



Recommended Books on Death, Grief and Loss

Center for Good Mourning

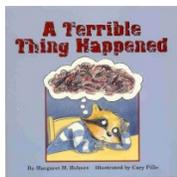
www.goodmourningcenter.org

Below is a selective list of recommended books. There are many excellent books dealing with death, grief and loss available for both children and adults. Many are offered by the Centering Corporation and Compassion Books—good places to start when looking for grief resources (links at the end of this document). Libraries and online booksellers are also good sources for researching and finding what is available.

Books should always be reviewed with thoughtful consideration before using with children.

PICTURE BOOKS

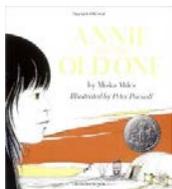
A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret M. Holmes, illustrated by Cary Pillo. Magination Press, 2000.



“Sherman Smith saw the most terrible thing. He was very upset. It really scared Sherman to see such a terrible thing.”

Thus begins the story of Sherman and how he learns to cope with the consequences of being exposed to trauma. The “terrible thing” is never defined—it could be an accident, a death or an act of violence. Whatever it is, Sherman is affected as he get stomachaches, gets into trouble at school, has trouble sleeping and feels angry all the time. Eventually, Sherman meets Ms. Maple who helps Sherman draw and talk about what has happened. Ms. Maple also helps Sherman understand that he didn’t cause the “terrible thing.” The illustrations of the animal characters are colorful, friendly and effective. The story ends as “Sherman is feeling much better now. He just thought you would want to know.”

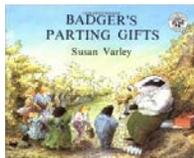
Annie and the Old One by Miska Miles, illustrated by Peter Parnall. Little Brown and Co., 1971.



Annie is a Navajo girl who lives with her mother, father and maternal grandmother—the “Old One.” Annie’s best times are sitting at the feet of her grandmother listening to stories of times long

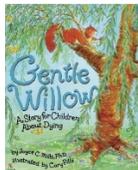
gone. One day Annie's grandmother gathers the family and announces, "My children, when the new rug is taken from the loom, I will go to Mother Earth." Annie understands what her grandmother is saying and looks for ways to keep her mother from completing the new rug. With gentleness and wisdom, her grandmother eventually helps Annie to understand that although her grandmother will die, her grandmother would always be. The story ends as Annie takes up her grandmother's weaving stick to learn to weave and in doing so contribute to the completion of the new rug. Published in 1975, this book with its tender story and evocative pen and ink illustrations continues to help children and adults better understand life.

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1984.



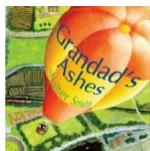
Following Badger's peaceful death, his friends recall their special memories of how he taught each of them something special- Badger's parting gifts.* A classic for good reasons—wise story and great illustrations.

Gentle Willow: A Story for Children about Dying by Joyce Mills. Magination Press, 1993.



This tender story brings back the characters from Little Tree (1992) to face the illness and eventual death of Gentle Willow. Amanda the squirrel and the tree wizards address feelings of disbelief, anger and sadness along with love, compassion and caregiving. The story provides children, and those reading the story with them, a "transformational" way of viewing death and dying.*

Grandad's Ashes by Walter Smith. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007.

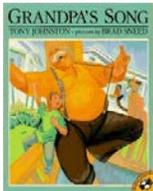


Jessica, Colin, Sasha and Tom loved their Grandad. After he died (and eighty-three people came to his funeral), Grandma said, "He had always wanted to be cremated and his last wish was to have his ashes scattered in his favourite place." The problem was deciding what his "favourite place" was and then successfully scattering Grandad's ashes. The children visit Grandma in the spring, summer, fall and

winter and each visit they come upon a different location for the ashes. In the spring it's the lake, in the summer it's the park, in the fall it's a vegetable garden and in the winter it's under a now non-existent oak tree. Circumstances work against them at each place, however, and for various reasons, their efforts to spread the ashes are not successful. The following spring Grandma, remembering when Grandad did a parachute jump, takes the children and ashes on a balloon ride. High in the air, a gust of wind knocks everyone off their feet and the lid off the urn with Grandad's ashes. All watch as the ashes, like "magic powder", drift over the big lake, the park, the garden and the location where the big oak tree once stood. Afterwards, Grandma and the children go home and talk about Grandad for a long time until it is time for bed.

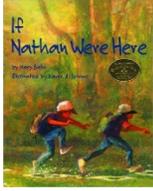
Author and illustrator Walter Smith has light touch both with his words and his rich, expressive and sometimes comical illustrations. Death of a grandparent and cremation are heavy subjects that sometimes defy conversation with children, so this book is a welcome contribution for creating a safe and life-affirming space for both topics. Set in the United Kingdom, there are a few terms that may not be familiar to American children such as "lorries" and "mince pies", but these can be entries into more conversations, too. A warm and comforting book.

Grandpa's Song by Tony Johnston, pictures by Brad Sneed, Dial Books for Young Readers, 1991.



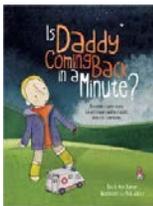
Grandpa and his voice were both as big around as kettledrum. When he sang his voice was so loud that the house shook and Grandma would have to straighten the pictures. One day he gathered the grandchildren and taught them the "best song in the world"—a song about how beautifully Grandpa sings. As time goes on, however, Grandpa starts to get "fuzzy" and can't remember things as he did before. When his birthday comes he doesn't want a party as he's afraid he'll seem fuzzy and old. Grandma and the grandchildren surprise and sing to him "the best song in the world" which leads to smiles, laughter and more singing. Brad Sneed's rich and stylistic pictures do well in helping to bring the story to life.

If Nathan Were Here by Mary Bahr, illustrated by Karen A. Jerome. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2000.



