



## FamilyMaterials – Death of a Loved One

*Stratford Parents' Place and the Stratford Library Children's Department acknowledge that this project is made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered by the Connecticut State Library, and a Community Impact Grant from the Stratford Rotary Club.*

This document is the online version of the Healing Library kit that is available at:  
Stratford Library Children's Department, 2203 Main Street, Stratford, CT 06615 and  
Stratford Parents' Place Family Resource Center, 718 Birdseye Street, Stratford, CT 06615

# Welcome, friends.

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

Inside you will find:

- Discussion Guide
- Healing Activities
- Acts of Kindness
- Community Resources
- Children's Books with Discussion Guides
- Annotated Bibliography
- Addendum of Additional Resources



This combination offers you an assortment of ways to move forward in a healthy manner.

The original **Healing Library** project was piloted by librarians at the Chattanooga Public Library, TN and the Lewiston Public Library, ME. These kits were developed by librarians, a children's literature advocate, and a holistic art and play therapist. The kits are not intended to take the place of a counselor, but rather provide a set of resources designed by professionals to help families on their unique journeys of healing during periods of trauma. This kit includes some materials from the information supplied by the Healing Library on their website: <http://www.curiouscitydpw.com/2017/10/17/healing-library>.

**The Healing Library** Model was replicated by a partnership with Stratford Parents' Place Family Resource Center and Stratford Library Children's Department. With the help of community partners such as Stratford Community Services, this kit was customized for the Stratford Community. This kit is available at both Stratford Parents' Place, located at Stratford Academy/Johnson House, 719 Birdseye Street, Stratford CT, 06615, 203-381-6992 or at the Stratford Library Children's Department located at 2203 Main St, Stratford, CT 06615, 203-385-4165.

**This kit is designed to start your journey of healing, but not 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 enclosed material and Community Resources guide will assist you in taking your 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 a sense of loss for your child. The loss felt during any of these experiences is painful for all family members and it is especially hard for parents to see their children grieving.

Parents who want to minimize the grief their children experience may lie to their children in an effort to soften the blow because they are inadequately prepared to discuss loss, death, and grief with their children.

It is our hope that 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.

### 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 Discussion Guide and Healing Activities offer 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 the 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 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, (Kubler-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, one study found 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.

For more information on the developmental stages of grief, see the attached *Grief in Developmental Stages*, Good Grief Organization, [www.good-grief.org](http://www.good-grief.org) and *Developmental Responses to Grief* from The Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children & Families in the Addendum.

## 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.





## 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.

### 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 object and shout out something that's making you mad. Let your child take a turn, 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.

## Blow Bubbles

Blowing bubbles can have a calming effect on children and adults alike. Blowing bubbles forces you to pause, focus on a single activity, and think about your breathing. Even this small moment of awareness can help to release tension and practice deep breathing which can help provide relief for stress and anxiety. When you or your child exhales into the bubble wand, try to control your breath so you create the largest bubble possible before it pops. This encourages to maximize control over your breath and remain focused on just the bubble. This basic and simple activity may help reduce stress.

Some other ideas for bubble blowing include:

- **Visualization with Bubbles:** Bubbles are a great way to help kids visualize their emotions. Whether they are experiencing anger, stress, fear or other emotions, encourage the children to visualize each bubble as a negative emotion and watch it float away. Talk about the things that are stressing them out and encourage them to release those things in the bubbles as they float away. For younger children, allow them to stomp on the bubbles as they land on the ground. In addition to being a good visual reminder of letting things go rather than keeping them buried inside, the process of blowing the bubbles also encourages deep breathing.
- **Bubble Karate Master:** Another option for bubbles is the Bubble Karate Monster. As you blow bubbles encourage kids to demonstrate their best karate moves to pop the bubbles. The only rule is no clapping the bubbles (that's too easy), kids must use their feet and open hands to karate chop the bubbles. In addition to the breathing mentioned above, this simple exercise gets kids moving and using cross lateral movements (where arms and legs cross the body). This type of activity is a great stress reliever, and you may want to join in the fun if you're feeling a little stressed yourself! For more ideas on deep breathing activities, try <https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids/>

## Homemade play-doh

Making shapes and kneading Play-Doh or modeling clay is a relaxing activity for all ages. Instead of buying commercial Play-Doh, try to this non-toxic play dough recipe. To make it even more relaxing, add a few drops of lavender oil.

