from the mother’s sweater the little boy carries with him through the story.

Title Page

In the picture you can see the mother wearing the sweater the little boy is so attached to.

Pages 1 & 2

*Death can be confusing for children. It’s important to clearly, consistently, and patiently explain death to your child. You may find this explanation useful or you may prefer the explanation in the back of the book **Something Very Sad Happened** by Bonnie Zucker & Kim Fleming where they suggest the following for letting your child know about death: “his body stopped working so he died. When someone dies, they cannot eat, sleep, or breathe anymore.” (pg 23) Whatever message you choose remember to be consistent so your child can understand what happened in a realistic way.*

Pages 3 & 4

Even after you have explained death to your child they may ask the same questions over and over again. This is common during the Denial phase of grief. Repeating their questions is how children make sense of trauma, the repeated information they receive will ground them in the reality of trauma and allow them to process death in a healthy way.

Your own loss of your loved one will mean you are grieving at the same time your child is grieving. Hearing these repeated questions will be difficult for you. Crying in front of your child is okay. In fact, it will be good for them to see you model healthy grieving behaviors. However, if you feel you need to cry uncontrollably you should find a private space like the father in the story as that display may scare your child. Unlike the father in the book, you'll want to be sure your child doesn't see you.

It's natural to feel a bond with an object that belonged to a loved one after they die, much like the little boy does with his mother's sweater. Children might want to keep such objects close to them during the grieving process and even beyond. This is normal. But take the necessary time to set boundaries and expectations around places or events in which the child might need to put the object aside and/or in a safe place (i.e. at school the child may need to keep the object in a backpack or locker). If the child cannot function without the object (i.e. in school, with peers, in the community, etc.) then follow up with a pediatrician or guidance counselor, as this may mean the child needs added support during this difficult time.

Pages 5 & 6

On page 5 the child seems happy, then on page 6 he seems sad again. This is common during the Denial phase for children. Suspending their trauma is how they are able to process death in healthy, manageable pieces. They may be distraught one minute, then bubbly and playful the next minute. It can be difficult for adults to understand because our grief feels more long lasting during the same phase. Being consistent and patient with your child during these times is what will help them the most.

Pages 7 & 8

Page 7 is indicative of how children can feel during the Depression phase of grieving.

Page 8 is indicative of how children feel during the Anger phase of grieving.

We have included activities your child may find helpful in our Activities Guide for when they need to express their emotions in nonverbal ways.

It's important to let your child know both of these feelings are normal and that you've been experiencing them too.

Pages 9 & 10

The guilt the child feels on Page 9 is indicative of the Bargaining stage of grief. There are times this guilt is merited and times it is not. If, for example, if your child had a fight with a parent who later died your child may feel guilt for their perceived involvement in the death. No matter if their actions resulted in the death or not don't be afraid to discuss this guilt with your child and to reassure them that we all make mistakes, we simply need to learn from them. As Buzhardt & Steib point out "Learning from mistakes is constructive; blaming ourselves for them is not." (Buzhardt & Steib, 2008).

Pages 11 - 16

During these pages the father in the story communicates what happened in a very kind and simple way that his son understands. It may be the first time he has explained it to his son or it may not be. Using the phrases he uses would work well with your own child when they need a reminder about what has taken place or what death is.

On page 11 a photo on the wall shows the mother in the sweater again.

On page 12 the father and son are seen crying together. Modeling healthy grieving behaviors for your child provides them with an example they can follow. If you feel you must cry uncontrollably, however, remove yourself so as not to unintentionally scare your child.

On pages 13 & 14 the father and son are seen going on a walk. On page 16 the whole family is walking together. Physical activity can be a healthy activity to participate in together when you're feeling sad or overwhelmed.

On page 15 the mother is seen in another photo wearing the sweater. After you've pointed out the mother a few times in the photos wearing the sweater you can share photos of your loved one who has passed away together. You can also suggest framing some photos together.

On page 15 the little boy is seen crying after a behavior he may feel contributed to his mother's death. This may be what he felt guilty about on page 9.

