

Grief Resources

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The following children's books are specific stories about death and dying. It is recommended that you review these stories prior to sharing them with your child. Allow enough time for questions or concerns. This is a great opportunity to talk to your child about any misconceptions or fears that come up while reading the books.

Where's Jess by Joy & Marv Johnson

An excellent book for children. A story about a child's experience of losing a sibling. RECOMMENDED FOR : Young children

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia

A simple story about a leaf named Freddie. How Freddie and his companion leaves change with the passing seasons, finally falling to the ground with Winter's snow. RECOMMENDED FOR: All ages

You Hold Me and I'll Hold You by Jo Carson

Through the process of a relative dying, it gives expression to worries and solutions for resolving issues. RECOMMENDED FOR: Young School-Age

Everett Anderson's Good-Bye by Lucille Clifton

A story of a boy's experience trying to understand the death of his father. It is short and easy to read. It describes the five stages of grief. RECOMMENDED FOR: School-Age

Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death by Bryan & Ingpen Mellonie

A wonderful book to help young children understand life and death. It is very concrete and understandable for young children. RECOMMENDED FOR: All ages

Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope by Donna O'Toole

Aarvy Aardvark comes to terms with the loss of his mother and brother with the help of his friend Ralphie Rabbit. A wonderful story of loss and grief. This book is long. RECOMMENDED FOR: Older children

When Someone Dies by Sharon Greenlee

In this simple book, counselor Sharon Greenlee explains the hurt, fear, and confusion felt by children and adults alike after a death has occurred. RECOMMENDED FOR: School-Age

When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book by National Alliance for Grieving Children

When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book is an activity book for children, that also provides valuable information to parents and caregivers about how grief impacts children.

When Someone Very Special Dies by Marge Heegaard

An interactive workbook designed for children and an adult. Helpful suggestions on how to use this workbook are given. RECOMMENDED FOR: Pre-school-Age through Adolescents

Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers by Earl Grollman

This book discusses normal adolescent reactions of death and working through grief. Also includes a journal to record memories of the person who died. RECOMMENDED FOR: Adolescents

How to talk about death with children

Children may ask practical questions instead of talking about their feelings. Sometimes these might sound strange. What's it like inside a coffin? What does a dead body really look like? How does it feel to die? Will I be a ghost when I die? These are entirely sensible things to wonder-and yet it can be reassuring to a child if you discuss them, rather than dismissing them as silly or unimportant questions.

- Listen carefully, so you know exactly what they mean.
- If you don't know the answer, say so.
- Don't worry if you think you've answered the question badly-it's important to the child that you listened and paid attention.
- Try not to look uncomfortable answering their questions-it may create the impression that talking about these things is not allowed.
- Try and answer their questions as soon as they've asked it-children's attention span is limited.
- A series of short conversations is often easier than long sessions.
- Be clear and direct in your language-using phrases such as "passed away" rather than "died" can leave them confused.
- There is no harm in a child seeing that you are sad or crying if someone has died. It may help them know their own grief is acceptable.

Questions & Answers

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Answers</u>
"Am I going to die?"	"Everyone dies eventually, but it probably won't be for a long time."
"Are you going to die?"	"Most people die when they are old, we are not worried about that happening anytime soon."
"What does dead mean?"	"A person who is dead doesn't move, or eat, or breathe or do anything. His/her body doesn't work anymore. He/she cannot feel pain and will never wake up."

Things to Say

"What do you think....?"

"No one knows for sure, but I believe that...."

"Adults find that difficult too."

Things not to say

"Granny passed away"-which sounds as if she may come back.

"People only die when they get old" – which is not true.

"I'm sorry you've lost your grandmother" –which sounds as if she might be found somewhere.

"Granny has gone to sleep" – which makes it sound as if sleeping is dangerous.

Children's Understanding of Death & Behaviors

Coping with death is difficult for everyone. Remembering that children interpret the world they live in differently at different ages and differently than you do is not easy. You may want to call on friends and relatives to help you with this.

It is very important to help children feel that they are a part of this experience. This will help them understand and work through death.

Infancy

Understanding

This age has no understanding of death, but reacts to:

- Fear of separation; is mostly disturbed by loss of physical and loving presence of parent.
- Parent's emotions; infants are very in tune with parents' anxiety level.