1 cup plain flour

1 tbsp. oil

1 cup water

½ cup salt

2 tbsp. cream of tartar

Food coloring

- Pour all dry ingredients, flour, salt and cream of tartar together into a microwave heat proof container, casserole dish or bowl.
- Add water and oil to dry ingredients. Add food coloring until desired color is achieved.
- Mix together using a whisk to remove lumps and blend the ingredients well.
- Cover and place in the microwave for 2 minutes on high.
- Remove from microwave and stir with a wooden spoon.
- Place in the microwave for 1 more minute, remove and stir to combine. Cook for a further minute if the play dough is still runny.
- Turn out onto a clean surface and knead into a smooth ball. Be careful the play dough will be very hot! Use a little bit of flour if the play dough is sticky.
- Allow the play dough to cool before playing with it.
- Store in a plastic zip lock bag or air tight container.

## 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
- Caring Cards (see back of the folder for activity cards)

## 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.

For younger children, a bereavement activity book can provide a great, structured way to work through their thoughts and feelings. Many can be found online and downloaded free of charge on websites such as <https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief>, or <http://www.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/resources.html>. We’ve included some sheets from these sites in the back of this folder; you may find them helpful to get you started. There are also apps for ipads such as *My Good Grief Journal For Kids App*.

## 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. Some ideas include:

- Creating a memory chain is one way to help your child relive some of their fond memories with their loved one, (see printable in the back of this folder for instructions).
- Create a bowl of memories. Have everyone write down as many happy memories as they can on colorful scraps of paper, and place all those good thoughts into a bowl. Anytime someone experiences a surge in grief, they can grab one of those slips of paper and, at least for a moment, remember a happier time. Children who can’t yet write or spell can contribute drawings instead.
- Cook 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
- Postcards or photos of places you visited together

## 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.

Sesame Street in Communities, <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief>.

## 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.

### 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:

- Pocket full of Hearts Activity (see back of the folder for activity sheet)
- 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 passersby 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 Resources – Loss of a Loved One

The following are resources you can explore in a face to face setting and others are for you to look up online. This list is not all inclusive. Finding support is an individualize approach and sometimes finding the right fit can take some time. These resources are suggestions for starting points.

### **211 Infoline**

In Connecticut, support help can be found through community resource directories including CT 211 Infoline. 211 Infoline helps connect people to the local services they need such as utility assistance, food, housing, child care, after school programs, elder care and crisis intervention. Dial 2-1-1 or search online at [www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org). If you are outside of Connecticut or have a problem using the 2-1-1-number, dial 1-800-203-1234.

### **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 Social Worker/Counselor**

Children often turn to their parents during periods of grief to discuss difficult topics like death, grief, and loss. 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.

If you think your child requires additional support, you can reach out to your school's social worker or counselor directly. These individuals are skilled in providing counseling services to their students and can help your child begin to make sense of their emotions. The amount of time these professionals have available to help your child will vary. They are also able to provide resources and referrals for parents seeking additional information.

If you decide to seek support elsewhere, alerting your school guidance counselor or social worker to the event that has taken place will help everyone. If your child already receives social work services at school, per an IEP (Individual Education Plan) or 504 Plan, you may want to inform that social worker so they can be better prepared to support your child during this time.

To find your school's social worker or counselor, check your school's webpage for phone numbers, or reach out to your child's teacher or main office directly. You can also discuss the option with your child ahead of time to ensure that they feel they're a part of the process.

## **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 Support**

### **Stratford Parents' Place Family Resource Center**

718 Birdseye Street, Stratford, CT 06615

Phone: (203) 381-69992

Email: [johnsonst@stratk12.org](mailto:johnsonst@stratk12.org)

The Family Resource Center provides access to a broad continuum of early childhood and family support services which foster the optimal development of children and families. Stratford Parents' Place provides resource and referral; parent education and training programs; family support; and resource and referral to the community. Parents' Place operates on a school schedule.

### **Stratford Library Children's Department**

2203 Main Street, Stratford, CT 06615

Phone: 203-385-4165

Website: [www.StratfordLibrary.org](http://www.StratfordLibrary.org)

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.

## **Stratford Area Professional Counselors**

### **Stratford Community Services**

468 Birdseye Street, Stratford, Connecticut 06615

Phone: (203) 385-4095

Email: [communityservices@townofstratford.com](mailto:communityservices@townofstratford.com)

### **The Child & Family Guidance Center**

Stratford Clinic

80 Ferry Boulevard, Stratford, CT 06615

Phone: (203) 378-1654

Website: [www.cfguidance.com](http://www.cfguidance.com)

**Note:** Commercial insurance carriers can also reach out to their insurance company for in-network providers as well as check the Psychology Today website for providers in your area.