An especially beautiful book about a boy whose best friend, Nathan, has died. His classroom teacher has the boy's class contribute items to a Memory Box for Nathan. A good story for use in a classroom.

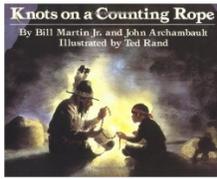
Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute? Explaining sudden death to pre-school children in words they can understand by Elke & Alex Barber, illustrated by Anna Jarvis, Crowdfunded in 2012, www.isdaddycomingback.com.



Alex was three years old when he and his father went away for a "boys only" weekend and his father died unexpectedly. A sudden death is hard to understand at any age, but it is especially challenging for preschool-age children. In this book based on the true story of the Barber family, Alex tells the story and asks lots of three-year-old questions, and his mother does a beautiful job of answering honestly and clearly in ways that give Alex the opportunity to understand the basic facts of what happened. Now that Alex' awareness of death has been heightened, he also has understandable concerns about the possibility of his mother dying and of his own death. With each new question, his mother patiently explains and explains again in terms that a preschooler has a chance of understanding. Alex finds good support and takes in the lesson that he can talk about his father any time and that it's OK to be sad and it's also OK to be happy.

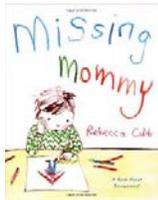
The illustrations are colorful and inviting, adding much to the story for both adult and child reader. The Barber family lives in Great Britain and some of the language may feel a little unusual for American ears, but this also provides another learning opportunity for both children and adults. A very practical, helpful and needed addition to list of books available for assisting young children in understanding death. Many thanks to the Barber family for sharing their story.

Knots on a Counting Rope by John Archambault and Bill Martin, Jr., illustrated by Ted Rand. Henry Holt and Co., 1987.



An unusually beautifully illustrated story of a Native American grandfather and grandson. The grandson asks the grandfather to once again tell him the story of his birth which they retell together. Grandfather and grandson recall special times that they have had together, how the grandson has grown with the “strength of blue horses” and how the grandson has learned to see although physically he is blind. After the telling, the grandfather ties another knot on the counting rope and reminds the grandson that when the rope is full, the grandson will not need the grandfather to help tell the story. Despite the grandson's request, the grandfather cannot promise that he will always be with him, but he does promise that his love will always surround him.

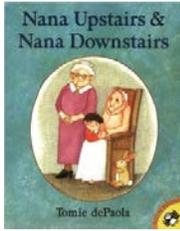
Missing Mommy: A Book About Bereavement by Rebecca Cobb, Henry Holt and Company, 2013, (first published in the United Kingdom, MacMillan Children's Books, 2011, www.mackids.com).



“Some time ago we said good-bye to Mommy. I am not sure where she has gone.”

The storyteller is a young boy who is confused by his mother's absence. Eventually, his father helps him understand that his mother has died. His father helps him understand the basics: his mother can't come back because she has died and her body doesn't work anymore, it was nothing he did, his father wishes she were here, too, but they are still a family and will remember her. The words are simple in their reality and wisdom, yet it might be the pictures that really set the book apart. The illustrations are a colorful mixture of crayon, marker and watercolor, and are very expressive. The combination of insightful, straightforward words with engaging and evocative illustrations helps this addition from the UK stand out in the grief/loss genre of children's literature.

Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs by Tomie dePaola, Puffin Books, 1973.



Tomie dePaola is a noted and award-winning author and illustrator of children's books. This book is a true story of the author's own experiences with a grandmother and great-grandmother. Four year-old Tommy loves to visit the house where both his grandmother and great-grandmother live. His great-grandmother is 94 years old and stays mostly in her upstairs bedroom so Tommy refers to her as Nana Upstairs. His grandmother by contrast then becomes Nana Downstairs. Tommy's affectionate and comfortable relationship with both Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs is simply and tenderly expressed and illustrated as is his response when he learns that Nana Upstairs has died. Originally published in 1973 with illustrations in black, pink and ochre, the author re-illustrated the book in 1998 in full color which adds to the book's look and appeal. Especially appropriate for early elementary children.

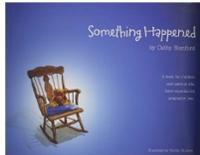
Old Pig by Margaret Wild, pictures by Ron Brooks, Allen & Unwin, Australia, www.allenandunwin.com, 1995.



Granddaughter Pig and Old Pig had lived together for a long time, sharing everything including meals and chores. Old Pig experiences the weariness that can come when life is coming to an end and Granddaughter is worried. With a quiet confidence, Old Pig does not worry but prepares. Part of her preparation is a long slow walk around town where she feasts on the sights, sounds, smells and tastes that have and do make life good. In the evening after her tiring and satisfying walk, Old Pig is exhausted and goes straight to bed. Granddaughter Pig stays with her as Old Pig had done for Granddaughter Pig when she was little and scared and for the very last time they hold each other tight until morning.

Old Pig comes from two of Australia's popular picture-book makers and the creators tell this poignant story with sensitivity and light humor. The pen and watercolor illustrations are expressive, warm and comforting. The final pages are illustration-only with no words and no words are needed. Old Pig treads lightly and surely on the tender territory of anticipated death at the end of a good life. It makes for a good read and is a treat for the eyes.

Something Happened: A book for children and parents who have experienced a pregnancy loss by Cathy Blanford, illustrated by Phyllis Childers, Signature Book Printing, 2008, www.somethinghappenedbook.com.



A young boy is excited (mostly) by the coming of a new baby in the family, but then something happens and the baby dies. The boy narrates his family's story, and he explains, "Instead of going to the hospital to say hello...we had to go to the hospital to say goodbye." In the days after, the boy explains that his parents let him know it wasn't anyone's fault that it happened and that no matter how hard they wish, their baby can't come back because it died. Something else happens, too, however. The family plants a tree and flowers to help remember the baby and the boy is reassured that they are still a family and their loves goes on and on.

