

Books for Children and Teens

Anticipatory Grief and Bereavement

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Below are books I've found helpful in my work with children, both those who have a seriously ill loved one and those who have lost a loved one. This is a limited list and many other titles I haven't reviewed yet are available. Please notice the key as it will help you find an applicable book.

In general, it's most helpful to read these stories aloud to children, even older kids. In the case of teens, read the book you give them. This puts adults and kids on the "same page." Stories can help initiate conversation about difficult subjects as children relate to characters. Also, when we hear a story of someone else going through a loss, it can help us feel we aren't alone and show us different ways of coping.

Anticipatory Grief/Illness

It's difficult to come by stories about anticipatory grief (AG) for children dealing with a seriously ill loved one. This is partly because the person hasn't died yet and adults often don't want to "go there" until it's a fact, so they aren't as likely to read a book to kids about a person who does die from an illness. Unfortunately, this common logic leaves these kids alone in what likely worries them the most, when a story about it could lead to honest conversation about the dilemma of holding hope and grief simultaneously.

Key: Ca=cancer I=information about disease C= coping Pa=parent is sick Sb=sibling or child is sick, A=AIDS, D=includes death

Afraid to Ask by *Judylaine Fine (1999)* Informative and straightforward about cancer cause, prevention, living with and dying from cancer as well as specific cancers with graphic drawings. It's a good resource for parents to talk to kids. (ages 9-15) Ca/I

Becky and the Worry Cup: A Children's Book About a Parent's Cancer by *Wendy Schlessel Hapham/ Jonas Kulikauskas illus. (1997)* This is an independent reader book for older kids but can be read aloud to younger ages, told from a girl's perspective and offers concrete ideas for coping. There is booklet in the back for adults helping kids through a parent's illness. (ages 6-12) Ca/C/P

Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings: When someone you love has cancer...a hopeful, helpful book for kids (*Hardcover*)- *Ellen McVicker (Author), Nanci Hersh (Illustrator)* Read aloud book for kids (4-12) who have a loved-one with cancer. It encourages kids to be part of their loved-one's cancer journey. AG

Cancer by *Elaine Landau (1994)* This is an informative/graphic book about cancer. Chapter one focuses on child cancer and chapters 2,3,4&5 focus on diagnosis, treatment, causes, prevention and coping. (ages 9-teen) Ca/I/C/Si

Coping when Someone in Your Family Has Cancer by *Toni Rocha (2000)* Primarily about kids sharing their experiences (with cancer). It's informative and personal and has good chapters on a parent having cancer and a general chapter on change and coping. (ages 4-8 as read aloud/older kids/teens independent read) Ca/I/Si/P

Daddy and Me by *Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe (1993)* This is a real story told from 7-year-old's perspective of her Dad's illness (AIDS via blood transfusion). It addresses coping and understanding. Photo images. (ages 4-12) **Pa/A**

Flamingo Dream by *Donna Jo Napoli and Kathy Felstead (2002)* Follows the course of a Dad's long term illness and death from the perspective of the 9-year-old daughter. Creatively illustrated picture book. It's one of the few books for kids that shows anticipatory grief through to bereavement grief. (ages 4-12) **P/D**

My Daddy's Cancer: An Interactive Book for Children by *Cindy Klien Cohen and John Heiney (1999)*
This is a story about a child coping with a parent's serious illness that offers activities to help children cope. (Ages 3-12) **P/AG**

My Mommy Has Cancer by *Carolyn Stearns Parkinson (1991)* This story is told from a 5-year-old's perspective of finding out his mom has cancer and following the initial treatment. It's an real story that children relate easily to. (ages 4-11) **P/Ca**

Mommy is in the Hospital Again by *Carolyn Stearns Parkinson (1994)* This is a follow up to **My Mommy Has Cancer** and is told from perspective of 6-year-old about his mom's cancer recurrence. It encourages open and honest communication and has helpful points directed to parents throughout book. It helps kids cope with unexpected negative changes. (ages 4-11) **P/Ca/C**

Once Upon a Hopeful Night by *Risa Sacks Yaffe (1998)* From "finding out" through treatment, this book provides affirming security for children via a rhyme from a mother with cancer to her children. Addresses concerns of children and what to expect. (ages 4-11) **P/Ca/C**

Promises by *Elisabeth Winthrop (2000)* This is a story about a mom's recovery from cancer. She can't make promise not to get sick again, but can promise ongoing love. It deals gracefully with issue of not knowing how an illness may go. (ages 4-11) **P/Ca/C**