Page 17

It's hard to know if the new adult the boy is with is a teacher or counsellor, or other type of helper. You can ask your child:

“Who are some of the people you know that could be helpers while you feel this way?”

Acceptable answers may include:

- *Teachers*
- *Friends*
- *Family Friends*
- *Daycare providers*
- *Other answers your child may have*

He has drawn his mother in the sweater, but the sweater does not seem to be with him. This could be a good time to talk about boundaries for your child in regards to the item that they have formed a bond with. If your child needs to begin distancing themselves from the item you can always reassure them that leaving the item at home will keep it safe until they return and need it.

This may also be a good page to encourage your child to participate in some of the activities included in this kit's Activities Guide.

Page 18

“Would you like to create a special memory book all about _____? We could create one together.”

There are instructions to help start this process in this kit's Activities Guide.

Pages 19 & 20

“The way the little boy is helping is family is so kind. Being kind to others can make us feel better when we’re sad. What are some ways you could be kind that would make you feel better?”

Pages 21 - 24

“There will be times when you will find yourself missing _____ for no reason, and other times you’ll realize it may have been a long time since you thought about them. No matter what, the love you had for one another will never, ever leave.”

Pages 23 & 24

“Look at that beautiful garden he is growing! If you would like to plant something to honor _____ we can do that. What kind of plants do you think he/she would have liked?”

Resources

Zucker, B. (2016). **Something Very Sad Happened: A Toddler’s Guide to Understanding Death**. Washington, D.C.: Magination Press

Buzhardt, L. F., & Steib, S. D. (2008). **Can We Have One?: A Parent’s Guide to Raising Kids with Cats and Dogs**. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.



Book Discussion: Rabbityness

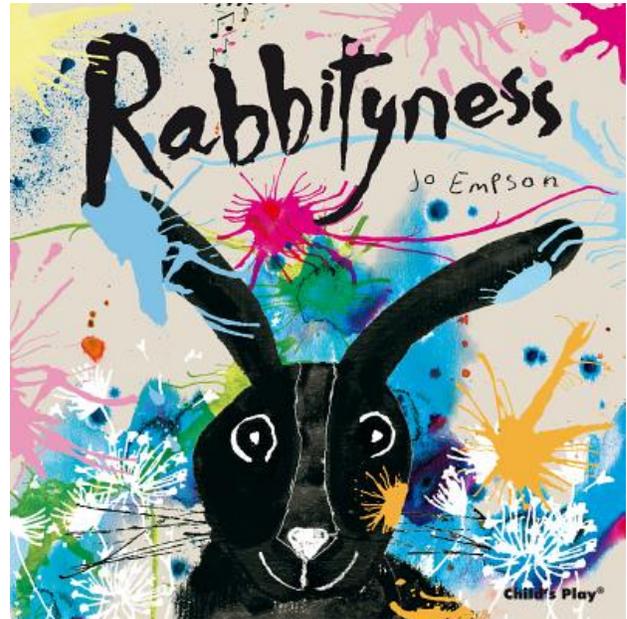
Rabbityness

By Jo Empson

Illustrated by Jo Empson

Child's Play International

This lively story of recognizing in ourselves many of the things we loved about a loved one we have lost is colorful, encourages creativity, and shows us how our loved ones continue on in our talents and memories. It provides wonderful opportunities to talk as a family about what made your loved one unique and creative ways to express the emotions you or your child are feeling.



You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain its hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you've recently lost. You don't need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you're reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Endpapers

At the front of the book only a stream of musical notes is seen. At the end of the book all of Rabbit's friends are enjoying the many talents they learned from Rabbit.

Pages 1 - 6

In this beginning section where Rabbit is doing rabbity things he is all black and the world around him is very realistic - green, black, and white. He also looks like a regular rabbit.

Pages 7 - 12

Now that Rabbit is enjoying unrabbity things his world is alive with color and he looks more animated.

“What are some unique things that _____ was good at?”