## **Connecticut Grief Support Organizations**

### **Adam's House**

241 Coram Ave., Shelton, CT 06484

Phone: (203) 513-2808

Website: <http://www.adamshousect.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/AdamsHouseCT>

Their "Helping Hearts Heal" program offers peer support that encourages the expression of grief through positive play, art and group discussions. Groups are available at no-cost. Children, ages 3 to

18, who are grieving the loss of a parent, grandparent, sibling or significant person are eligible for our program. Widow/Widowers groups meets monthly and are open to new members. Adam's House is conveniently located off Rt. 8 making it accessible to most Connecticut residents.

### **Camp Erin Connecticut**

The Cove Center for Grieving Children  
250 Pomeroy Ave Suite 107, Meriden, CT 06450  
Phone: (203) 634-0500  
Website: [www.covect.org/camp-erin-ct](http://www.covect.org/camp-erin-ct)

Camp Erin is a free, weekend bereavement camp for children and teens ages 6-17 who are grieving the death of someone close to them. It is a fun, traditional camp combined with grief education, peer bonding, and emotional support led by grief support professionals and trained volunteers.

### **The Cove Center for Grieving Children, Inc.**

Coordinating Office for sites in West Hartford, New Haven, Guilford, Meriden, Stonington, East Hartford and Easton serving Newtown/Fairfield County CT  
250 Pomeroy Avenue, Suite 107, Meriden, CT 06450  
Phone: (203) 634-0500  
Website: <http://www.covect.org>

The Cove provides free peer support group services for grieving children ages 4-18 throughout the state of CT at 7 Cove Family sites, as well as "Good Grief" School Programming, Professional Development Training and Community Outreach. The Cove partners with The Moyer Foundation to provide Camp Erin Connecticut.

### **Experience Camps**

136 Main Street, Suite 207  
Westport, CT 06880  
Phone: (860) 850-0397  
Website: <http://www.experience.camp>

Experience Camps provides free, one-week camps for boys and girls, ages 9-16, who have a parent, sibling or primary caregiver that died. It's a place where kids can laugh, cry, play, create, remember the person who died, or forget the grief that weighs them down. They can feel "normal", because everyone there has been through something similar and understands what it's like to lose someone important to them.

### **Healing Hearts Center for Grief and Loss**

Regional Hospice and Home Care  
30 Milestone Rd., Danbury, CT 06810  
Phone: (203) 702-7400  
Website: <https://regionalhospicect.org/programs-services/healing-hearts-center-for-grieving-children-families/>

The Healing Hearts Center for Grief and Loss is a program of Regional Hospice and Home Care, offering free support groups, workshops, and educational events to help children, teens and adults cope after the loss of a loved one.

**Manitou Experience**

P.O. Box 5099, Westport, Connecticut 06881

Phone: (917) 647-4249

Website: [www.manitouexperience.org](http://www.manitouexperience.org)

Manitou Experience is a one-week summer camp for boys who have experienced a significant death-loss that helps build confidence, encourage laughter, and navigate grief through friendship, teamwork, activities, and the common bond of loss. Their mission is to normalize the grief process and facilitate healthy integration of loss through peer support in a safe and nurturing environment.

**Mary's Place**

A Center for Grieving Children & Families

6 Poquonock Avenue, Windsor, CT 06095

Phone: (860) 688-9621

Website: <http://marysplacect.org>

Mary's Place provides peer grief support groups for Children ages 3-12 who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling; Teens ages 13-18 who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or significant person; and for Young Widows and Widowers. All groups are ongoing and meet throughout the year. All programs are offered at no cost to families. Mary's Place is a resource to the Connecticut and Southwestern Massachusetts community.

**The Center for Hope, Inc.**

590 Post Road, Darien, CT 06820

Phone: (203) 655-4693

Website: <http://centerforhope.org>

The Center for HOPE provides comprehensive services for adults and children living with an illness, grieving a loss or coping with a life-altering circumstance. All counseling, support and education services are facilitated by specially-trained professionals in an atmosphere of hope and renewal.

**The Den for Grieving Children**

40 Arch Street, Greenwich, CT 06830

Phone: (203) 869-4848

Website: <http://familycenters.org>

Family Centers is a private, nonprofit organization offering education, health and human services to children, adults and families in Fairfield County. More than 225 professionals and hundreds of trained volunteers work together to provide our communities with a wide range of responsive and innovative services.

**Camp Jonathan**

New Milford Visiting Nurse & Hospice

68 Park Lane Road, New Milford, CT 06776

Phone: 860 354-2216

Website: [www.newmilfordvna.org](http://www.newmilfordvna.org)

A one week bereavement day camp at Saint John's Episcopal Church in New Milford, CT. for children ages 6 - 18 who have lost a significant person in their lives to death.