Author Cathy Blanford has over twenty years working with grieving children and also serves as a bereavement counselor for Still Missed, a support program for families who have experienced a pregnancy loss. Her long years and practice experience show in the simple, direct language of the story and the issues addressed. A special and appreciated feature of this book is a text box on many pages directed to parents. These text boxes help parents be aware of and consider issues and reactions that may be present with their child and also offer guidance beyond the sharing of the book. Because pregnancy can be a mysterious and ambiguous concept for young children, a pregnancy loss can be especially challenging for parents to explain. For these special losses, this book is a real help.

Thank You, Grandpa by Lynn Plourde, illustrated by Jason Cockcroft, Dutton Children's Books, 2003.



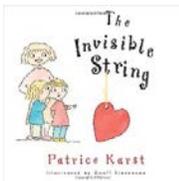
Many children's books that deal with grief do so with the topic of the death of a grandparent and *Thank You, Grandpa* is a high quality addition to this genre. With warm and evocative illustrations, this story is of the relationship between a grandfather and a granddaughter. They take nature walks through the years and the seasons and the girl learns about saying "thank you" for the small wonders that they experience together. One day the girl walks alone and says her "thank you" to her grandfather for all that he has given her and she promises to never forget him. A simple and poignant story told sensitively and illustrated beautifully.

The Bug Cemetery by Frances Hill, illustrated by Vera Rosenberry. Henry Holt and Co., 2002.



When a boy finds a dead ladybug, he and his sister bury it and hold a pretend funeral. Funerals and burials for bugs become fun and popular in the neighborhood, but when the boy's cat is killed, the funeral is real and sad. A unique story that is funny, sad, and hopeful.

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst, illustrated by Geoff Stevenson, DeVorss Publications, 2000, www.devorss.com.



In the adult grief world, we refer to it as "continuing bonds." The idea is that even after someone has died, we are and can be connected in healthy and life-affirming ways. For children (according to Patrice Karst and Geoff Stevenson), it's "the Invisible String" between the hearts of those who love each other. In this brightly and comfortably illustrated book, twins Liza and Jeremy rush from their beds to their mother after being awakened by a thunderstorm. Mom takes advantage of this teachable moment to explain that even if she is not physically close to them, they are always together and connected by an invisible string. This String connects parents to children, friends to friends, and families to pets. The children ask if it can reach to far-away places like France, the jungle or space, and, of course, the answer is "even there" each time. Jeremy asks if it can reach all the way to heaven and the answer remains the same, "Yes...even there." An additional and significant point made is that love is stronger than anger and the String doesn't go away when people are mad at each other. In closing, the story emphasizes that because of the Invisible String, no one is ever truly alone.

This is a friendly and accessible book for younger elementary ages and teaches an important lesson about how we are connected to those we love despite distance, absence and death.

The Next Place by Warren Hanson. Waldman House Press, 1997, www.waldmanhouse.com.



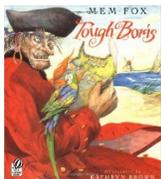
Striking illustrations and a first person text describe "the next place" the storyteller will go. The book presents a very peaceful and attractive description of the afterlife and is not overtly religious--does not identify with any particular religion. Many have found this book comforting and helpful.

The Spirit of Tio Fernando by Janice Levy, Albert Whitman & Company, 1995.



Tio Fernando died, but his spirit is remembered and met by his nephew, Nando, on the Day of the Dead in Mexico. As Nando prepares for his trip to the cemetery with his mother, customs and rituals for the Day of the Dead are introduced and experienced. The story, written in both English and Spanish, is well presented and can be a good starting place for learning about how different cultures express grief and celebrate continuing bonds with the dead.

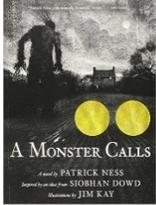
Tough Boris Mem Fox, illustrated Kathryn Brown. Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994.



Boris von der Borch is an unforgettable pirate. "He was tough. All pirates are tough." He was also massive, scruffy, greedy, fearless, and scary. All pirates are these things. "But when his parrot died, he cried and cried. All pirates cry." This simple, brightly illustrated book provides excellent reinforcement of the acceptability of expressing feelings, especially for boys who learn at a very early age that it's not ok to cry. The illustrations also tell the story of a boy who sneaks on board the pirate ship in an effort to retrieve his stolen violin. He eventually recovers his violin, plays for the pirates, and is returned back home.

CHAPTER BOOKS

A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, inspired by an idea from Siobhan Dowd, illustrated by Jim Kay, Candlewick Press, 2011.



The story grabs the reader at the beginning and will not let go.

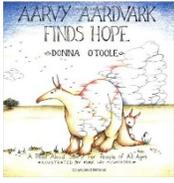
“The monster showed up just after midnight. As they do.

Conor was awake when it came.”

Conor O'Malley is thirteen years old and lives in England with his mother. His mother is being treated for cancer and is not doing well as the treatments are not working and his mother is getting weaker and having more difficulty with pain. Conor's father lives in America with his new wife and baby. Conor's maternal grandmother lives near Conor but his relationship with her is ambivalent at best. Conor is feeling quite alone and has a frequent nightmare which he finds more terrifying than the monster which shows up outside his second floor window-because it is as tall as his house! The monster takes the form of a huge ancient yew tree on a hillside behind the family home but the tree morphs into a mostly human shape of extremely large proportions to become the monster which repeatedly visits Conor. It comes to Conor contending that it has been called but it has its own agenda. The monster will tell three stories to Conor and then Conor will tell the monster his story which must include the truth. Conor is not much impressed with the threat of being told stories, but he experiences the realization in the days and weeks to come that he has seriously underestimated the power of stories. During these weeks, Conor's mother worsens and is hospitalized and Conor's school experience is haunted by different kinds of nightmares: a group of bullies who have chosen Conor for a victim and being seen as an object of sympathy by other students and school staff. The tension builds with multiple unexpected twists and turns until Conor must face the demand of telling his own true story.