“What are some activities _____ used to do that made him/her VERY happy like Rabbit?”

If you know any unique stories your child may not be familiar with - especially from _____'s youth - this would be a good time to share one or two with your child.

Pages 13 - 18

“When someone we love dies we can feel very sad and like a part of ourselves is missing. Do you want to talk about how you're feeling since _____ has died?”

If so, allow your child to talk.

If not, some of the activities included in this kit's Activities Guide may help them express their feelings in a more physical or artistic way.

Pages 19 - 22

*Now would be a great time to discuss similarities you see between your child and _____.
These could be talents that they share, or ways that they're similar.*

“What do you think the music the rabbits are making sounds like?”

“What was some of the music that _____ loved?”

“What are some creative things that _____ used to enjoy?”

“You know, when you miss _____ you can listen to the music or try out the activities they loved to do to feel closer to them. Is there anything new you'd like to try that _____ enjoyed?”

Pages 23 & 24

“The gifts Rabbit gave to his friends keep his memory alive, even though he's gone now. All those gifts that _____ gave you mean _____ feels like he/she is still with us, even though he/she is gone now.”



Book Discussion: Something Very Sad Happened

Something Very Sad Happened:

A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death

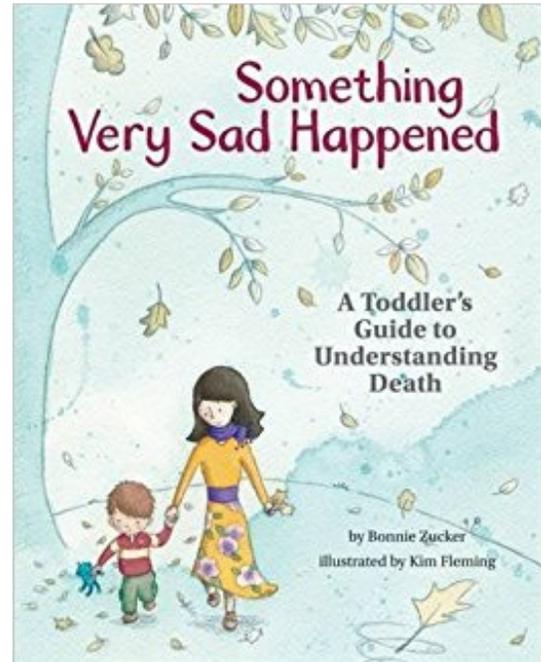
By Bonnie Zucker

Illustrated by Kim Fleming

Magination Press

Designed specifically for toddlers, this simple picture book explains death and our natural responses to death in a comforting way.

Although designed with this specific age group in mind it's well written message and comforting illustrations will be helpful for many young children of different ages.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you've recently lost. You don't need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you're reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Pages 1 - 6

This simple explanation will work well explaining death to your toddler.

Pages 7 & 8

“It’s okay to cry when you miss _____ and feel sad. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Long lasting sadness is typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 9 & 10

“There may be times you feel angry that _____ died. You might feel angry for no reason or you might even feel angry at _____. Both are normal ways to feel. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Anger has its own stage in the grief process. Your child may experience anger multiple times during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

When your child does feel angry there are suggestions for ways to express their anger in healthy ways in this kit’s Activities Guide.

Pages 11 & 12

Modeling healthy grieving behaviors is important. Your child will look to you for cues about what’s okay and will then mimic them. Crying in front of your child is fine. However, if you

feel you must cry uncontrollably find somewhere private to do that as it may unintentionally scare your child.

“I like how when the mommy felt sad the little boy made her feel better. You make me feel better when you...

- Give me hugs
- Smile at me
- Tell me stories

Anything special your child does!

“It looks like it made the little boy happy to make his mommy feel better too!”

Pages 13 - 16

Here the book talks again about what it means to be dead.

Pages 17 & 18

Telling stories and looking at pictures can make us feel close to our loved one who has died.

Check the Activities Guide in this kit for help getting started creating a memory book for your child or your family.