Paper Chain by *Blake, Parkinson, Blanchard (1998)* Story is told by a mom with cancer about different feelings and changes in family life when as she goes through treatment. Helps with understanding and hope and includes index of cancer/medical words. (ages 4-11) **P/Ca/C/I**

The Hope Tree by *Laura Numeroff and Wendy Harpham, MD (1999)* Kid animals talk in support group about breast cancer. Helps with coping throughout course of loved one's illness from children's perspective with emphasis on hopeful outcome. (ages 4-11) **P/Ca/C**

The Shoemaker's Boy by *Joan Aiken (1991)* This is a fantasy story of a boy's rite of passage via his mom's illness, stressing coping, integrity and hope. (ages 8-12) **P/C/Ca**

Skiping School by *Jessie Haas (1992)* A novel about 15 year-old boy coping with his Dad's terminal illness and recent move. (12-teen) **P/C**

Straight From the Siblings Another Look at the Rainbow Written by and for children who have siblings with life threatening illness. (ages 6-20) **Si/C**

Straight Talk About Death and Dying by Robert DiGuilio, Ph.D & RachelKranz (1995) Concise and informative, this guide helps teens cope with a loved one's illness and/or death. (teens) C/D

When a Parent is Very Sick by Eda LeShan (1986) Excellent resource for teens on many aspects of understanding implications of parent's illness from diagnosis, feelings and coping after (if the parent dies). Real examples. Parts can be read to younger children for discussion. (ages 9-teen)

When Snow Lay Soft on the Mountain by Patricia Hermes (1996) Story about how a girl's close relationship with her Dad (implies mom died previously) is impacted by his illness and how kids wish for simple things (ie doll) during complex times. Stresses hope during uncertainty. (ages 5-11) P/C

You and an Illness in Your Family A Family Matters Book by Tabitha Wainwright (2001) A great reference for adults and for teens to read themselves. It covers information about illness, feelings, change and coping and includes Index of medical words. Teens share their experiences with parent's & sibling's illnesses. (As resource 8-teen, on own 12-teen.) P/C/Si/I

Understanding Cancer by Susan Neiburg Terkel and Marlene Lupiloff Brass (1993) This book provides basic, but broad, understanding of cancer and some coping skills to younger children. Simple illustrations (ages 4-9) Ca/I

Children's Bereavement

Key: Sb=sibling/peer loss, Pa=parent loss, Gp=grandparent loss, S=loss by suicide, IA=interactive books, AG=anticipatory Grief, G=general grief

AARvy AARDvark Finds Hope: A Read Aloud Story for People of All Ages About Loving and Losing, Friendship and Hope by Donna O'roole (1988) In depth look at feeling grief as told through a story of two animals companions, one with parent loss and one with sibling loss. Takes reader on journey through deep grief and back into life. Lengthy story. (ages 9-12) Sb/Pa

About Dying: An Open Family Book for Parents and Children Together by Sara Bonnett Stein/ Dick Frank photo (1983) Timeless, simple yet thorough talk about death, first via child's pet and then Grandpa's death. Photo picture book (ages 3-9) P/Gp

A Little Bit of Rob by Barbara Turner (1996) Loss of a sibling. Beautifully illustrated by Marni Backer. It's a story of a family's first outing after the death of a teen son, from the perspective of a 9 year-old sister, with theme of hope and healing. (ages 5-11) Sb

But I Didn't Say Goodbye: For Parents and Professionals Helping Child Suicide Survivors by Barbara Rubel (2000) This book can be read in parts and is intended as a read aloud by adult to child. Ten year-old boy loses Dad to suicide and has questions. Book takes the form of dialog Q&A with general guidance. Good for prompting conversation. Great resource lists (No pictures) (ages 6-15) S/IA

Everette Anderson's Goodbye by *Walle Clifton (1973)* Talks about the stages of grief in kids terms and through the story of an African American boy going through them. Brief and to point. (ages 4-11) **G**

Finding a Way Through When Someone Close has Died: What It Feel Like and What You Can Do to Help Yourself: By Young People, for Young People by *Pat Mood & Lesley Whittaker (1991)* The title says it all. This is a self-help book, written by peers who have been through loss. They give practical/applicable advice for coping and normalize wide range of grief experience. Good for independent reading and aloud to group to stimulate expression. (ages 8-teen) **IA**

Flamingo Dream by *Donna Jo Napoli and Kathy Felstead (2002)* Follows the course of a Dad's long term illness and death from the perspective of the 9-year-old daughter. Creatively illustrated picture book. It's one of the few books for kids that shows anticipatory grief through to bereavement grief. (ages 4-12) **AG**

