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# Recommended Books for Children Coping With Loss or Trauma

Books can be wonderful tools to use with children who have experienced difficult times such as trauma or loss. Reading (or being read to) and talking with adults can help them understand and cope with their feelings in a developmentally appropriate way. Reading also offers a great way to spend time with a child, reinforce a sense of normalcy and security, and connect with them, all of which are important to recovery from a traumatic experience.

Following is a list of books that are recommended by grief and crisis experts working with children. Parents and caregivers who want to find other books should look for books that address children's grief and loss, natural disasters, anxiety, and dealing with tragedy. Talk to a children's librarian for other appropriate search terms. Parents and caregivers can also refer to the following tips for talking to children about their feelings.

## **Tips for Using Books to Engage With Children**

Parents and caregivers who share books with children after a tragedy or loss should be prepared to do the following:

- Let the characters and story help your child understand how to cope. Discuss ways to feel less anxious or nervous about what is happening.
- Be willing to answer your child's questions simply, at their level of understanding.
- Let them know that it is normal to cry, feel scared, or want comfort during difficult times. Provide them with opportunities for that emotional closeness, as needed.
- Remind children that you, the caregiver/parent are there for them, and that you are always willing to help them when times are difficult.
- Use the power of ritual to help teach children how people in your family or social group remember those who have died.
- Encourage children to identify simple plans of action to take each day to reengage in normal activities with others.
- Help children develop simple ways to remember good things about those who have died. They might share a story, draw pictures, or remember occasions that they enjoyed with the person(s) who have died.
- Let children know that they are loved and cared for. Reach out to other family members or close friends who could also support your child/ren.

## **PICTURE BOOKS**

### **Always and Forever**—Alan Durant (Picture Book)

A story for anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. When Fox dies, Mole, Hare, and Otter are devastated. They feel they will never get over their great sadness. How can life go on without him? Then one day Squirrel comes to visit. She reminds Fox's family of all the funny things he used to do. And as the friends share dinner and tell stories, they realize at last that in their hearts and memories, Fox is still with them, and he will be -always and forever.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0152166366
- Pages: 32
- Publisher: Harcourt Children's Books
- Age Range: 3+

### **Badger's Parting Gifts**—Susan Varley (Picture Book)

A touching look at death, and how life goes on. Badger's friends are saddened by his passing, but they come to realize that everyone lives on through their gifts of kindness and the happy memories that remain.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780688115180
- Publisher: HarperCollins 1984
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4+

### **Bear's Last Journey**—Udo Weingelt (Picture Book)

This gentle picture book succeeds in articulating the sense of loss and confusion that children may feel when a loved one dies. Old Bear is very sick. With his animal friends gathered around him, Bear tells them that that he must say good-bye, for he is going on a special journey. "But...but...you're not dying?" asks Rabbit, and Bear admits that he is. All the animals are saddened by the news, but the little fox is especially upset - hurt and angry and confused. He cannot imagine life without Bear. How Fox and the other forest animals

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-10: 0735817995
- Publisher: North-South Books- 2003
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4+

### **Dead Bird**—Margaret Brown Wise (Picture Book)

A group of children find a dead bird and bury it in the woods, sing to it, and place flowers on its grave. Without any reference to religious concepts, the author addresses the sensitive issue of death in a non-threatening way that young children can understand. The spare writing style and design help to sustain the serious mood suggested by the subject matter, making the book an excellent mechanism for the sharing of feelings about death. By gently confronting the emotions associated with the experience of death, the author provides a starting point for discussion with young children faced with the loss of a cherished pet or loved one.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780060289324
- Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4 - 7

### **Everett Anderson's Goodbye**—Lucille Clifton (Picture Book)

A touching portrait of a little boy who is trying to come to grips with his father's death. Lucille Clifton captures Everett's conflicting emotions as he confronts this painful reality. We see him struggle through many stages, from denial and anger to depression and, finally, acceptance. In this spare and moving poem, the last in this acclaimed series, Lucille Clifton brings Everett Anderson's life full circle.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780805008005
- Publisher: Square Fish- 1983
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 5+

### **Goodbye Mousie**—Robie H. Harris (Picture Book)

One morning a boy finds that his pet, Mousie, won't wake up. The truth is Mousie has died. At first the boy doesn't believe it. He gets very mad at Mousie for dying, and then he feels very sad. But talking about Mousie, burying Mousie in a special box, and saying good-bye helps this boy begin to feel better about the loss of his beloved pet.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780689871344
- Publisher: Aladdin- 2001
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4+

### **The Purple Balloon**—Chris Raschka (Picture Book)

When a child becomes aware of his pending death (children tend to know long before the rest of us even want to consider it), and is given the opportunity to draw his feelings, he will often draw a blue or purple balloon, released and unencumbered, on its way upward. Health-care professionals have discovered that this is true, regardless of a child's cultural or religious background and researchers believe that this is symbolic of the child's innate knowledge that a part of them will live forever. . . .

