



Explaining Death and Loss to Children and Young People Useful books and reference material

Bereavement is a difficult topic for adults and children but books can provoke discussion and foster understanding about the loss of a loved one. Reading or hearing about characters who are going through similar experiences can help reassure that they are not alone and help them understand that they will eventually be able to overcome their pain.

The following is a list of books that have been found helpful. It is by no means exhaustive. The age limits are approximate and depend on the maturity or understanding of the child. Usually, a book from a younger category will be preferable to one that is beyond the child's understanding. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact the Rainbows website (www.rainbowsgb.org). To find most of the titles, go to amazon.co.uk

Books for Pre-School

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

A story about Badger, who is old, and the sadness his friends feel when he dies. His friends eventually realise that death was a happy release for him and so they are able to look back on their memories of him with happiness rather than just dwelling on their grief.

Granpa by John Burningham

This tells of the close bond between a little girl and her grandfather. When he dies, the little girl still misses him but is comforted by her happy memories of him.

A Dog like Jack by Dyanne Disalvo-Ryan

After a long life of chasing squirrels an old dog comes to the end of his days.

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst. Illustrated by Geoff Stevenson

This delightful book provides a gentle way to ease a child's fear of loneliness and separation through the story of the invisible string of love connecting us all, no matter where we are or how far apart we are.

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back

by Margot Sunderland and Nicky Armstrong

The beautiful sea dries up and the sand dragon finds ways of coming to terms with his loss by finding water to save a dying flower and by building a rock pool. This book comes with a very helpful guidebook, "Helping Children with Loss", complete with further work to do on bereavement and grief.

Books for Ages 5 - 8 Years Old

NB The first eight books in this list and some in the other age group lists are suggested by the charity "Winston's Wish" which also has a very helpful website: winstonswish.org.uk with resources and DVDs explaining the effects of grief on young people. There are also good ideas such as memory books and memory boxes.

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine by Diana Crossley. Illustrated by Kate Sheppard (Winston's Wish, 2000 ISBN 978-1-869890-58-2)

This is a workbook for children who have experienced the death of a loved one. With six possible sessions, this book offers practical and sensitive support for bereaved children through the characters of Bee and Bear.

Ask Me by Antje Damm

(Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2005 ISBN 978-1-84507-386-2)

This book offers an engaging way for primary school aged children to generate those really special conversations that happen when the defences are down and a child feels more able to open up.

Flamingo Dream written and Illustrated by Cathie Felstead

(Greenwillow Books, 2002 ISBN 0-688-17863-4)

This bright and colourful book is narrated by a young boy whose dad is seriously ill and dies soon after a trip to Florida to see the place where he grew up. The collage style illustrations capture the things the boy collects to remind him of his dad. This is a sensitive but honest book, which emphasises the importance of memories.

My Mommy Has Cancer by Carolyn Stearns-Parkinson

(Park Press, 1991 ISBN 0963028707)

This is an American story book about a child whose mother is in hospital for treatment for cancer. Suitable for use with children aged from three to six.

No Matter What by Debi Gliori

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999 ISBN 0-747581347)

This book gently and powerfully conveys the idea of unconditional parental love through the characters of Large and Small. It is suitable for children aged from three to eight.

Mum and Dad Glue by Kes Gray. Illustrated by Lee Wildish

(Hachette Children's Group, ISBN: 9780340957110)

A powerful book about a little boy coming to terms with his parents' divorce where he tries to find a pot of parent glue to stick his mum and dad back together. This rhyming story is brilliantly told with a powerful message that even though his parents may be broken, their love for him is not.

On Eagles' Wings by Sue Mayfield

(Lion Hudson, 2004 ISBN 0-745948901)

Tony's mother is dying. There's nothing he can do about it and he can't always put a brave face on things. Often he wishes he could just fly away from everything, like an eagle, powerful and free. Gradually, through his experiences, Tony begins to understand that death can sometimes bring freedom. A very readable and sensitive story about growing up, family relationships, and facing bereavement.

There's No Such Thing as a Dragon by Jack Kent

(Golden Books, 1975 ISBN 0-375832084)

This is another really helpful story for children aged from four to eight. It is a funny, quirky story about a little dragon that gets bigger –eventually becoming an overwhelming size because no-one is noticing him. It subtly conveys to a child that even tough stuff can and needs to be talked about to make it more manageable.

The Secret C: Straight Talking About Cancer by Julie Stokes

(Winston's Wish/Macmillan Cancer Relief, 2000 ISBN 0-9539123-0-2)

This book aims to help children ask questions about cancer and answers some common questions. It has a simple description of what cancer is and the treatments. The book discusses side-effects in easy to understand language as well as the emotions that a child may have when a family member has cancer. Suitable for use with children aged from four to 11.

Goodbye Mousie by Robie H. Harris & illustrated by Jan Ormerod

This beautifully illustrated picture book tells the story of a little boy whose pet mouse has died. At first he doesn't believe it, thinking it is just asleep, but by asking lots of questions, and with the help of his family, he begins to accept Mousie's death. This would be very helpful to introduce death to young children and a starting point to discuss what happens when someone dies and the different feelings one may have.