## **National Resources**

### **National Alliance for Grieving Children**

[www.childrengrieve.org](http://www.childrengrieve.org)

The National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) is a nonprofit organization that raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them.

### **The Dougy Center: The National Center for Greiveing Children and Families**

[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)

The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences.

## **Additional Resources**

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



## Book Discussions

*Stratford Parents' Place and the Stratford Library Children's Department acknowledge that this project is made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered by the Connecticut State Library, and a Community Impact Grant from the Stratford Rotary Club*

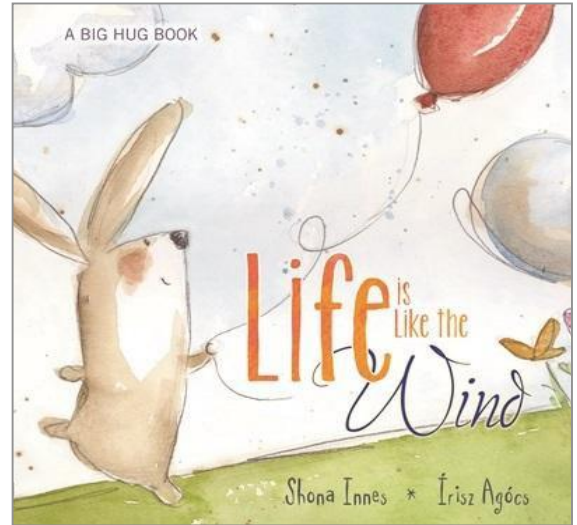
These books can be found online by clicking on the YouTube links indicated below each title.

## Book Discussion: Life is Like the Wind

### Life is Like the Wind

Written by Shona Innes and illustrated by Irisz Agócs  
Barron's Educational Series  
Presented by Hello Library  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0\\_Lq7mpbtAM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_Lq7mpbtAM)

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 viewing the book together. The notes refer to certain pages of the book. You may want to view the entire story first, and then look at it again, pausing at each spread to discuss the questions.

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. 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.



## 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.*

## Book Discussion: Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children

### **Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children**

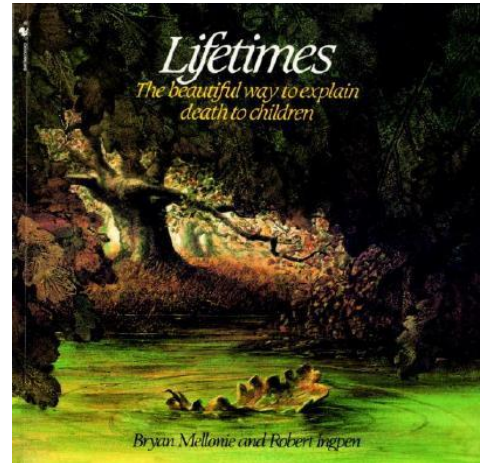
Written by Bryan Mellonie and illustrated by Robert Ingpen

Published by Bantam Books, 1983

Read by Jeff Harden and presented by Roman Chimienti

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwwGBVa1j9A>

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 viewing the book together. The notes refer to certain pages of the book. You may want to view the entire story first, and then look at it again, pausing at each spread to discuss the questions.

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. 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.

## **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: Rabbityness

### Rabbityness

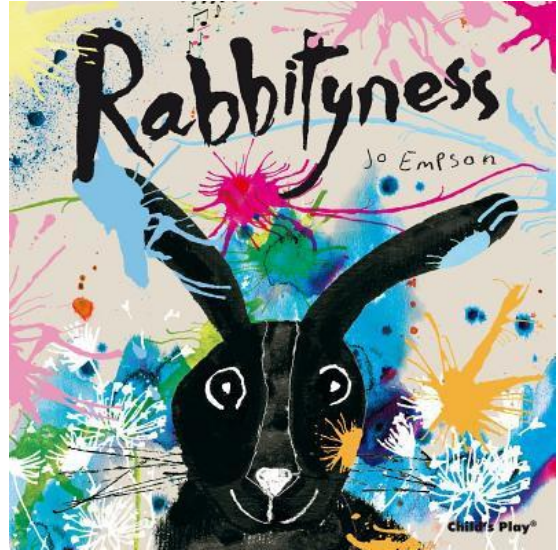
Written and illustrated by Jo Empson

Published by Child's Play International, 2012

Narrated by Erin Hoskins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmQWEgoqdwI>

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.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when viewing the book together. The notes refer to certain pages of the book. You may want to view the entire story first, and then look at it again, pausing at each spread to discuss the questions.

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. 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.