This is neither a typical story nor a typical monster, and the journey to healing is a powerful and wild thing. Complementing and enriching the narrative are the haunting and evocative black-and-white illustrations by Jim Kay. *A Monster Calls* is an intense, unsettling, magical and satisfying story. Highly recommended, but have some time if you begin to read as it resists being put aside until the end.

Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope by Donna O'Toole, illustrated by Kore Loy McWhirter. Compassion Press, 1998.



With the help of his friend, Ralphy Rabbit, Aarvy Aardvark comes to terms with the loss of his mother and brother. The difficulties and long time needed to begin to feel better after a loss are illustrated well in this story. A special appeal of the story is how it respects the time it can take to feel better in grief. Toward the end of the story, Aarvy says, “Perhaps someday soon I will play again.” The illustrations are purposefully not colored so that children can color them as they please.

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson. Crowell, 1977.



Leslie and Jess are from different backgrounds, but they form a close friendship and create an imaginary, secret kingdom. The girl’s tragic accidental death marks the end of childhood for Jess, but their shared experiences help him bear the loss.*

Each Little Bird That Sings by Deborah Wiles, Scholastic, 2005.



Comfort Snowberger is a 10 year old girl who begins her story with “I come from a family with a lot of dead people.” While this is true for all of us, Comfort has a special perspective as she lives in the residential part of a funeral home in a small southern town. Far from being depressed or frightened by her surroundings, Comfort is full of spunk and insight into life, people and service to others. Her best friend, Declaration Johnson, is beginning to have her doubts about spending time with Comfort which Comfort understandably finds disturbing. More immediately disturbing, however, is the presence of her younger out-of-state cousin whose histrionics create scenes and embarrassment for Comfort. In the mix are a flood, a brother named Tidings, a dog named Dismay, a funeral and a comic and tender story about life, friendship, family and death. A highly readable juvenile novel.

Green Angel by Alice Hoffman. Scholastic, 2003.



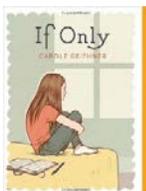
A fifteen year old girl dives into despair following the sudden death of her parents and younger sister in a fire that was a community-wide disaster. Haunted by loss and the past, she eventually begins to heal through a series of mysterious encounters. A haunting, but ultimately hopeful, contemporary fable.

Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Scholastic, 1999-2009.



There were seven *Harry Potter* books and eight *Harry Potter* movies beginning with *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and ending with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Harry is an orphan as both of his parents were killed when he was an infant. As much as these are stories about wizards, magic, good vs. evil and growing up, they are also powerful grief stories. Harry's grief in never knowing his parents and yet his connection to his parents are continuing themes in the books. Rowling has real insight into grief and its many facets and expressions. For reflections on the *Harry Potter* series as grief stories, go to <https://secure.archildrens.org/publications/GoodMourning-FEB2008.html>.

If Only by Carole Geithner, Scholastic Press, 2012.



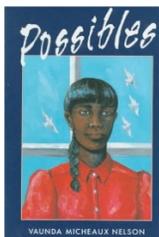
What would happen if someone was very experienced with adolescents, who had experienced the death of a parent, could remember what it felt like to be in the 8th grade and had an ear and feel for contemporary young teens, and was a gifted storyteller? If all those factors come together, you would have Carole Geithner's extraordinary debut novel, *If Only*.

As if 8th grade is not challenging enough, Corinna begins the school year reeling from her mother's death from cancer over the summer. Corinna narrates the story of this first year in a new world without her mother's physical presence to comfort, guide, listen and keep the family running smoothly. Challenges

are many as Corinna deals with well-meaning friends who don't "get it," a father who tries hard but is struggling himself, and the typical dramas of early adolescence. Corinna is a keen observer of her middle school social world and the clumsy reactions of friends and relatives to the death of her mother. Friendships change as her best friend has difficulty understanding while she finds a new friend who has experienced the death of her father. Adult responses vary from sensitive to clueless which rings true to the testimony of many grieving teens. Corinna's school counselor leads a time-limited support group during the lunch hour which Corinna finds helpful and illuminating as she hears the experiences of others and sees some of their commonalities and differences. Along the way Corinna discovers her mother's journal which exposes some important and distressing family secrets and shows her mother's struggles with expressing her concerns to her own family.

Geithner is patient and doesn't go for the easy answers and neat resolutions. The story ends as a new school year begins with a hard-earned realization of the consequences of her mother's death along with a sense of hope and resilience.

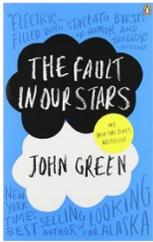
Possibles by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson. Paperstar, 1995.



*Listen to the mustn'ts, child,
Listen to the don'ts
Listen to the shouldn'ts
The impossibles, the won'ts
Listen to the never haves
Then listen close to me---
Anything can happen, child,
Anything can be.
--Shel Silverstein*

Sheppy and her father had shared this wonderful Shel Silverstein poem, but her father still died. Just before Sheppy's father died, he told her that anything is possible, but now Sheppy doesn't know what to believe. While Sheppy learns more about her father and his past, her brother, mother and she all grieve individually and alone. Eventually, the family learns to support one another and mourn together. An unusually insightful book that deals with both grief and race issues with sensitivity and respect. A welcome juvenile novel with African-American main characters.

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green, Dutton Books, 2012.