Good-bye Baby Max by *Dianne Cantrell/Heather Castles illus. (2008)* Teacher helps class process feelings of loss after one baby chick dies before hatching. May be useful in explaining/processing miscarriage loss to younger children. (ages 4-8) **P/MC**

Goodbye Max by *Holly Keller (1987)* Young boy's dog is old and is "put to sleep" and his parents try to fix grief with new puppy. Boy rejects this and allows his grief process with support of peer before accepting new pup. (ages 3-10) **P**

Grandma's Gone to Live in the Stars by *Max Hanes (2000)* This is a simple picture book with minimal words. It begins with grandma's death and follows her goodbyes to all that is special to her as she makes her journey to the stars, showing love beyond death. It also indicates belief system that dead become/go to stars (can be helpful as a concrete understanding for younger children). (Ages 3-8) **Gp**

Grandma's Scrapbook by *Josephine Nobisso/Maureen Hyde illus. (2000)* Beautifully illustrated, this story is told through the scrapbook a young woman her grandma kept all through her childhood until her grandma died. It shows death as natural end to lifespan and how remembering can become sweet with healing. (ages 9-12) **Gp**

Grandpa Loved by *Josephine Nobisso/Maureen Hyde illus. (2000)* Male version of Grandma's Scrapbook. Boy fondly remembers grandpa and what he instilled in him. The story comforts with belief that once people die, they can travel anywhere in spirit form. (Ages 7-12) **Gp**

Help For Hard Times - Getting Through Loss by *Earl Hipp/L.K. Hanson illus. (1995)* Full coverage of grief issues specific to teens but in small article format and with cartoon-illustrations. Respects teens, educates and gives guidance. A must for bereaved teens. (Ages 11-young adult) **G**

Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When A Special Person Dies by *Janis Silverman (1999)* This book is a helpful tool for parent/teacher/counselor to use with kids. It encourages children to express grief through words and art. (ages 4-8) **IA**

I Miss You: A First Look At Death by *Pat Thomas/Leslie Harker illus. (2001)* This story helps normalize grief as a response to loss for younger children, including how it plays out socially at school and among peers. Good for basic grief orientation. (4-8) **G**

I'll Always Love You by Hans Wilhelm (1988). About how a boy's loyalty and appreciation for dog while it was alive helped his grief process after. Addresses tendency to want to replace lost pet. (ages 4-8) P

It Must Have Hurt A Lot by Doris Sanford. This is about a boy's emotional journey through grief after losing a pet and the gifts found in loss. Good parent advice at end. (ages 4-9) P

Lifetimes by Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (1983). This is a timeless book about life and death of all living things. It helps normalize death without invalidating feelings about it. May also bring up issues of one's own immortality (in older children). (2-12) G

Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs by Tomie dePaola (1973) A story about a young boy's relationship with his great grandmother and grandmother and the loss of both at different times in his life. (ages 4-9) GP

Sad Isn't Bad – A good Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss by Michealene Mundy (1998) Each page offers guidance/validation of different aspect of grief. Elf-help series (Christian orientation) See also When Your Grandparent Dies by Victoria Ryan/R.W. Alley (ages 4-8) G/GP

Saying Goodbye to Daddy by Judith Vigna (1991) A wonderfully written story about a young girl coping with the sudden death of her father. It realistically address a wide range of feelings and applicable issues. (ages 4-12) Pa

Some of the Pieces by Melissa Madenski (1991) Grief and healing process from reflective perspective of young boy who's Dad died suddenly. It shows how sadness can eventually move into joy. Also addresses a baby too young to remember loss. (ages 3-10) Pa

Someone I Love Died by Suicide: A Story for Child Survivors and Those Who Care for Them by Doreen Cammarata/Volk&Accetta illus. (2001) This is an informative book for a wide age range and especially addresses the issue of suicide not being the child's fault (a common conclusion children make). Helpful for facilitating conversation/coping. (ages 4-15) S/G

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers by Earl A. Grollman (1993) This book helps teens with what to expect when a loved one dies. It includes interactive section for journaling as a coping device for grief. (teens) IA/ G

Tear Soup Pat Schwibert, Chuck DeKlyen / Taylor Bills illustrator (2005) This is one of those stories that's potentially helpful for all ages. It uses soup making as the metaphor for what ingredients are needed to heal from a loss. (Ages 4-8)