## 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 rabbit 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 unrabbit 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**

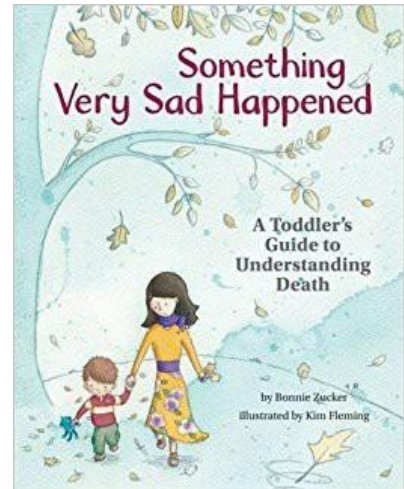
Written by Bonnie Zucker and illustrated by Kim Fleming

Published by Magination Press, 2016

Presented by Learning Tree TV

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHaspeyGYFQ>

Designed specifically for toddlers, this simple picture book explains death and our natural responses to death in a comforting way. This is well-written message and the comforting illustrations will be helpful for children of all ages.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when viewing the book together. The notes refer to certain pages of the book. You may want to view the entire story first, and then look at it again, pausing at each spread to discuss the questions.

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. 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.

## 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: When Dinosaurs Die

### **When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death**

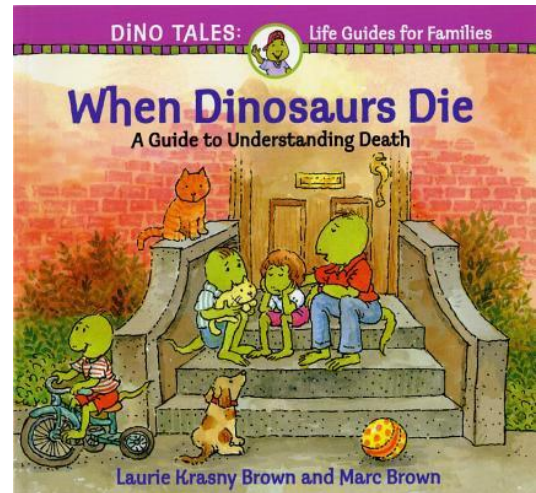
Written by Laurie Krasney Brown and  
illustrated by Marc Brown

Published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1996

Presented by Emily

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fs7xcqFwNuo>

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.



Below are some helpful notes for you to use or paraphrase when viewing the book together. The notes refer to certain pages of the book. You may want to view the entire story first, and then look at it again, pausing at each spread to discuss the questions.

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. 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.

## 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.*

**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.

## Book Discussion: Boats for Papa

### Boats for Papa

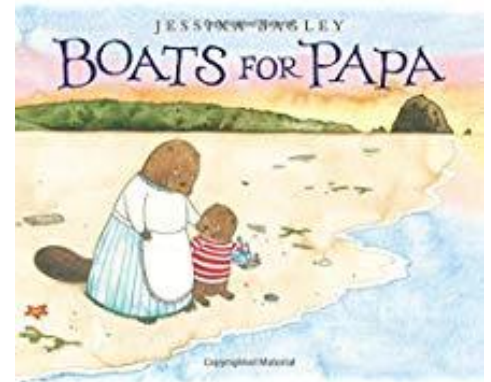
Written & illustrated by Jessixa Bagley

Published by Roaring Brook Press, 2015

Presented by Jaimee Farrar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbRkHvu3Pb8>

This is a tender story about how a child copes with the loss of his father. Buckley, a young beaver, builds boats from driftwood and places them in the sea by his home so they can sail to his Papa. The story shows how art therapy can be helpful in dealing with the loss of a loved one.



### Discussion questions:

- Why do you think Buckley liked to build boats? What did he use to make them?
- Why did Buckley put the boats in the water? Where does he think they went? Where do you think the boats went?
- How did Buckley's mama feel about the boats? Why did she go out at night?
- How do you think the boats ended up in Mama's desk? How do you think Buckley felt when he saw them?
- Why do you think Buckley wrote the last note for his Mama?
- How do you know that Buckley and his mama miss his Papa?
- How do Buckley and Mama feel about each other? How can you tell?
- Do you think Papa would appreciate the boats?
- Think about your loved one. What did he/she like? Perhaps you can think of a special object, book, or pet. Or maybe an activity, such as playing or watching a sport. Did he/she like to go anyplace special, such as the beach? Did you do anything special together?

### Additional Activities:

- Buckley always writes a note to his Papa. You can write a simple note or a longer letter to your loved one. Ask a grown-up to help you write it. Or you can draw a picture instead.
- Think of something that was special to your loved one. Draw a picture or make something that represents what he/she liked.



- Buckley makes boats out of driftwood. If you can get to the shore, see if you can find driftwood and other things to use in making a craft. You can use these things to make a boat, diorama, or other art object as a gift for your loved one. Write your person's name on the object.