“I know so many wonderful stories about _____. I bet you do too! Do you want to tell me a story about _____? Would you like to hear a story about _____? What kind of story would you like to hear about _____?”

Pages 19 - 22

“No matter what, the love that you and _____ had for one another will never die. Just like the love that we have for one another.”

Pages 23 - 27

This helpful guide will teach you what the grieving process is like for your toddler. In addition, it has a lot of useful tips for parents who are grieving along with their child.



Book Discussion: The Goodbye Book

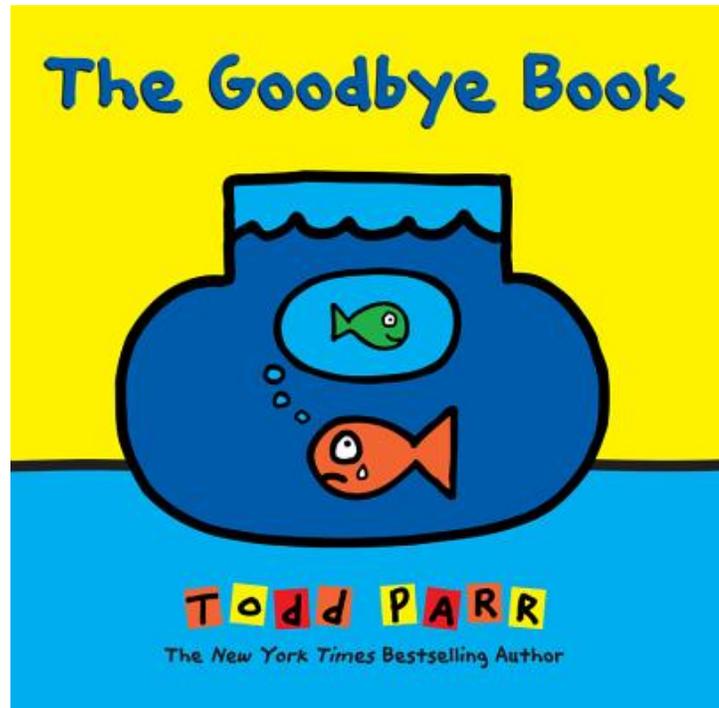
The Goodbye Book

By Todd Parr

Illustrated by Todd Parr

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

Todd Parr's colorful illustrations and direct text cover a wide variety of emotions making this book another classic when it comes to death. Discussing the emotions within the book will help you to understand what stage or stages of the grieving process your child is currently experiencing.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics, it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations, it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you’ve recently lost. You don’t need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you’re reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Pages 1 & 2

“That fish look sad. It’s okay to feel sad when we miss someone the way we miss _____. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Pages 3 & 4

“How do you feel right now? You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Page 5

“It’s okay to cry when you miss _____ and feel sad. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Long lasting sadness is typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Page 6

“There may be times you feel angry that _____ died. You might feel angry for no reason or you might even feel angry at _____. Both are normal ways to feel. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Anger has its own stage in the grief process. Your child may experience Anger multiple times during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

When your child does feel angry there are suggestions for ways to express their Anger in healthy ways in this kit's Activities Guide.

Pages 7 & 8

“Wanting time alone or not feeling like talking is something we all go through. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Feeling quiet or seeking out isolation is typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 9 & 10

“When someone dies we can feel like we’re a totally different person. Sometimes every day, sometimes from minute to minute. It’s not pleasant but it is normal. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Feeling quiet or seeking out isolation is typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 11 & 12

“Do you ever feel like this? If you do I want you to come and talk to me, okay?”

Lack of appetite and sleep can be typical during the Depression stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 13 & 14

“Trying to stop thinking about _____ dying or pretending it didn’t happen for a while are both okay. It doesn’t mean you love _____ any less. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Both of these coping strategies are common during both the Bargaining stage and the Acceptance stage of grief which may strike your child repeatedly during their grief process. If you are concerned seek out the help of your primary care physician or school guidance counselor.

