



Children's Books on Death-Related Issues
Selected and Annotated by Charles A. Corr, PhD, CT

**Picture and Activity Books
for Preschoolers and Beginning Readers:**

Carney, K. L. (1997-2001). *Barklay and Eve Activity and Coloring Book Series*. Dragonfly Publishing Company, Wethersfield, CT (277 Folly Brook Boulevard, Wethersfield, CT 06109; tel. 860-257-7635; www.barklayandeve.com). Each of the eight titles in this series examines a topic adults may find difficult to discuss with children, such as going to a funeral, understanding cremation, hospice, pet loss, and organ and tissue donation. There is room for a child to draw and color while learning lessons like: loss and sadness do happen; those events are not anyone's fault; it is OK to have strong feelings as long as they are expressed in constructive ways; and "we can get through anything with the love and support of family and friends" (Book 1, p. 5).

Fox, M. (1994). *Tough Boris*. New York: Harcourt Brace. Boris von der Borch is a huge, tough, scruffy, greedy, fearless, and scary pirate—just like all pirates. But when his parrot dies, Boris cries and cries—just like all pirates, and everyone else. A simple story and pictures give children permission to experience and express their grief.

Muñoz-Kiehne, M. (2000). *Since My Brother Died/Desde Que Murió Mi Hermano*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation. With text in both English and Spanish, a child wonders if a brother's death is only a dream or if anything could have been done to prevent his death. The child and his family are sad. Afraid of forgetting his brother, the child begins to paint—simple watercolor illustrations gradually turn into rainbows and the confidence that life can go forward.

Raschka, C. (2007). *The Purple Balloon*. New York: Schwartz & Wade. This book observes that children who draw their feelings when they become aware of their impending death often draw a blue or purple balloon, released and floating free. Here balloon images first depict the death of an elderly person before turning to a dying youngster. The text says, "Good help makes leaving easier" and offers suggestions for those who want to help make dying not so hard.

**Storybooks and Other Texts
for Primary School Readers:**

Adams, G. (2006). *Lessons from Lions: Using Children's Media to Teach about Grief and Mourning* + CD. Little Rock, AR: Center for Good Mourning, Arkansas Children's Hospital (800 Marshall Street, Slot 690, Little Rock, AR 72202). This booklet explains how to use 10 slides from Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) to encourage discussions about three unhelpful reactions following a loss: (1) running away from the problem, the pain, and those who love you; (2) pretending the bad thing never happened; and (3) never telling anyone about your feelings and experiences them. The positive lesson is: By not making any of these mistakes, we can keep the person with us in our hearts.

Bunting, E. (1999). *Rudi's Pond*. New York: Clarion. While Rudi is sick, his friend and classmates send cards and make a big "GET WELL RUDI" banner for his hospital room. After Rudi dies, the children write poems and make a memorial pond in the schoolyard that attracts a beautiful hummingbird.

Dickerson, J. G. (1995). *Grandpa's Berries: A Story to Help Children Understand Grief and Loss*. Johnstown, PA: Cherubic Press. On a visit to her grandparents, Alice tastes a wonderful,



orange-gold raspberry. Later, after Grandpa has died, Alice discovers that the raspberry bush is also dead. As they share their grief, Alice's mother says she will never forget the special taste of those berries even though now they are gone. The same will be true for Grandpa: "The remembering will become easier until one day you'll notice that all that's left is the sweetness that you remember. Just like the berries."

Goldman, L. (2006). *Children Also Grieve: Talking About Death and Healing*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. This book combines a story told by a dog named Henry and his questions to readers, a section for making a memory book, a two-page glossary of grief words, and advice for caring adults. Henry's story uses photographs and text to tell about the sadness following the death of Grandfather. He explains what death means, what grief is like, things to do when you are sad or scared, and ways to feel a bit better. Blank spaces allow readers to respond to questions.

Grollman, E., & Johnson, J. (2006). *A Complete Book About Death for Kids*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation. The three main parts of this book address death and feelings, funerals and cemeteries, and cremation, respectively. Most pages have photos and a few simple sentences directed to child readers and adults who might interact with those children.

Hemery, K. M. (2001). *The Healing Tree*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation. This story compares grief in a family to a tree struck by lightning. Just as the tree lost one of its main branches leaving only a bare strip on its trunk where there is no bark, Papa says that they are all in pain after Mama's death. But like the tree, Papa says they will heal and go on living, even though life will be different and forever changed.

McLaughlin, K. (2001). *The Memory Box*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation. A young boy is mad at Grandpa for dying when he had promised to take the boy fishing. Mommy agrees the boy will miss doing things with Grandpa, but she tells him to hold onto good memories of all they shared. One way to do that is to make a memory box and to put into it objects that help the boy remember this special relationship.

Peterkin, A. (1992). *What About Me?* Washington, DC: Magination Press. Laura and Tom are siblings who often play together and sometimes quarrel. One day Laura learns that Tom is sick and in the hospital. She misses Tom, feels responsible for his illness, and worries he might die. Their parents and other adults seem to focus only on Tom, while ignoring Laura's needs. Finally, Laura's parents and the doctor explain Tom's illness to her, let them play together, and take her out for a special treat.

Plourde, L. (2003). *Thank You, Grandpa*. New York: Dutton Children's Books. On their walks in the woods over the years, a girl and her grandfather share many discoveries. When they find a dead grasshopper, the girl asks, "What can we do?" Grandpa says: "We can say thank you and good-bye." Years later, as the girl walks alone, she says to herself: "Thank you, Grandpa, for our walks. You kept me steady when I wasn't so steady. You let me run ahead when I was ready to run ahead. . . . But most of all, thank you for teaching me the words I need to say. . . . Grandpa, I love you and I'll miss you. But I will never forget you. Thank you and good-bye."

Schwiebert, P., & DeKlyen, C. (1999). *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing after Loss*. Portland, OR: Grief Watch (2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland, OR 97212; 503-284-7426; www.tearsoup.com). "An old and somewhat wise woman" called Grandy who has just suffered a big loss in her life fills a soup pot over and over again with her tears, feelings, memories, and misgivings. Rejecting foolish advice, *Tear Soup* affirms all of the feelings and experiences that bereaved persons encounter, while encouraging them as they cope with loss and grief.