Gentle Willow by Joyce C Mills

This story is one of the few written for children suffering an illness from which they may not recover. It tells the tale of Amanda and the Little Tree who discover that their friend Gentle Willow isn't feeling very well. This book helps to address feelings of sadness, worry, anger, love and compassion.

The Lonely Tree by Nicholas Halliday

With beautiful illustrations and using gentle woodland characters, the book describes the cycle of life through the seasons.

The Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside

This tells of a little girl whose worries and anxieties overshadow her life. With the help of the old lady next door, she learns to share her worries and try to deal with them.

Goodbye Vivi! By Antoine Schneider

When Granny's beloved canary dies, the family comes to accept it, as well as the idea that someday they will lose Granny as well.

Always and Forever by Alan Durant

A family of forest animals learn to cope with the death of a loved fox friend. The book does not flinch from facing up to the reality of death as the animals find fox's body "still and cold".

The Sunshine Cat by Miriam Moss

Sunny the cat is loved by all his human family, but one day there is a knock at the door - Sunny has been killed in an accident. A sensitive story which aims to help children come to terms with death.

Books for Ages 8 - 12 Years Old

Saying Goodbye to Daddy by Judith Vigna

Clare's Dad died in a car accident and this book looks at changes in the family, difficult feelings, funerals and memories through the eyes of Clare. It would also be a good book to help parents understand the child's perspective. It gives good examples of how adults can answer children's questions, emphasising the need to be clear and honest.

When Someone Very Special Dies, When Someone has a Very Serious Illness, When Mom and Dad Separate all by Marge Heegaard

A series of books to help children cope with their feelings. Practical workbooks, rather than stories, they encourage children to personalise and illustrate their thoughts and feelings. (Available from Being Yourself, 73 Livingstone Road, Deal CT14 7NN)

Lizzie Zipmouth by Jacqueline Wilson

It follows a young girl named Lizzie who copes with moving into a new home. It is aimed for 7- to 10-year-old readers, and is written in a fun and believable way to connect with the audience.

The Cat Mummy by Jacqueline Wilson

On the surface, this tells the tale of a girl coming to terms with the death of her cat but this death prompts Verity to think about the death of her mother many years ago.

The Worry Website by Jacqueline Wilson

A collection of linked short stories in which pupils in a class can post their worries onto the Worry Website set up by their class teacher. Other pupils can leave advice but sometimes the best advice comes from the most unexpected places.

What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? By Trevor Romain

A thought provoking book for older children that describes the huge range of emotions people go through when a loved one dies and how to cope with the situation. It answers questions such as 'why do people have to die?', 'is it okay to cry?' and 'what is a funeral/memorial service?' It is written in a straightforward way, with practical tips, advice and information about different faiths and beliefs.

Rudi's Pond by Eve Bunting

When a sick boy dies, his friends and classmates remember him by building a schoolyard pond in his memory.

Saying Goodbye: A Special Farewell to Mama Nkwelle by Ifeoma Onyefulu

This book has bright colourful photos and follows a little boy, Ikenna describing what happens at the ceremony after his greatgrandmother's funeral. It gives ideas of different ways to remember someone and an insight into Nigerian culture. A lovely book that could be used in many different situations, including schools.

How it Feels When a Parent Dies by Jill Krementz

Children from 7- 16 discuss the questions, fears and bereavement they experienced when one of their parents died.

A Gift for Tia by Karen T Taha

Little Carmela is close to her elderly neighbour and saddened by her illness and death but she finds a way to express her love when Tia Rosa's grandchild is born.

Books for Teenagers

How to Guide Children and Teens through Times of Divorce, Death, and Crisis with the Rainbows Approach by Suzy Yehl Marta, President and Founder of Rainbows

The Grieving Teen. A Guide for Teenagers and their Friends by Helen Fitzgerald

A fairly sophisticated book aimed at teenagers that gives advice on how to cope with death and the emotions that may be felt.

Michael Rosen's Sad Book by Michael Rosen

This book is suitable for all ages and certainly for younger teens. It tells of Michael's sadness when his beloved son, Eddie, dies. A true story that tells of the very real emotions that affect him and of the things he does to try to overcome and come to terms with his sadness.

Before I Die by Jenny Downham

Suitable for older teens, it tells the story of Tessa, a 16 year old who is dying of terminal leukaemia and of her wish list of things she wants to do before she dies. It very movingly tells of how she faces up to her death and the responses of family and friends.

When a Friend Dies. A Book for Teens about Grieving and Healing by Marilyn E Gootman

Author, Marilyn Gootman, saw her own children suffer from the death of a friend, so she knows what teenagers go through when another teen dies. Her genuine understanding, gentle advice, and compassionate wisdom provide a helpful guide for parents or teachers of a teen who has experienced a painful loss.

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love by Earl A. Grollman

This book was written after the author spoke to thousands of teenagers and found they often felt forgotten after someone has died. Written in short, clear sentences that are easy to read, it covers feelings, different types of death and the future. This book gives the reader many options of what can happen, how s/he may feel, giving advice and reassuring readers grief is normal.