In disarmingly simple and direct language, creates a moving, sensitive book that is also a phenomenally useful tool to talk about death. The message of the book is clear: talking about dying is hard, dying is harder, but there are many people in your life who can help.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-10: 0375841466
- Publisher: Schwartz & Wade
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 3+

### **Remembering Crystal**—Sebastian Loth (Picture Book)

Crystal and Zelda are best friends. They do many things together (read books, take trips, talk). When Crystal disappears from the garden and it's evident that she has died. As Zelda remembers all that Crystal taught her about the world and the good times they shared, she realizes that her friend will always be in her heart. In this gentle story, children learn, with Zelda, that true friendship is a gift that doesn't die.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0735823006
- Publisher: NorthSouth
- Pages: 64
- Age range: 3+

### **Rudi's Pond**—Eve Bunting (Picture Book)

When a sick boy dies, his friends and classmates remember him by building a schoolyard pond in his memory. Based on a true story, "Rudi's Pond" is a gentle, insightful book to help young readers deal with loss.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780618486045
- Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 1999
- Pages: 32

### **Sammy in the Sky**—Barbara Walsh (Picture Book)

A tale of love, loss, and remembrance. Sammy, the best hound dog in the whole wide world, loves his girl and she loves him. When illness cuts Sammy's life short, the girl's family keeps his spirit alive by celebrating his love of chasing wind-blown bubbles, keeping loyal guard at night, and offering his velvety fur for endless pats and tummy scratches.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0763649272
- Publisher: Candlewick
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4+

### **The Scar**—Charlotte Moundlic (Picture Book)

The story of a boy struggling with wild fluctuations of emotions: sadness, sympathy, and fear, following the death of his mother, which he tries to counteract by closing all the windows, holding his breath, and running around until his heart pounds, since he was told that she'll always be "in your heart." With tenderness, touches of humor, and unflinching emotional truth, Charlotte Moundlic captures the loneliness of grief through the eyes of a child.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0763653415
- Publisher: Candlewick
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 5+

### **Six Is So Much Less Than Seven**—Ronald Himler (Picture Book)

A bittersweet story of loss and love. The story follows a farmer's day as he remembers and mourns the loss of one of his seven cats. Though a farmer regrets the sad loss of one of his faithful companions, he realizes that life goes on.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-1887734912
- Publisher: Star Bright Books
- Pages: 40
- Age range: 5+

### **Someone Special Died**—Joan Prestine (Picture Book)

An unencumbered, explanation of death for young children. Using language appropriate for younger audience, the book addresses some of the feelings that a young child may have about death. Instilled is the message that while the person is no longer here with them, there a ways in which they can be remembered.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-1577686828
- Pages: 32
- Publisher: Brighter Child
- Age Range: 3+

**Where Do People Go When They Die**—Mindy Avra Portnoy (Picture Book)

The answers to the age old question may be as varied as the individuals asked. Some thoughtful answers are provided in this book. Suggestions for parents, on providing honest, age and developmentally appropriate answers to this and related questions are also addressed by the author, Portnoy, a rabbi.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-1580130813
- Pages: 24
- Publisher: Kar-Ben Publishing
- Age Range: 5+

**Where The Tomorrows Go**—Manoj S. Abraham (Picture Book)

This picture book reminds children of the importance and support that family pets provide. They are beloved companions, very much a part of daily life. Sometimes those pets, such as the main character's dog, become ill and die, leaving a painful gap in the family. The child in the story is saddened by her pet's death, and wonders how to keep her memories alive. As the author illustrates, writing stories about one's experiences with her dog helps accomplish that task, and gives the little girl hope for the future.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0-9887965-7-7
- Pages: 21
- Publisher: Sennin Group LLC
- Age Range: 6+