Pages 15 & 16

“There’s a lot about death that’s confusing. Do you have any questions for me or anyone else? You can always come talk to me when you have questions.”

If you don’t know the answers to your child’s questions you can write them down to figure out later.

Children experiencing death and the grieving process may ask the same questions over and over again. This is common during the Denial phase of grief. Repeating their questions is how children make sense of trauma, the repeated information they receive will ground them in the reality of trauma and allow them to process death in a healthy way.

Pages 17 - 20

“Even after you feel better there may still be times you miss _____. That’s okay and may happen for a long time. You can always come talk to me when you feel like that.”

“Feeling better” is common during the Acceptance stage of the grieving process.

Pages 21 & 22

Sharing memories can make you and your child feel close to _____ again.

“Can you tell me any stories about your special time with _____?”

“Did _____ teach you anything?”

Pages 23 & 24

“We can do a lot of different things to make ourselves feel better. Talking, sharing stories, and being creative are all things to make us feel better. What else can we do to feel better?”

These activities are indicative of the Acceptance stage of the grieving process which your child may experience numerous times during their grieving process.

Page 25

Your child may hear a variety of theories about what happens after we die from people trying to help. Let your child know what you believe but also that it's alright for people to have differing viewpoints. Let your child know that if they have questions they can always come to you to ask them.

Page 26

“No matter what, the love that you and _____ shared will always be with you. Just like my love for you.”

Pages 27 - 29

“I will always love you and want to hold you tight! How many other people can we think of who love you?”



Book Discussion: The Kissing Hand

The Kissing Hand

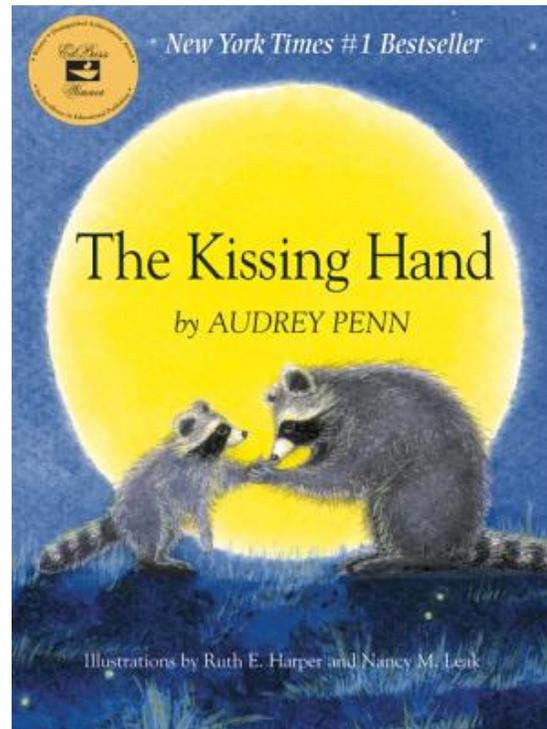
By Audrey Penn

Illustrated by Jo Ruth E. Harper

and Nancy M. Leak

Tanglewood

This book is considered a classic when it comes to the topic of grief and separation. It will be especially practical for the child experiencing separation anxiety. In addition, it's message is great for reminding a child that the love your child shared with whoever died will never leave them.



Below are some helpful notes you can use or paraphrase when reading the book together. If it's written in italics it's a note for you as a parent to read and consider. If it's written in quotations it's a discussion prompt for you and your child. There's no need to use all the notes, just what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain it's hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a “_____” you may insert the name of the loved one you’ve recently lost. You don’t need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you’re reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.

Discussion

Pages 1 & 2

Though Chester is talking about school it’s clear from the illustrations and his tone that this could be any traumatic situation including losing a loved one to death.

After the death of a loved one your child may become reclusive. This is especially common during the Depression stage of the grieving process and should be allowed. When it’s time to move on and return to school, work, or childcare the message of this book will be a useful tool in reminding your child they are loved.