## Book Discussion: Death is Stupid

### Death Is Stupid

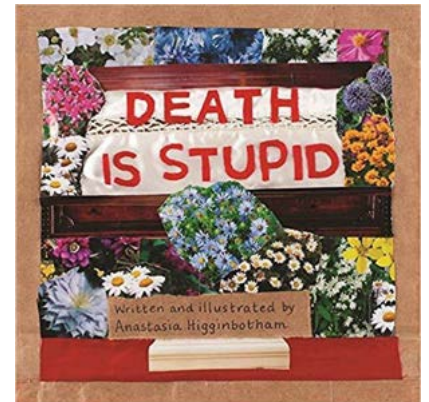
Written & illustrated by Anastasia Higginbotham

Published by Feminist Press, 2016

Read by Lolly Hopwood

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDAiQ\\_g3lgE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDAiQ_g3lgE)

This book explores grief and mourning from a child's point of view. People may say things, such as "She's in a better place," that are confusing instead of comforting. Children may feel angry, afraid, or frustrated at explanations given by adults. *Death Is Stupid* is not only an important tool to discuss death, but also to celebrate life and love.



### Discussion questions:

- What are some things that people say to the boy? Why does he think they are stupid?
- Do you understand what people mean when they say, "We lost her" or "She's gone" or "She's in a better place"? What do you think that means?
- If those phrases are confusing to you, what do you think people should say instead to help you understand what happened? What can people say that might help you to feel better?
- What relative died in the story? What does he say to her in his imagination? What does she say to him? Try to imagine a conversation with your loved one. What would you say to each other?
- Some people believe that loved ones will send a sign or a message after they die. What are some signs in the book? Can you think of some other possible signs?
- The boy's grandma liked to garden. What do the boy and his father think of when they see the garden? How can working in the garden make them feel better?

### Additional Activities:

- The book has some suggestions of how to keep the memory of your loved one alive. Try to do some of these things. Can you think of some other things to do?
- You can't write in the book, but you can draw a heart or make a frame on another piece of paper to put a picture of your loved one.
- The author makes books to help her cope with difficult feelings. Did you notice that she used brown paper bags for the pages? And that her pictures were made with cut paper collage and photographs? Look around the house to see what you can use to make a book about your loved one. Maybe you can use scraps of some of their clothing or photographs in your book.

## Book Discussion: The Funeral

### The Funeral

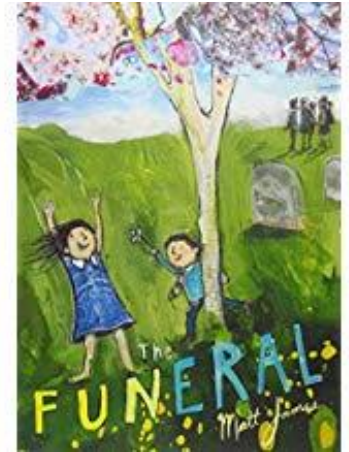
Written & illustrated by Matt James

Published by Groundwood Books, 2018

Presented by Learning Tree TV

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGXX3cqmwn0>

This book recounts the experience of attending a funeral from the point of view of a young child. She doesn't exactly know how to mourn an older relative, but looks forward to spending time with her cousin. This honest approach may be eye-opening for adults who don't understand why a child may fidget or not act sad at a funeral. Adults and children can benefit from reading this book together and sharing their feelings.



### Discussion questions:

- How does Norma feel about going to a funeral? Is she sad or not? Why?
- Why would she be happy about going to a funeral? How does she act that lets you know she's not too sad?
- Have you been to a funeral where there is a long black car? What do you think is in the car? Why do all the cars have a little flag on them that says "Funeral"?
- How does Ray feel about going to the funeral?
- What does Nora think about when she is in the church? What does she notice?
- Do you think Nora and Ray behaved well at the funeral service? How did the grown-ups behave? What was the difference between how the children acted versus how the adults acted?
- Why were the parents glad to see Nora and Ray go outside? What did they do outside? Were they thinking about Uncle Frank?
- Why does Norma think Uncle Frank would have liked the funeral?
- If you go to a funeral, would you act like Nora did? Have you seen other children act like her?

*People grieve in different ways. The mourning process for a child may be different from an adult's. A child who does not seem sad may be coping in his or her own way and not trying to be disrespectful. After attending a funeral, parents may want to talk to their children about their experiences and feelings.*

## **Additional Activities:**

- An organist plays music at the funeral. What type of music did your loved one enjoy? Maybe you can play a recording of their favorite music or sing some songs your person liked.
- Nora and Ray explored the cemetery near the church. You can walk through a cemetery and read the headstones. What can you find out about the people who are buried there?
- If you can find photographs of your loved one who has died, look at them with other family members. What memories do you get from the photos? Who else is in the photos?

