

Recommended Children's Books with Grief Themes

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Reading is a way we know we are “not alone” even in grief. The following books offer a way to provide comfort and to “jump-start” conversations. These recommended books can be read and reread *with* a child, especially as the child matures. Before you select a book read though the book first, and familiarize yourself with its contents before you read it to or, depending upon the age, with the child. What questions might the book raise? In my work with grievers, I have found that many adult grievers find great meaning in these books “for children.” These are important books to have on your shelf and to give to a family in grief.

Clergy will discover that many of these books can be used effectively in funerals and memorial services particularly when young children and grandchildren are present. They can be used as the children’s “message.” And adults will lean forward to listen. Too often children are overlooked in funeral rituals.

These books make great condolence gifts to children and adults.

Alexander, Sue. (1982). *Nadia the Willful*. Kane/Miller.

Nadia’s older brother, Hamed, perishes in a desert storm. Her father orders that his name never be mentioned again in the oasis. Nadia challenges that edict. Implications for grievers: Sometimes a griever has to challenge the “forget & move on” mentality.

Bostrom, Kathleen Long. (2002). *Papa’s gift: An inspirational storey of love and loss*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz.

Clara cannot understand why God let her grandfather die. Why didn’t God answer her prayer? Through a special gift from her grandfather she begins to understand how she can keep her grandfather in her heart. Implications for grievers: Gives a child a way to voice questions about or anger at God.

Brown, Laurie Krasny Brown, & Brown, Mark. (1996). *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

The authors use dinosaurs to tell the story of life and death. Children find permission to experience a wide range of emotions toward death and the individual(s) who died. The book also addresses fears that children may develop following the death of a loved one. Implications for grievers: This practical resource honestly deals with death and offers an excellent section on “ways to remember” and has a comprehensive child-friendly vocabulary of words associated with death.



Copeland, Kathe Martin, & Hudson, Elissa. (2005). *Mama's going to heaven soon*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

When a parent is terminally ill, a child must navigate the reality and a changed environment. In this book two children struggle with why a mother "has to go to heaven soon" and leave them. Implications for grievers:

A parent will *always* be a part of a child's life and the love does not change; how can children make spaces in their lives for their departed loved ones.

Coville, Bruce. (1996). *My grandfather's house*. New York: BridgeWater Books.

What do children experience when they go to a grandparent's house or apartment but learn, "Grandpa doesn't live here anymore?" The questions that naturally arise can be opportunities for learning. The child in the story concludes, "Someday I will learn more. But that's enough for now."

Implications for grievers: Grief is impacted by loss of place or loss of familiar face in a place.

Doyle, Roddy. (2008). *Her mother's face*. Illustrated by Freya Blackwood. New York: Arthur Levine Books.

A young girl, Siobhan and her father grieve the death of Siobhan's mother. Siobhan cannot remember her mother until she meets a woman who urges her to look in the mirror very carefully. Implications for grievers: The child needs to identify physical traits or gifts from loved ones.

Evans, Richard Paul, & Linton, Jonathan. (1999). *The Dance*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Follow the role of dancing in a young girl's life. At every stage her father is present, encouraging her. Then, in her father's final illness, the young woman is asked to come home to dance one last time. She must struggle with how she will remember. Implications for grievers: The adult who has been a significant encourager remains in our lives through memory. We do not have to forget those we love.

Fox, Mem. (1985). *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*. Kane/Miller.

A six-year-old's question, "What's a memory?" sparks great interaction in a nursing home as the boy asks residents to explain memory. "Something that makes you feel warm." "Something from long ago." "Something that makes you cry." "Something that makes you laugh." "Something as precious as gold." Implications for grievers: What stimulates memories for you? Introduces the variety of memory-initiators. This book has wonderful pictures and will be valued by the old child griever (and my adults, too).



Garland, Sherry. (1994). *I Never Knew Your Name*. Ticknor and Fields.

A young boy is saddened by the suicide death of a teenager neighbor. Unfortunately, the boy missed the opportunities to make a friendship. Implications for grievers: Regret for the parts of a person we did not know or for a relationship that never became all we wanted.

Goldman, Linda. (1999). *Life and loss: A guide to help children*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Two timely childhood losses - the loss of the protection of the adult world and the loss of a future –make this an important resource for supporting today's and tomorrow's children. Well-meant cliches and entrenched myths inhibit healthy grieving by children. Goldman examines four central psychological tasks of grief, explains the techniques of grief work, provides useful tools, ideas, and inventories for educators to discover ways for children to commemorate loss (funerals, memorials, memory books). Includes web sites, cd-roms, and grief camps.

Goldman, Linda. (2005). *Children also grieve: Talking about death and healing*. New York: Jessica Kingsley.

An imaginative resource, illustrated with color photographs, offering support and reassurance to children coming to terms with the loss of a relative or close friend. Also helpful for adults supporting the child in bereavement.

Goldman, Linda. (2009). *Great answers to difficult questions about death: What children need to know*. New York: Jessica Kingsley.

This book explores children's thoughts and feelings on the subject of death and guides parents, teachers and other caring adults in honoring the questions of grieving children. Chapters are devoted to particular issues (religious beliefs, experiencing terminal illness, and the fear of forgetting the loved one).

Howe, James, & Rose, David. (1986). *There's a Monster Under My Bed*. Alladin.

Simon is sure that there are monsters under his bed –he can even hear them breathing! Grief can be the unspoken “monster” that menaces a child’s sense of safety and security. Implications for grievers: In the presence of “monsters under our beds,” we all need company.