Pages 5 & 6

Reminding your child of upcoming positive things despite the death occurring is important. Noticing the beautiful things that surround us can brighten the day of someone who is grieving.

“There are a lot of good things for Chester to do at school. What are some of the things you love about School (or work, or daycare)?”

Pages 7 - 12

After reading about the kissing hand try it!

“Does my kiss make you feel like Chester or does it feel different?”

If it feels different, “How does it feel different?”

Then get a kiss from your child and describe how it feels to you!

Pages 8 & 9

This is a lovely illustration of the kiss and how it makes Chester feel. You can use some of the materials in this kit to draw your own illustrations of how one another's kisses make each of you feel.

Pages 13 & 14

“Look at those animals going to school. What friends from school do you miss?”

Pages 15 & 16

“You know the love you shared with _____ is a lot like the kissing hand. It will always be with you and can never wash off.”

Pages 17 - 22

“If you're ever worried about something the way Chester is worried we can share a kissing hand.”

Pages 23 & 24

This would be a nice time to tell your child again how good their kiss made you feel.

Pages 25 & 26

“I like that Chester got to see his friends again because he went back to school, don't you?”

Page 27

If your child has enjoyed doing the kissing hand you can do it one more time here!



Book Discussion: When Dinosaurs Die

When Dinosaurs Die:

A Guide to Understanding Death

By Laurie Krasney Brown

Illustrated by Marc Brown

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

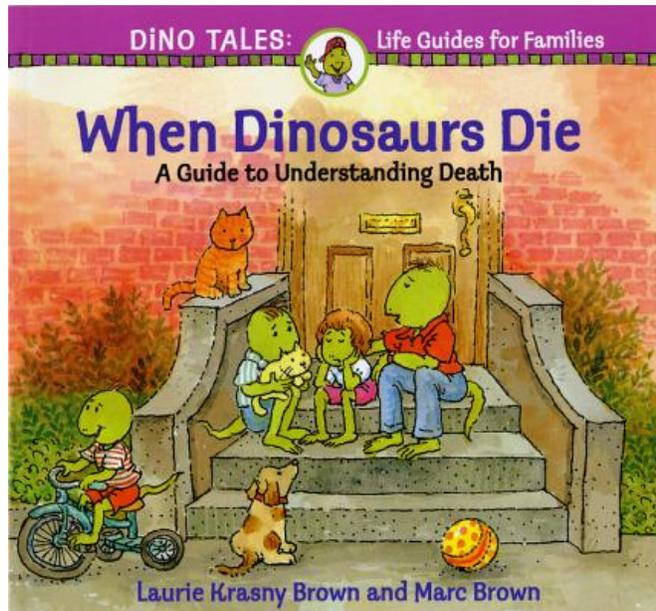
This book is a fabulous conversation starter. Its explanation of death is well put together and it also touches on less common ways people die including war, violence, substance abuse, and suicide. It covers all the bases of what

needs to be touched on when a loved one dies and we're helping a child work through their grief.

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain its hidden meanings to your child in place of a conversation with you.

Wherever there is a "_____ " you may insert the name of the loved one you've recently lost. You don't need to use all these suggestions, just what feels right for this moment or the family member you're reading with.

If you would like to keep this sheet when you return the kit to the library, you are welcome to do so.



Discussion

Pages 4 & 5

“Look at all the fun things those dinosaurs are doing! Do you see any dinosaurs doing something _____ liked to do?”

Page 6

If your family is experiencing the loss of a loved one who was ill, involved in an accident, or died young this page can be used to discuss that. Be honest without being gorey. The details may disturb your child and won't add to their understanding of death.

Page 7

If your loved one died due to an accident remind your child that everyone is sad, including the doctors, nurses, and emergency responders who tried to help them.

When discussing what happened to your loved one be honest without being gorey. The details may disturb your child and won't add to their understanding of death.

Page 8

If your loved one died due to violence, war, suicide, or substance abuse this page will be especially helpful in beginning that discussion. Be honest without being gorey. The details may disturb your child and won't add to their understanding of death.