**GENERAL****A Terrible Thing Happened - A Story for Children Who Have Witnessed Violence or Trauma**—Margaret M. Holmes

Sherman Smith saw the most terrible thing happen. At first he tried to forget about it, but soon something inside him started to bother him. He felt nervous for no reason. Sometimes his stomach hurt. He had bad dreams. And he started to feel angry and do mean things, which got him in trouble. Then he met Ms. Maple, who helped him talk about the terrible thing that he had tried to forget. Now Sherman is feeling much better. This gently told and tenderly illustrated story is for children who have witnessed any kind of violent or traumatic episode, including physical abuse, school or gang violence, accidents, homicide, suicide, and natural disasters such as floods or fire. An afterword by Sasha J. Mudlaff written for parents and other caregivers offers extensive suggestions for helping traumatized children, including a list of other sources that focus on specific events.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9781557986429
- Publisher: Amer Psychological Assn- 2000
- Pages:
- Age range: 4+

**Bird**—Zetta Elliott (More appropriate for older children)

Mekhai, otherwise known as "Bird", loves to draw. As Bird struggles to understand the death of his beloved grandfather and his older brother's drug addiction, he escapes into his art. Drawing is an outlet for Bird's emotions and imagination, and provides a path to making sense of his world. A look at a young boy's path to coping with real-life troubles.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-1600602412
- Publisher: Lee & Low Books
- Pages: 48
- Age range: 7+

**Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories**—Audrey Penn (More appropriate for older children)

Chester Raccoon's good friend Skiddel Squirrel has had an accident and will not be returning - ever. Chester is upset that he won't get to play with his friend anymore. Mrs. Raccoon suggests that Chester and his friends create some memories of Skiddel, so that they will have good memories when they miss him. Chester, his brother Ronny, and their friends decide to gather at the pond, where they combine their memories and create a touching celebration of their friend's life.

This sweet story will help children to understand the positive purpose behind memorial services and how "making memories" can provide cheer and comfort when missing an absent loved one.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-1933718293
- Publisher: Tanglewood Press
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 3+

**The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages**—Leo Buscaglia

A warm, wonderfully wise and strikingly simple story about a leaf names Freddie. How Freddie and his companion leaves change with the passing seasons, finally falling to the ground with winter's snow, is an inspiring allegory illustrating the delicate balance between life and death.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780943432892
- Publisher: Slack Incorporated- 1982
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4+

**Good-bye, Sheepie**—Robert Burleigh

Goodbye Sheepie portrays the love between a boy and his dog, the boy's grief related to the death of his dog, and the supportive love and understanding of the parent, as the boy says his goodbye. The story fuses the sadness of loss with the hope Sheepie will remain a pleasant memory. No form of afterlife is mentioned and no religious beliefs are referenced.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0761455981
- Pages: 32
- Publisher: Amazon Children's Publishing
- Age Range: 6+

### **Her Mother's Face**—Roddy Doyle (More appropriate for older children)

Following the death of her mother, a young girl “Siobhan” is left with a father so sad he never speaks to her about her mother. By the time she is 10, Siobhán can no longer remember her mother’s face; it’s an “empty space” that causes painful unhappiness. One day, she meets a beautiful woman who recognizes the girl’s sadness and listens to her story. The woman tells her to look in the mirror to find her mother’s face. The story embodies the message that life goes on and so can individuals.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN- 10: 0439815010
- Publisher: Arthur A. Levine Books
- Pages: 40
- Age range: 4+

### **I Miss You: A First Look At Death**—Pat Thomas

When a close friend or family member dies, it can be difficult for children to express their feelings. This book helps boys and girls understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have following a loved one's death. Titles in this sensitively presented series explore the dynamics of various relationships experienced by children of preschool through early school age. Kids are encouraged to understand personal feelings and social problems as a first step in dealing with them.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780764117640
- Publisher: Barron’s Educational Series- 2001
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 4+

### **The Invisible String**—Patrice Karst

Children of all ages (And yes! Adults too!) feel a great sense of peace and joy realizing that we are all connected to the ones that we love... (pets, friends, grandparents, cousins etc... and especially those that have passed on)...through the Invisible String. A string that can never be lost, cut, or torn. A string that can reach all the way to the moon or down to the ocean floor. Strings that anger, time, or bad feelings can ever make go away

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780875167343
- Publisher: DeVorss & Company- 2000
- Pages: 36
- Age range: 3+

### **Jenny Is Scared: When Sad Things Happen in the World**—Carol Shuman

A comforting, coping story for children who are aware of the threats of violence and terrorism in the world. A range of fears, feelings and questions are explored. The child reader is encouraged to talk to parents, friends and other caregivers.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9781591470038
- Publisher: Magination Press- 2003
- Pages: 28
- Age range: 4+