Possible Behavior

- Crankiness
- Crying
- Slight skin rash
- Clinging or difficulty separating

What you can day & do

- Talk about your feelings and concerns with available personnel.
- Let family and friends help with care and household tasks.
- Try to spend some of each day with your child to keep the feeling of security intact.
- Provide comfort, loving, patting and holding.
- Keep baby's routine as consistent as possible.

Preschool-Age 2 ½ to 5 years

Understanding

- Death is not seen as permanent, but rather, as reversible and temporary.
- Death may be seen as violent.
- Death may be seen as punishment for some wrongdoing
- Death may be confused with sleeping or being away-with the belief that the person will return.
- Child considers self as center of universe (egocentric: sees all events as either caused by or related to them).
- Death may be seen as caused by a death wish, or that anger may produce death. These are examples of magical thinking.
- Child may think he might catch the same thing.
- Child may think dead people live underground.

Possible Behavior

- May show little concern at times.
- May need to talk about death a lot, often at what seems like inappropriate times. This repetition makes it feel real for a preschooler.
- Child may need to repeat the fact of death.
- He may say such things as, "we're all going to the zoo, but not daddy, he's dead." Or "Ben doesn't need a plate, he's dead." Or "Ben can't use his dumptruck anymore because he's dead."
- May have regression and go back to :
 - bed wetting
 - thumb sucking
 - baby talk
 - fear of dark
- May show fear of separation from significant others:
 - at bedtime
 - attending preschool

What you can day & do

- Encourage anyone explaining death to use the terms "dead" or "death".
- Respond to the child's security needs and concerns about "who will take care of me?" Reassure him regarding routines, activities, and schedules.
- Keep explanations short, simple and truthful. They may need to be repeated over and over again. "Ben was very sick. The doctors and nurses could not make him better, although they tried everything they knew. They are sad, too. But Ben's body could not work anymore. His breathing stopped. Being dead doesn't hurt."
- Do not use phrases that give mixed messages:
 - passed away
 - sleeping
 - taken from us
 - resting
- Other examples include:
 - "Ben is sleeping in the arms of God". The child may have subsequent sleep disturbances and be afraid to go to bed.

- "Ben was so good, God wanted him to come live with him." The child might react with bad behavior to avoid death or develop a fear of God.

- "Ben is just away." The next person who goes away may not be trusted to come back.

School Age-Age 5 to 11 years

Understanding

5 to 9 years:

- Death seen as possible, but not for them, only for others.

9 to 11 years:

- Death may now include them.
- Child may begin to understand irreversibility of death
- Death becomes more real, final, universal, inevitable
- Child can differentiate between living and non-living.
- Child may show interest in biological aspects of death and details of funeral.

Possible Behavior

- Crying
- Anxiety
- Fear of dying at same age
- Headache
- Abdominal pain
- Try to fix things and find solution to death
- Fear of continuing friendship bonds, might lose friend
- Withdrawn
- Display similar symptoms of deceased person
- Separation anxiety at time of going to camp, away to school
- Denial of death
- Hostile reactions toward deceased
- Guilty, blame someone other than self
- Poor grades
- Lack of attention
- Day dreaming
- Loss of manual skills

What you can day & do

- The suggestions for the pre-school age child may also apply to the school-age child.
- Explain that everyone has different reactions to death and at different times. The reaction might not happen until the funeral or 2 weeks later, or on a special occasion.
- Give an honest explanation for the person's death, again avoiding previously outlined statements.
- Give permission to cry through words and example; let them know it's ok not to cry, if child doesn't usually react in that way.
- Encourage attendance at funeral as a final ceremony, a way to say goodbye. Abide by the child's wish to be sure to understand reasons if child chooses not to go
- Be a good listener
- Let them know their feelings are important.

Adolescents-Age 12 to 18 years

Understanding

- Child begins to think more like adults.
- Child is able to think more abstractly; now understands more fully the implications of death.
- Child may view suicide as means of getting back at someone, but also see it reversible because some survive it and repeatable because some try it more than once.
- Can acknowledge that life is fragile.

Possible Behavior

- Want to assume more adult role
- Seek out peers more
- Anger
- Preoccupation with death
- Taking on mannerisms of deceased
- Aggression
- Regression
- Idealization of deceased
- Practice denial of death by risk-taking
- May be very critical of parents' handling of financial arrangements, funeral traditions, etc.

What you can day & do

- Review suggestions for school age children for "What you can say and do."
- Encourage communication first in family, but may also find it beneficial to involve a trusted friend or counselor. A support group of peers could be helpful.
- Discuss role changes which may occur in family structure.