## Book Discussion: I Miss You: A First Look at Death

### I Miss You: A First Look at Death

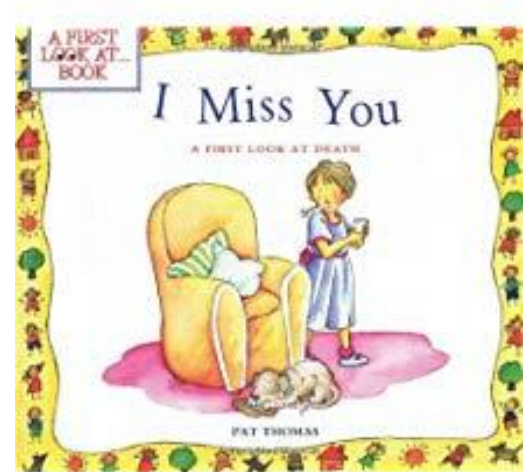
Written by Pat Thomas and illustrated by Leslie Harker

Published by Barron's, 2000

Presented by Blooming Minds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyM97X4lhEo>

This book explains death as a natural part of life in simple terms for children to understand. It also discusses common feelings and beliefs. The book includes some discussion questions and information about how adults can use the book with children.



### Discussion questions:

- Have you read a book or seen a movie where a person or animal dies? Why did they die? How did that make you feel?
- How did your loved one die? Were they old or young? How was the person connected to you?
- How did you feel when you first found out someone you know had died? How do you feel now? Have your feelings changed? Is it harder or easier for you to think about the person now?
- Have you been to a funeral? What do you remember about it? Was there a religious service? Did the service comfort you? If you follow a religion, you can talk to a relative about what your religion or culture believes about death.

### Additional Activities:

- What do you remember about the person who died? Maybe you can write a list of memories and add to it whenever you think of another one.
- If you have been to a funeral, draw a picture about what you remember. It could be a picture of the building where the service was held, some flowers you saw, people who were there, or anything else you noticed.
- You can also draw a picture of your feelings, even if it's just scribbles. Or draw a picture of something you liked to do with that person.



## Death of a Loved One: An Annotated Bibliography

### Included in the Healing Library kit:

*Boats for Papa* by Jessixa Bagley

Buckley and his mother cope with the loss of their father/husband by sending small wooden boats, built by Buckley, off into the ocean.

*Death Is Stupid* by Anastasia Higgenbotham

This exploration of grief and mourning recognizes the anger and confusion that a child feels around death while offering possibilities for celebrating life and love.

*The Funeral* by Matt James

Norma doesn't quite understand the rituals she confronts at her great-uncle's funeral, but she likes seeing her cousin and thinks Uncle Frank would have enjoyed his funeral.

*I Miss You: A First Look at Death* by Pat Thomas

When a close friend or family member dies, it can be difficult for children to express their feelings. This book helps children understand that death is a part of life.

*Life Is Like the Wind* by Shona Innes

This book introduces the concept of death to young readers by likening life to the ever-moving wind.

*Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children* by Bryan Mellonie

The cycles of life and death for all creatures are explained in simple language for children.

*Rabbityness* by Jo Empson

When Rabbit suddenly disappears, no one knows where he has gone. His friends are desolate. But, as it turns out, Rabbit has left behind some very special gifts for them.

*Something Very Sad Happened: A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death* by Bonnie Zucker

A tool for parents, caregivers, therapists, and teachers to help young children understand the concept of death and begin the process of coping with the loss.

*When Dinosaurs Die* by Laurie Krasney Brown

A child-friendly guide to helping children understand death.

These books are available in the Stratford Library Parents' Collection:

*And What Comes After a Thousand?* by Anette Bley (P Death Person)

When her elderly friend dies, a girl comes to understand that her memories of him still live on.

*Badger's Parting Gifts* by Susan Varley (P Death)

Badger's friends are sad when he dies, but treasure the legacies he left them.

*Children Also Grieve: Talking About Death and Healing* by Linda Goldman (P Death)

A dog explains how he and his human family mourned the death of their grandfather. Includes instructions on how to make a memory book.

*A Corner of Heaven* by Laura Dewire (P Death Person)

A child's view of the death of her infant brother.

*Cry, Heart, But Never Break* by Glenn Ringtved. (P Death Person)

Death gently explains to four siblings why it is natural for people to die and how life moves on.