The Charlie Barber Treatment by Carole Lloyd

Simon's Mum died suddenly from a brain haemorrhage and he came home from school to find she had died. With his GCSE coursework piling up and having to help around the house, Simon finds it hard and doesn't go out much with his friends. He then meets Charlie, who is visiting her Grandma, and believes their meeting was fate. Simon starts to enjoy life again and to re-build relationships with his family and friends. A sensitive and realistic book that conveys some of the thoughts and emotions of a teenage boy.

When Mum Died by Sheila Hollins and Lester Sireling: Illustrated by Beth Webb

When Dad Died by Sheila Hollins and Lester Sireling: Illustrated by Beth Webb

These books take a gentle, honest and straightforward approach to death in the family. The pictures tell the story of the death of a parent in a simple but moving way and will be helpful to adolescents and adults with learning disabilities as well as to their carers and supporters.

When Somebody Dies by Sheila Hollins and Noëlle Blackman:

Illustrated by Catherine Brighton

Everyone feels sad when somebody dies, and people with intellectual disabilities have the same feelings of grief as anyone else. This book tells the story of Mary, who is very upset when someone she loves dies. She is encouraged by a friend to go and see a counsellor. Her counselling sessions help her to feel less sad. Later on in the book, Mary's friend Frank also loses someone he is close to. He is given comfort and companionship by his friends, and learns to cope with life better as time passes.

Am I Going to Die? by Sheila Hollins and Irene Tuffrey-Wijne:

Illustrated by Lisa Kopper

This book tells the story of John, who has an intellectual disability. John is dying. The pictures follow him in his illness and his final days. They are designed to help the reader make sense of what is happening to them or someone they know who is ill. The pictures help them to ask questions or share their concerns.

Books for Adults Helping Grieving Children

The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide by Helen Fitzgerald

Explaining death to a child is one of the most difficult tasks a parent or other relative can face. *The Grieving Child* offers practical, compassionate advice for helping a child cope with the death of a parent or other loved one. Parents of children from preschool age to the teen years will find much-needed guidance,

Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One:

A Guide for Grownups by William C Kroen

This is a guide for parents, teachers, counsellors and other adults who play important roles in children's lives and it reflects the knowledge and wisdom of a wide range of people who have given much thought into how children grieve.

What happens when someone dies? A book for adults and children to share together

SeeSaw – Grief Support for the Young in Oxfordshire (www.seesaw.org.uk)

This book is written to help adults explain to children in simple language and pictures what happens when someone dies.

Living with Grief: Children, Adolescents, and Loss by Kenneth J Doka

This publication features articles by leading educators and clinicians in the field of grief and bereavement. The chapters entitled "Voices" are the writings of children and adolescents. The book includes a useful bibliography of age-appropriate literature for children and adolescents.

Water Bugs and Dragonflies: by Doris Stickney & illustrated by Gloria Stickney

This booklet with small black and white pictures is based on a fable, associating death with a water bug's transformation into a dragonfly. It portrays the mystery around death but may need an adult to explain the analogy and help a child relate it to their own experience. It uses Christian beliefs with a focus on life after death and also contains advice for parents and carers.

Grief in Children (Second Edition) A Handbook for Adults by Atle Dyregrov

A sympathetically written and accessible book and is the thoughtful distillation of many years' clinical experience of working with bereaved children and their families. Suggestions and advice are accompanied by knowledge of the most up to date research and includes vignettes describing children's questions and reactions.

Grief in Young Children: A Handbook for Adults by Atle Dyregrov

It is a common misconception that pre-school children are not capable of experiencing grief in the same way that older children do. Grief in Young Children challenges this assumption, demonstrating that although young children may not express grief in the same way as older children, they still need to be supported through loss.

Effective Grief and Bereavement Support: the role of Family, Friends, Colleagues, Schools and Support Professionals by Atle and Kari Dyregrov

Individuals in social networks surrounding bereaved people often feel very uncertain about how best to offer support following the death of someone close. As a result of this, people often find that their relationships with friends and family suffer in the wake of bereavement. Kari and Atle Dyregrov provide concrete, evidence-based advice about how support processes can be improved. Suitable for staff working in schools and for families, among others.

Healing the Hurt, Restoring the Hope by Suzy Yehl Marta

A wonderful book full of insight and practical tips based on Suzy's wide experience of working with children and young people who have suffered a significant loss in their lives. Full of examples drawn from her experience, Suzy offers wise and practical tips for those supporting children and young people who are grieving.

Children and Loss by Sue McDermott - Redemptorist Publications

http://www.rpbooks.co.uk/search.html?route=product/search&keyword=children%20and%20loss&category_id=0&description=1&model=1&isbn=1&author=1&code=1&publisher=1

A practical, user-friendly, non-academic pastoral resource which helps pastoral care providers to give even more effective and appropriate support to children grieving a significant loss in their lives. Sue draws on her many years experience with Rainbows, as a facilitator, coordinator, Headteacher, National Director and now Executive Director of the charity.