Page 9

Most people die when they've lived long lives. Reminding your child of all your loved one experienced and accomplished can be reassuring to them.

If your loved one lived with you before they died this would be a nice time to tell a story about those times as well.

“It looks like these dinosaurs all get to live together like when _____ lived with us. Do you remember when _____ ...”

Pages 10 & 11

The explanation of death used here will work well with young children. Feel free to use it with your child even after you're done reading this book.

The dinosaurs on this page are reacting in a variety of ways. Some seem not to care and continue playing, others look scared (behind the tree), some are curious (at the base of the tree), and others seem sad. Asking your child to point out a dinosaur who feel the way they feel may help you begin a conversation about feeling scared, or sad with them.

In addition, children may seem sad one minute and then fine the next. This is common to their grieving process as suspending reality is how they deal with trauma in manageable pieces.

*If your child has questions about the bird you may want to read **The Dead Bird** by Margaret Wise Brown next.*

Page 12

Anger has its own stage in the grieving process. Your child may experience this stage or may skip it all together, both are normal. If your child is angry try some of the suggestions in this kit's Activities Guide to give them a chance to express their feelings in a more physical way.

If your child is experiencing strange dreams encourage them to talk to you about what they're dreaming. If they're having trouble expressing verbally what their experience is like you can turn to the suggestions in this kit's Activities Guide for options they can use to communicate with you in different ways.

Page 13

The behavior of this little girl dinosaur is indicative of the Bargaining stage of the grieving process. If your child is behaving like her he or she may need to be reminded that death is forever but our love and memories are something we will always share with our loved one.

Page 14

These behaviors are indicative of the depression stage of the grieving process.

The mom dinosaur is being great about encouraging her children to talk, you can do the same for your children if they are experiencing depression over the loss of your loved one.

Page 15

After a child experiences a death it is not uncommon for them to experience worry or fear about more people they care about dying, or even themselves dying. If your child is going through this support them by encouraging them to ask questions and then reassuring them.

“There’s a lot about death that’s confusing. Do you have any questions for me or anyone else? You can always come talk to me when you have questions.”

Page 16

Anger may be revisited by your child during their grieving process. There is no straight line and time limit for each stage to be dealt with. The suggestions on this page are wonderful for your child to use to deal with their anger. In addition, it isn’t listed but the little girl dinosaur is journaling about her feelings. For tips on journaling check the Activities Guide in this kit.

“There may be times you feel angry that _____ died. You might feel angry for no reason or you might even feel angry at _____. Both are normal ways to feel. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Page 17

Needing time alone or to cry are both common during the grieving process. You can let your child know it’s okay to cry as well as model positive healing behaviors like crying yourself for your child to see and replicate.

“It’s okay to cry when you miss _____ and feel sad. You can always come talk to me when you feel this way.”

Pages 20 - 25

This section of the book covers what commonly happens at a funeral or memorial service for a loved one who has died. If you plan on attending a funeral and will be bringing your child these pages will help you explain what may happen.

If your child is not attending the funeral there are helpful tips on page 25 for them to still be a part of things.

Pages 26 & 27

There are many ways and customs to honor our loved ones who have died.

“There are so many ways to celebrate our loved ones. What is something special you’d like to do to celebrate _____?”

Pages 28 & 29

Your child may hear about not only customs or traditions from others but they may also get a lot of viewpoints on what happens after we die. It’s important to let your child know that all these viewpoints, customs, or traditions are okay for people to believe in and they were shared with your child in an effort to show support and care for your child.

“There’s a lot about death that’s confusing. Do you have any questions for me or anyone else? You can always come talk to me when you have questions.”

Pages 30 & 31

All of these are great suggestions you can do with your child to assist them through their grieving process. In addition your child may have their own suggestions for ways to feel better or honor your loved one.

“Are any of these things you want to do together? You pick one for us to do first.”
You’ll find additional suggestions in the Activities Guide and Acts of Kindness guide in this kit.