This book has been described in reviews as "genius," "luminous," "pitch-perfect," and "compulsively readable." *The Atlantic* stated, "This book is a book that breaks your heart, not by wearing it down, but by making it bigger and bigger until it bursts." It is also a witty, insightful, unsentimental punch in the gut that sends the reader looking for another John Green novel.

Along with evidently being a first-rate novelist, John Green is also a history teacher - check him out on the Internet with his Crash Course US History and World History videos. In this bestselling novel, Green wrestles with big questions of life and love in a story of teenagers with cancer. The narrator is Hazel who has an incurable cancer whose spread is being held at bay by a new medication. Her condition does include fluid buildup in her lungs, however, and she is constantly tethered to oxygen delivered by nasal cannula. She's a 16 year old only child and both she and her parents are well aware that in the big picture her dying has been just temporarily delayed. Hazel is sharp-tongued and has little tolerance for conventional perspectives of cancer, youth and death which, from her point of view, are too often dishonest, sappy attempts at inspiration and comfort. An example from the first page:

"Whenever you read a cancer booklet or website or whatever, they always list depression among the side effects of cancer. But, in fact, depression is not a side effect of cancer. Depression is a side effect of dying. (Cancer is also a side effect of dying. Almost everything is, really)."

Hazel is acutely aware of and grateful for her extended time but her social circle has shrunk to mostly her parents who are portrayed as earnest, fallible and caring, even by a teenage storyteller. Her life and horizons are disrupted, however, when she meets Augustus, or Gus, at a teen cancer support group that she reluctantly attends. Gus is a 17 year old boy who has had an above-knee amputation due to osteosarcoma and is no longer in treatment. Both Hazel and Gus reject the expectations others have for them in their roles as cancer patients and the book is much their story of connecting and making as much sense as possible in their sense-defying lives. The other main characters are Isaac, another support group member, whose remaining eye is removed because of a recurrence of his cancer and the fictional novel (within this novel), *An Imperial Affliction*, and its author Peter Van Houten. Hazel is obsessed with *An Imperial Affliction* which tells the story of a teenage girl who dies with leukemia. After sharing the novel with Gus, he is also hooked and impacted. How these characters grow and interact is the story of *The Fault in Our Stars* and to say more about what happens in the story would be to say too much. Suffice it to say that it is well worth the time, thought and emotion involved.

For those who might wonder, here is an excerpt from the "Author's Note" which is consistent with the tone and feel of the book:

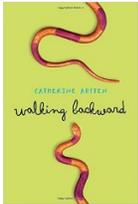
"This book is a work of fiction. I made it up.

Neither novels nor their readers benefit from attempts to divine whether any facts hide inside a story. Such efforts attack the very idea that made-up stories can matter, which is sort of the foundational assumption of our species.

I appreciate your cooperation in this matter.”

This is one of those books that, while fiction, feels fundamentally true.

Walking Backward by Catherine Austen, Orca Book Publishers, 2009, www.orcabook.com.



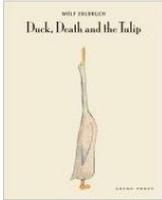
This is a quirky book with some darkly funny stuff, insights into families and grief plus information about mourning practices of different religions. Twelve-year-old Josh tells the story journal-style as his family reels from the strange accidental death of his mother. Someone put a snake in the passenger seat of his mother's car, and being phobic about snakes, his mother drove the car into a tree. Now Josh is left with the mystery of who put the snake in the car, the responsibility of parenting his four-year-old brother as his father spends his time in the basement trying to invent a time machine and the concern that his mother's death will be listed in the Darwin awards for deaths caused by the deceased person's stupidity. It's a lot to handle, even for a very bright kid who knows a lot about history and religious practices and is the best soccer player on his team. Trying to help his brother and himself, they start a "Mom book" scrapbook while his brother walks backwards so he can see everyone's face to remember in case they die. It's not easy, but this unusual family finds ways to begin to live again and be together as a different kind of family. Sounds strange, but it works.

“The dead-parent genre is a busy one, but Austen breaks from the pack with this confident and peculiar debut.”--*Booklist*

PICTURE BOOKS WITH PROVOCATIVE METAPHORS

Especially good for older readers and adults.

Duck, Death and the Tulip by Wolf Erlbruch, Gecko Press, 2011 (first published in Germany, Verlag Antje Kunstmann GmbH, 2007).



“For a while now, Duck had had a feeling. ‘Who are you? What are you up to, creeping along behind me?’

‘Good,’ said Death, ‘you finally noticed me. I am Death.’”

And so an unusual story and strange friendship begins. Duck takes Death to the pond, but Death can barely tolerate the damp. Duck warms Death on the pond's bank—something no one had ever offered Death before. Duck asked Death questions:

"Are you going to make something happen?" "Life takes care of that..."

Questions about the afterlife—Death is noncommittal, for the most part. They become friends. As the weather chills as summer ends, Duck peacefully dies. Death tenderly takes Duck and places her in the great river with a tulip on her body.

“For a long time he watched her.

When she was lost to sight, he was almost a little moved.

‘But that's life,’ thought Death.”

The illustrations are really masterful, subtle and gentle. Duck has an impossibly long neck, small head and demonstrative eyes. Death has a skull head, wears a plaid robe and appears to wear mittens. Death's posture, hand placement, line-mouth (never open) and almost empty eye sockets are remarkably expressive. Much more is suggested than explained with both characters and with the story. "But that's life..."

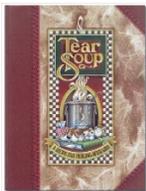
It is a strange and intriguing story, one that calls for rereading and pondering (like life).

Mama Does the Mambo by Katherine Leiner, illustrated by Edel Rodriguez. Hyperion Books for Children, 2001.