Karst, Patrice, & Stevenson, Geoff. (2000). *The Invisible String*. Camarillo, CA: DeVorss & Company.

During a thunderstorm two frightened children seek comfort from their mother who explains that they are always connected by an “invisible string” made out of love. The children raise all kinds of situations that might be too far for the string to reach. Mother reassures that the string connects them to “everyone you love” including Uncle Brian in Heaven. Implications for grievers: The child does not have to stop loving because the



individual has died.

Lobel, Arnold. (1971). *Frog and Toad Together*. Harper and Row.

One of the gifts of a friend is presence. The essay “Alone” describes the ability of two close friends “to sit alone, together” sometimes without talking. Implications for grievers: We do not have to know what to say—we simply show up.

Langston, Laura, & Gardiner, Lindsey. (2004). *Remember, Grandma?* New York: Viking.

Some children must navigate changes in a grandparent’s physical and mental functioning. In some cases, the grandparent now lives with the family and that changes everything. A young girl grieves for the grandmother who once knew her name and her favorite things. In the process, she promises to be the remember-er. Implications for griever: Some children must grieve for mental changes in a grandparent in a slow death like Alzheimer’s or dementia.

Munsch, Robert. (1986). *Love You For Ever*. Portunus Publishing.

A mother’s promise, “Love you forever, like you for always. . . “ is promised and honored through the stages of development of a boy’s life. Implications for grievers: The book helps grievers, of all ages, realize that others “know” that love lasts longer than grief and gives permission to love “forever.”

Romain, Trevor. (1999). *What on earth do you do when someone dies*. Minneapolis, MN. Free Spirit.

A brief easy-to-read book that responds to questions children have: Why do people have to die? Where has the loved one gone? What happens to me *now*? Readable and believable for children in grades one-four.

Root, Phyllis. (2003). *The Name Quilt*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

The nights Sadie spends at Grandma’s house, she sleeps under the name quilt. The quilt has the names of all the family members, and as Sadie learns, each name and piece of fabric is linked to a story. When a storm blows the quilt off the clothes’s line, Sadie is sad until she discovers that her grandmother keeps “all the names and all of those stories right here inside me.” Implications for grievers: The book helps grieving children find ways to remember their loved one and to know that even if the object is lost, the memory remains.

Rylant, Cynthia. (1995). *Dog Heaven*. Scholastic.

Do dogs go to heaven when they die? Rylant says yes. “When a dog arrives in heaven, he just runs. Rylant adds, “They will be there when old friends show up. They will be there at the door.” Implications for grievers:



The book helps grievors realize that grief for pets is acceptable.

Ryland, Cynthia. (1997). *Cat Heaven*. New York: Scholastic.

If dogs go to heaven, what about cats? "If you have ever been lucky enough to have a special cat in your life, then you well know there is some place called Cat Heaven!" Implications for grievors: The book helps adult realize that others "know" grief, too and that we can all learn from one another.

Scrivani, Mark. (1996). *I Heard Your Daddy Died*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation.

What do you say to a grieving child after, "I heard your daddy died?" Scrivani offers wise guidance. The book shows great sensitivity and will be a valued resource for the care-er. Implications for grievors: The book gives valuable ways to initiate conversations with grieving children.

Shulevitz, Uri. (1978). *The Treasure*. Sunburst/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Isaac has a dream about treasure buried in a distant city. A guard has a dream about treasure buried under a fellow named Isaac's stove. The moral: sometimes one must travel far to discover what is near. Implications for grievors: Bereavement is a journey. And, at the end, we discover that some of the most valued resources were near us, all the time.

Simon, Norma. (1986). *The saddest time*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Company.

When someone dies it is natural to feel sad. This book offers grieving children three scenarios: the death of a young uncle, the death of a schoolmate, and the death of a grandmother. Implications for grievors: The book helps children balance sadness with new beginnings.

Smith, Harold Ivan, & Johnson, Joy. (2006). *What does that mean? A dictionary of death, dying and grief terms for grieving children and those who love them*. Omaha, NE: Centering.

Grieving people of all ages need words to verbalize and talk about their losses. We all need words to comfort grievors. So what does a word mean? Words can puzzle or explain. How do you tell a six-year-old about cremation? What is a mausoleum? In this dictionary for children, the authors give the meaning of the word, use an example or story and quote a current resource to further explain.



Thomas, Jane Resh. (1988). *Saying Goodbye to Grandpa*. New York: Clarion.

Clara, on the long ride to her grandmother's house, wonders what "the funeral" will be like. Through a series of experiences, she comes to develop an understanding of death and of funeral rituals. Implications for grievers: Helps children understand why funerals and memorial services are important in grief.

Wood, Ramona. (2004). *Now Caitlin Can: A donated Organ Helps a Child Get Well*. El Dorado, AR: Abc Press.

Freddie's sister Caitlin's only chance for life is a kidney transplant. So many aspects of a normal childhood are off-limits to her. After the death of a young man who had just graduated from high school, a family agrees to organ donation. Hours later, Caitlin undergoes the surgery that forever changes her life and the life of everyone in the family. Implications for grievers: Through organ donation, a great tragedy gives others an opportunity to live.

Woodson, Jacqueline, & Muth, John J. (2002). *Our Gracie Aunt*. e. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Paperbacks for Children.

Two young children, Johnson and Beebee, are alone in the world because their mother cannot responsibly care for them. So, a social worker takes them to stay with aunt aunt they've never met. This brother and sister try to adjust in a new world but still worry about their mother. Will she, someday, come back for them? How does a child survive "foster care?" Implications for grievers: The loss of a predictable parent is a significant grief for children; foster care is a reality for too many children.