The Accident by Carol Carrick, illustrated by Donald Carrick (1976) Excellent book about feelings that arise in accidental death. Boy's dog is hit by truck and boy blames, feels guilty and is angry. Sadness comes after boy goes on journey with dad to find a stone marker for dog's grave. (Ages 5-12) P

The Goodbye Boat by Mary Joslin/Claire St.Louise Little illus. (1998) Grandmothers death seen through symbol of ship leaving horizon and arriving somewhere else with theme of the end being only the beginning. It brings hope that something continues after death. There are few words for such a big concept. (possibly confusing for younger kids) (ages 3-12) GP

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by *Leo Buscaglia (1982)* This book answers questions about life and death cycle via metaphor of leaves on a tree and seasons. It's also excellent for anticipatory grief or children/adults facing death themselves. Emphasis is on circle of life. (ages 4-adult) **G**

I Will Remember You: What to do When Someone You Love Dies: A Guidebook Through Grief for Teens

by *Laura Dower (2001)* This guide includes personal stories from teens, advice from grief counselor and creative activities to help teens cope with loss. (teen) **IA/G**

The Saddest Time by *Norma Simon (1986)* The book contains 3 different stories about 3 different losses —an Uncle, classmate and Grandma. It deals with feelings and healing by remembering. (ages 4-12) **Gp/G**

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by *Judith Viorst/Eric Blegvad illus. (1987)* A timeless story about pet loss. A 7ish year-old boy loses his cat and has questions about what happens when one dies. Dad is nature based, but allows for other ideas (ie. heaven) (ages 3-10) **P**

What is Death? by *Etan Boritzer/ Nancy Forrest illus. (2000)* This book is oriented toward big questions and looks at different beliefs/cultures to answer them at child's level. Ultimately, it makes death something to have a sense of control with by living fully. Stimulates child to consider and develop their own ideas about death. (not focused on feelings-may be too esoteric for younger kids or recent loss) (ages 8-15) **IA/G**

What On Earth Do You Do When Someone You Love Dies? by *Trevor Romain (1999)* A small and easy, straight forward book about dying in question/answer format. Cartoon illustrations. Uses examples of children he knew that died and gives their perspective (could be a little scary to a kid who had a grown up die and already is all too aware of their own mortality). Good all around. He explains grief of a child 7+ but speaks at a developmental level that meets kids ages 5-12. **IA / AG-child facing death**

What On Earth Do You Do When Someone You Love Dies? by *Trevor Romain (1999)* Excellent DVD with same title as book, but content is different. Video is about girl who loses grandma and grandma appears in a dream and reassures her she is okay. Deals accurately with initial feelings and social discomforts. Tricky for younger kids who need concrete explanations and may be confused as to how grandma visited if she was dead. Best for ages 8-12. **Gp**

What's Heaven? by *Maria Shriver (1999)* Girl loses great grandma. Loss is slightly removed from her, so it focuses on understanding vs emotions. It's a good book for explaining concept of heaven when applicable. Younger children tend to need concrete concepts (a place someone goes). Author bridges into older child abstractions by explaining the soul and heaven being a belief vs. a place. (ages 6-10) **Gp**

When a Friend Dies by *Marilyn E. Gootman, Ed.D* Advice and healing words about grieving loss of a friend/peer. (teens) **Sb/G**

When A Parent Dies by *Jill Kremenetz (1988)* This is a compilation of kids (variety of ages, gender, ethnicity and circumstance) sharing each of their stories of what it was like to lose a parent. Kids relate easily to kids. (9-teen) **Pa**

When Dinosaurs Die by Laurie and Marc Brown (1996) This is one of the Dinosaur series (there are many on many subjects) that covers many aspects of death (feelings, funeral, coping) concisely and is easy to understand. Cartoon-like (3-11) G/IA

When I Die, Will I Get Better? by Joeri and Piet Breebaart (1993) Written and illustrated by a Dad who listens to his son's experience of losing a brother to an illness. Story shows perspective of 5 year old coming to terms with loss via safe distance of animal family. (3-10) Sb

When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief by Marge Heegaard (1988) This activity book promotes coping skills natural to children through the use of drawing to express themselves. The book is simple, direct and guides through expression/understanding of death/grief. (ages 4-12) IA/G

Why Do People Die? by Cynthia MacGregor (2002) This book is informative, direct and in simple terms (cartoon pictures). As a read-aloud it helps adults find the words to explain aspects of death including cause of, funeral, feelings and memories. It's told in Eurocentric perspective with death of relative. It's long and thorough, but can be read in parts. (ages 4-12) G/IA