“After Papa died, Mama stopped dancing.” Carnival time is approaching in Havana, Cuba, and Sofia is beginning to wonder if her beautiful mother will ever dance again. Possible dance partners are considered, but none can take the place of Papa. When Carnival finally arrives, Mama reaches out for Sofia. “I am dancing with Mama, and Mama is dancing the mambo again.” Several Spanish words are included in the story to help ground the story in the Cuban culture. An inspiring story of embracing life after loss.

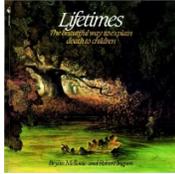
Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen, illustrated by Taylor Bills. Grief Watch, 1999.



Grandy, “an old and somewhat wise woman,” sets out to make tear soup as a way to cope with her loss. With wonderful illustrations, making tear soup is used very creatively as a metaphor for mourning. Sometimes it takes a big pot and a long time to make tear soup. One can learn from others’ recipes, but in the end you have to find your own recipe. Often the soup is very bitter tasting in the beginning. Good soup making is hard work, and if it’s not tended to the soup can boil over and make a great mess. Eventually Grandy cleans up the pot and puts the rest of the soup in the freezer to “pull it out from time to time to have a little taste.” Because of the metaphorical nature of the story, the book is very appropriate for older children, teens and even adults.

TEACHING DEATH CONCEPTS

Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen. Bantam Books, 1983.



“There is a beginning and an ending for everything that is alive. In between is the living. All around us, everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time. With living in between. This is true for all living things. For plants. For people. For birds. For fish. For trees. For animals. Even for the tiniest insect.”

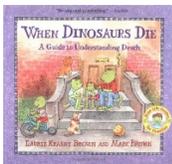
This is how the book begins and it repeats these points of beginning, ending and living in between as it reviews lifetimes of living things in the natural world. Eventually the question comes, "And people?" Here the book applies the same themes to people--beginnings, endings, and living in between. It is a gentle and beautiful book and an excellent book to help introduce the concept of death to young children.

What Is Death? by Etan Boritzer, illustrated by Nancy Forrest. Veronica Lane Books, 2000.



A gentle-toned and brightly illustrated book which discusses "big" and basic questions about death in a very accessible way. This is one of the few books that deals with different ways that major religions understand death and dying including Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish perspectives.

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. Little, Brown and Co., 1996.

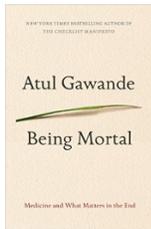


What does alive mean? Why does someone die? What does dead mean? How do people feel and what do they do after someone dies? What comes after death and what are ways to remember someone who dies? These are some of the questions that are handled with gentleness and clarity in this excellent

book for teaching children about death. It is a picture book with colorful and inviting illustrations of dinosaurs (which have a close resemblance to the characters in the Arthur cartoon series by the same creative team) doing all kinds of typical people activities. The book covers a lot of topics in small “bite-size” pieces just right for a young child. The information is helpful and can lead to adult-child conversations about very difficult topics, and this is one reason that it is highly recommended.

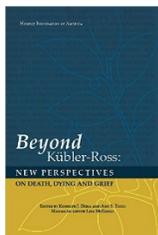
ADULT READERS

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande. Metropolitan Books, 2014.



Atul Gawande is a surgeon and an excellent writer. In this timely book, he considers the challenges and limitations of modern medicine in the context of aging and illness which leads to death. In this exploration, he looks at the “big picture” of medicine and healthcare, especially in the United States, and also at personal stories including the story of his own father’s cancer and eventual death. Much of what he finds in our death/dying-avoiding healthcare system is distressing, but he also finds reasons to be hopeful in the growth and development of palliative care and its insights into the needed but difficult conversations about what is most important to patients when life is limited. An important and useful book for all of us mortals and our mortal family and friends.

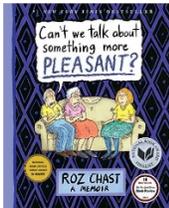
Beyond Kübler-Ross: New Perspectives on Death, Dying and Grief edited by Kenneth J. Doka and Amy S. Hospice Foundation of America, 2011.



Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief-denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance-found in her book, *On Death and Dying*, published in 1969 have had remarkable staying power. Although these stages came from her clinical observations and were never validated by her or anyone else's research, this five-stage approach to understanding grief continues to be taught and understood as the standard approach for many still today. Fortunately we have learned a lot about grief and mourning since 1969 and this book does a very effective job of summarizing many of the important insights gained about our response to loss in the past forty plus years while giving credit to Kübler-Ross for being the pioneer that she was. In the nine chapters of the book, stage and task models of grieving are compared and contrasted, ideas of post-loss growth are explored and cross-cultural perspectives of grief are considered. In the very useful concluding section on "implications for practice," contemporary conflicts in the current "grief world" are discussed regarding the diagnosis of "complicated grief" proposed for the coming DSM-5 and whether or not grief counseling is helpful, harmful or of little use. Robert Neimeyer's closing chapter, “From Stage Follower to Stage Manager: Contemporary Directions in Bereavement Care,” will be appreciated by counselors and therapists looking for ways to apply some of the newer insights in their work with grieving people. This is a brief book-only 152 pages-but it covers a

great deal of needed ground for those wanting to take advantage of the grief insights gained since Kübler-Ross gratefully brought the discussion of death, dying and grieving front and center. We owe her a great debt for her pioneering work, and yet as Ken Doka remarks in his introduction to the first section of the book, "would a cancer patient wish to be treated by an oncologist steeped in the approaches offered in 1969?"

Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?—A Memoir by Roz Chast. Bloomsbury, 2014.



There is no book like this one in form but its themes and subject matter are ones that will resonate with many. Roz Chast is a cartoonist whose work is often found in *The New Yorker* magazine. This memoir covers the last years of life for her elderly parents from the perspective of an adult child who both loves and is often exasperated by them. Although there is much they share as family, there are major personality perspective differences between Chast, her parents and between her parents. Chast is insightful, painfully honest and funny as she tells her stories in words and cartoons (and a few photographs). It is a family story well-told of life, dying, death and the messiness along the way.