### **Kaddish for Grandpa in Jesus' Name Amen**—James Howe

This gentle story approaches the subjects of family, grief, and religion as a little girl struggles to come to terms with her grandfather's death. A simple narrative takes readers through five-year-old Emily's thoughts and feelings as she remembers the things she and Grandpa shared and watches her parents and other relatives go through the process and rituals of grieving. Since Grandpa was Christian and Emily and her parents are Jewish, the way

each side of the family mourns is very different. This book is a good vehicle to explain the rituals of death to children.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0689801853
- Pages: 32
- Publisher: Atheneum
- Age Range: 4+

#### **Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children**—Bryan Mellonie Page

When the death of a relative, a friend, or a pet happens or is about to happen . . . how can we help a child to understand? *Lifetimes* is a moving book for children of all ages, even parents too. It lets us explain life and death in a sensitive, caring, beautiful way. *Lifetimes* tells us about beginnings. And about endings. And about living in between. With large, wonderful illustrations, it tells about plants. About animals. About people. It tells that dying is as much a part of living as being born. It helps us to remember. It helps us to understand

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780553344028
- Publisher: Bantam- 1983
- Pages: 40
- Age range: 5+

#### **The Next Place**—Warren Hanson

This is the book that has brought healing to the many families and friends who have lost loved ones in our recent national tragedies. The Next Place is an inspirational journey of peace, comfort and hope, to a place where earthly hurts are left behind. It is a picture book for all ages, a beautifully illustrated celebration of life, and an immeasurable comfort to those who have lost someone dear. Its gentle message makes The Next Place an excellent gift book for the bereaved, and an inspirational book for the dying.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780931674327
- Publisher: Waldman House Press- 1997
- Pages: 36
- Age range: 5+

#### **Old Pig**—Margaret Wild

Old Pig and her Granddaughter have lived together for a very long. As she accepts her impending death, Old Pig put her affairs in order. She then takes a last walk with Granddaughter savoring and reminding Granddaughter of the many joys of their life together. Old Pig and Granddaughter say goodbye to each other in the best way they know. Old Pig dies and Granddaughter lives on surrounded by memories of what they shared together.

#### **Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-1741757064
- Pages: 32
- Publisher: Allen & Unwin
- Age Range: 4+

#### **Pearl's Marigolds For Grandpa**—Jane Breskin Zalben

When Pearl's grandfather dies, she decides not to attend his funeral. ("She wanted to remember Grandpa playing checkers.") Instead, she thinks of him while she is at school. Later, at his house, she tries on his hat and slippers, sits in his chair, and wonders who could possibly replace him in her life. On Pearl's next visit, Grandma offers her some comfort by saying, "Grandpa's still alive...through you." Pearl discovers a way to keep her grandfather's memory alive--by bringing life to marigolds, as he did every year. This book is built around the ritual of sitting shiva.



**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780689604489
- Publisher: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing- 1997
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 2+

**Saying Goodbye to Lulu**—Corrine Demas

The portrayal of a young child learning to understand and cope with the mixed emotions that come with the loss of a loved one. A young girl and her lovable dog, Lulu, are the best of friends. Lulu is the best dog a girl could ever hope for, but when she grows older and gradually becomes weak, the girl must face the sad possibility of losing her dear friend, and inevitably, cope with the death of her canine companion. Though she is deeply saddened by Lulu's passing and misses her very much, over time the little girl discovers that the sweet memory of her beloved Lulu will live on forever... in her heart.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 978-0316047494
- Pages: 32
- Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
- Age Range: 3+

**Sometimes I'm Scared**—Jane Annunziata

Kids can be afraid of lots of things—it's normal. But these fears can seem really big! This book outlines easy steps kids can use to overcome their everyday fears. An extensive Note to Parents gives parents additional information on why fears naturally develop and how to help their kids understand and deal with common fears.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9781433805509
- Publisher: Magination Press- 2009
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 5+

**When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death (Dino Life Guides for Families)** —Laurie Krasny Brown

Unlike many books on death for little ones, this one doesn't tell a story. Instead, it addresses children's fears and curiosity head-on, and in a largely secular fashion, by answering some very basic questions: "Why does someone die?" "What does *dead* mean?" "What comes after death?" Other questions deal with emotions, and there's a section about death customs (the weakest part of the book). The forthright approach makes the subject seem less mysterious and provides kids with plenty to think about and discuss with their parents. It's the brightly colored artwork, however, that will really enable children to relax with the concept.

**Product Details**

- ISBN-13: 9780316119559
- Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers- 1998
- Pages: 32
- Age range: 5+

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