*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia, Ph.D (P Death)

The life cycle of a leaf is used to explain the balance between life and death.

*Finn's Feather* by Rachel Noble (P Death Person)

When Finn finds a feather, he thinks it is from his brother, who is now an angel.

*French Toast Sundays* by Gloria Spielman (P Death Person)

When Mina's beloved grandmother dies, she doesn't want to talk. But she is the only one who knows how Grandma made her wonderful French toast.

*Helping Children Cope with the Death of a Parent: A Guide for the First Year* by Paddy Greenwall Lewis & Jessica G. Lippman (P Death Person)

A book for adults to help children cope with the loss of a parent.

*How Do I Feel About: When People Die* by Sarah Leveté (P Death Person)

Children discuss why people die, their reactions to death, and ways of coping with grief.

*I Remember Miss Perry* by Pat Brisson (P Death Person)

After their teacher dies in a car accident, the students find a way to honor her memory.

*Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute? Explaining (sudden) death in words very young children can understand* by Elke & Alex Barber (P Death Person)

Alex is confused when his daddy is taken to the hospital and doesn't return. His mother helps him to understand what happened.

*Michael Rosen's Sad Book* by Michael Rosen (P Death Person)

A man is sad after his son dies and explains how he copes with his grief.

*Missing Mommy* by Rebecca Cobb (P Death Person)

Daddy comforts a young boy after his mommy dies.

*More Creative Coping Skills for Children: Activities, Games, Stories, and Handouts to Help Children Self-Regulate* by Bonnie Thomas

*My Father's Arms Are a Boat* by Stein Erik Lunde (P Death Person)  
The father of a young boy helps him deal with the loss of his mother.

*The Purple Balloon* by Chris Raschka (P Death Person)  
This book can be read to a child who is dying in order to give them comfort.

*Samantha Jane's Missing Smile* by Julie Kaplow (P Death Person)  
A neighbor helps Sammy Jane cope with the loss of her father.

*A Sky of Diamonds: A story for children about loss, grief and hope* by Camille Gibbs (P Death Person)  
A girl grieves her mother's death with the help of her father. Parent guide included.

*Something Very Sad Happened – A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death* by Bonnie Zucker  
A book to read to very young children, with extensive notes for parents and caregivers.

*Stacey Had a Little Sister* by Wendie C. Old (P Death Person)  
A young girl wants answers when her baby sister dies of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

*A Story for Hippo: A book about loss* by Simon Puttock & Alison Bartlett (P Death)  
Hippo and Monkey are best friends. After Hippo dies, Monkey makes sure the other animals don't forget her.

*What Happened to Daddy's Body?* by Elke and Alex Barber (P Death Person)  
A mother explains the process of cremation to her son.

*What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?* by Trevor Romain (P Death)  
A small booklet that covers some common questions and answers about death.

*What's Heaven?* by Maria Shriver (P Death Person)  
Kate's mother answers questions about what happened to her great-grandmother who died.

*When Aunt Mattie Got Her Wings* by Petra Mathers (P Death Person)  
Lottie the Chicken copes with the death of her elderly aunt.

*Where Do People Go When They Die?* by Mindy Avra Portnoy (P Death Person)  
People have different answers for a girl who asks where people go after they die. Back matter includes suggestions for parents.



## In the Picture Book collection:

*Always and Forever* by Alan Durant (PJ Du)

After Fox dies, his friends remember the things they loved about him

*Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories* by Audrey Penn (PJ Pe)

Chester Raccoon finds ways to remember a classmate who has died.

*A Flag for Grandma* by Sally Grindley (PJ GR)

A boy and his Grandfather spend a day at the beach while remembering Grandma.

*The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr (PJ Pa)

A little fish illustrates the feelings you may have after someone you love dies.

*The Grandad Tree* by Trish Cooke (PJ Co)

Leigh and Vin remember their grandfather when they look at the apple tree, which changes with the seasons.

*Grandmother's Visit* by Betty Quan (PJ Qu)

Grandmother lives with Grace's family and they enjoy their time together. When Grandmother grows feeble and dies, Grace carries on with her memory.

*Ida, Always* by Caron Levis (PJ Le)

Ida and Gus are polar bears who live at a city zoo. When Ida gets sick, the friends enjoy the time they have left together.

*In My Heart: A Book of Feelings* by Jo Witek (PJ Wi)

All kinds of feelings, from happy to sad, are explained.

*The Memory String* by Eve Bunting (PJ Bu)

Three years after her mother died, a grieving girl learns to accept her stepmother.

*Turtle Girl* by Carole Crowe (PJ Cr)

As her grandmother taught her, Magdalena continues to protect the sea turtles that nest near her home even after Grandma's death.