Helping a Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers developed by The Dougy Center, 2011,
www.dougy.org.



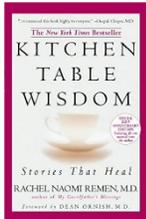
This user-friendly booklet has 50 pages of practical and helpful information for teachers from preschool through high school. Sections include:

- Six Basic Concepts of Grief
- How Bereaved Students Grieve
- Developmental Issues of Grieving Students
- How Teachers Can Help Grieving Students
- Responding to a School-Related Death
- Special Considerations or Complications for different types of deaths

Classroom Activities to Help Students Deal with Grief
Additional resources and book recommendations

Clearly and well-written and interspersed with quotes and drawings from grieving children, this book is a great resource for teachers wanting to be the best help and support possible for grieving students.

Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD. Riverhead Books, 1996.



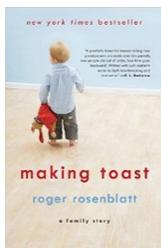
Dr. Remen is a physician, teacher and counselor and in this book she tells short stories from her professional life and her personal life as daughter and person with a chronic illness. Along the way she shares her observations and insights into healthy and whole living in the midst of loss and illness.

Here is just one example: In the story entitled, “The Container,” Remen tells of a young man who had his leg amputated as part of his treatment for bone cancer. The loss of his leg caused him much anger and when asked by Remen to draw a picture of his body, he drew a crude vase with a deep, dark crack running down the center. She goes on to describe his journey to find ways to live with his new life and body and at the end of their work together, she reminds him of his drawing:

“He took it in his hands and looked at it for some time. ‘You know,’ he said, ‘it’s really not finished.’ Surprised, I extended my basket of crayons toward him. Taking a yellow crayon, he began to draw lines radiating from the crack in the vase to the very edges of the paper. Thick yellow lines. I watched, puzzled. He was smiling. Finally he put his finger on the crack, looked at me, and said softly, ‘This is where the light comes through.’”

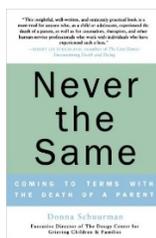
Cannot be more highly recommended. For more insightful and healing stories, see Remen’s subsequent book, *My Grandfather’s Blessings*.

Making Toast: A Family Story by Roger Rosenblatt, HarperCollins Publishers, www.harpercollins.com , 2010.



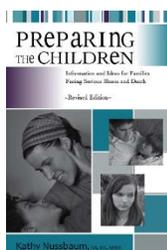
Spare, restrained, unsentimental, moving and beautiful. These are words to describe Roger Rosenblatt's story of his family following the unexpected death of his thirty-eight year old daughter, Amy. Following Amy's death, Roger and his wife move in with their son-in-law, Harris, and their three grandchildren, seven-year-old Jessica, five-year-old Sammy, and twenty-month-old James (Bubbies). Rosenblatt (called "Boppo" by the children) describes daily activities of living, such as making toast, after Amy's unimaginable death. He reflects on Amy's life as child, daughter, physician and mother. A talented and attentive observer, he describes the details of appearance, children's toys and activities and the uneven steps of a family finding its way while all live with the pain and the differences in their lives. The family is not religious and the God in which Rosenblatt believes offers neither care nor comfort. How he finds a way to walk and "make toast" in this new family and unwelcome world is poignant and instructive.

Never the Same: Coming to Terms with the Death of a Parent by Donna Schuurman. St. Martin's Press, 2004.



This book is especially written to adults who experienced the death of a parent during childhood, but its appeal and value extends far beyond this audience. Filled with practical and well-researched wisdom about how loss affects us, how others affect our grieving and how we can help ourselves even years after a loss, this book is a worthy guide for both those who grieve and those who want to help others. Topics covered include “forget the stages,” children and resiliency, how a parent’s death affects one as an adult, and what can be done now to address a parent’s death. *Never the Same* is a true title as the book is real about the difficulties and real about how things can be better than they are.

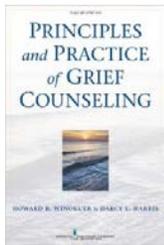
Preparing the Children: Information and Ideas for Families Facing Terminal Illness and Death by Kathy Nussbaum. www.preparingthechildren.net, 2012.



Kathy Nussbaum puts her hospice experience as a nurse and her experience in a children’s grief support program to good use in this booklet filled with helpful and practical information. The major sections are What children need during the terminal illness, What children need during the death and death rituals, and What children need to heal from their loss. Each section considers the particular

needs in the context of a child's perspective and development, and each section has many real-life ideas for helping children understand what is happening in their lives and feel supported. Black and white photographs and children's drawings are used effectively to illustrate and support the text throughout. For adults supporting children in the face of the dying of a significant person, this book can be a great resource.

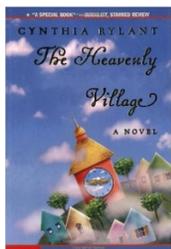
Principles and Practice of Grief Counseling by Howard K. Winokuer and Darcy L. Harris, Spring Publishing, www.springpub.com, 2012.



Effective, research-based and engaging grief and loss textbooks are not easy to find. Some are too dry, some too narrow and others not current with contemporary understandings of grief, mourning and counseling approaches. This book by Winokuer and Harris, however, has the right balance of head, heart and updated perspectives.

Principles and Practice of Grief Counseling helpfully starts with the basics of counseling and then examines what makes grief counseling different within the counseling world. Building on that foundation, the book explores the development of current thinking and understanding about grief and loss. Issues explored include different types of losses, working with emotions for both client and counselor, ethical concerns, and specific therapeutic techniques. Winokuer and Harris have feet in both academic and counseling worlds, and they bring insights from both along with frontline examples from their clinical experiences. This is an excellent core, introductory resource for both students and clinicians who seek grounding and orientation to the world of current understandings of grief and how to be of help to those impacted by loss.

The Heavenly Village by Cynthia Rylant. The Blue Sky Press, 1999.

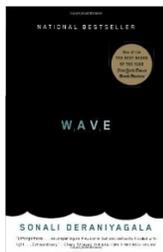


This book can be read in one sitting. Get your beverage and snack of choice, a comfortable place to sit and enter in. In this imagining of the afterlife, most of those who have died go straight to heaven, but there are some who are not quite ready. For varieties of reasons, they feel tethered to their lives on

earth and are reluctant to let go. For these ambivalent souls, God has provided "the heavenly village," an idyllic place with pleasant weather, friendly neighbors, any desired and needed creature comforts and flexible time. With a wink and a nod from the author, one character wonders if they're in Connecticut (which suggests adding a visit to Connecticut to your bucket list). The book is a series of profiles of some of the inhabitants of the heavenly village. Their lives on earth are described as well as the purposes of their time in the village. They did not consciously choose to delay heaven itself, but God understood that they had some debts to pay, accounts to settle or some kind of business to be resolved.

Certainly a religious book, Rylant's spirituality includes the vision of spirits existing with God both before and after life on earth, and she uses quotes from the Bible, both from Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, preceding chapters. She also envisions a perfectly gracious and humanistic God, one who reflects, perhaps regrets, and has more to learn. It is a similar image of God as is presented in her book of short poems, *God Went to Beauty School*. *The Heavenly Village* provides a dreamlike place where human needs for forgiveness, connection and wholeness are understood, respected and supported. It is a kind and provocative vision.

Wave by Sonali Deraniyagala, Vintage Books, 2014.



How does one attempt to describe the indescribable? The experience of the death of a child overwhelms. The death of both your children stretches the imagination in more painful ways. The loss of both your children, your husband and your parents in one horrific, totally unforeseen event that almost takes your own life boggles both mind and heart. The tsunami wave in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 actually did take the author's life while leaving her alive. Her most immediate family—children, spouse and parents—all died. Sonali Deraniyagala describes the facts of that day and the seven plus years that follows in her memoir *Wave*. It is a difficult story to read, not because of the writing, which is beautiful and often understated in style, but because the facts of the story are so overwhelming.

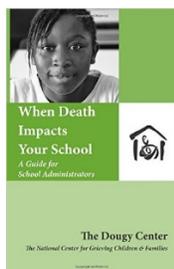
Deraniyagala was vacationing with her 5 and 7 year-old sons, husband and parents on the coast in Sri Lanka, her home country when the tsunami hit. The family lived in the United Kingdom, her husband's home country, most of the year but often visited family and vacationed in Sri Lanka. The way in which Deraniyagala tells the story suggests some important facets of her life following the tsunami. She writes much more on the loss of her children than on the loss of her husband and parents, although she eventually gives focus to their lives and losses, too. She tried to sabotage the new renters of her childhood home as their occupancy is offensive to her fragile sense in the world. Suicide is a real risk for her, especially in the first months, and she was saved from herself by the faithfulness of family and friends. When she meets new people, she avoids telling her story and explaining her circumstances as they defy explanation and to tell feels, in some ways, like an aggressive act to innocent inquirers.

7.17.2015

One of the most telling themes in her writing has to do with her relationship to memories. She is both drawn to and repulsed by them. In the early years, the memories threaten to destroy what little she feels she has left of herself, but as she persists in living and revisiting both physical and emotional places, the memories eventually become refuge and places of grounding. The telling and descriptions of the subtle changes in her relationship to memories is one of the gifts of Deraniyagala's story.

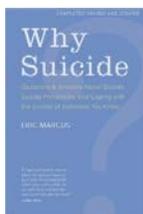
In the end, it is a tale of losing, losing even more, and living in spite of. Haunting, terribly sad, affirmation of life and living, and quiet, stubborn endurance. There is redemption here.

When Death Impacts Your School: A Guide for School Administrators developed by The Dougy Center, 2003, www.dougy.org.



A school administrator is faced with many concerns when a death impacts his or her school including how to inform the school community of the death, how to offer support to both students and staff, how to handle memorial requests and sometimes how to handle the media. This guide is a unique and practical resource for these and other related concerns. Topics covered include planning for a crisis and tasks for crisis team, practical aspects of what to do during the school day, student and staff issues and special considerations related to varying causes of death. Also very helpful is the inclusion of sample classroom announcements and letters to parents after a death, after a suicide death and after a violent death. A remarkably useful tool for principals and school administrators.

Why Suicide: Questions & Answers About Suicide, Suicide Prevention, and Coping with the Suicide of Someone You Know by Eric Marcus, HarperOne, 2010.

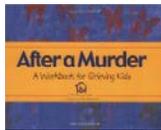


After someone dies by suicide, those left behind (called "survivors") are left with many questions. Exactly how did this happen? Were there warning signs, and if so, were they recognized? What, if anything, might have been done to prevent this? Am I even partially responsible? How can someone do such a thing, and most of all, why?

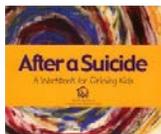
Journalist Eric Marcus brings both investigative and personal perspectives to these questions as his father killed himself when Eric was a boy and this death has reverberated throughout his life. The book is written in a friendly, inviting style and organized as a series of questions and answers under general topics including basic understandings of suicide, methods, youth and elderly characteristics, attempts, treatment, prevention and support for survivors—the latter being about half the book. The intended audience for the book is especially those who have been impacted by the suicide of someone important in their lives although it could also be very helpful for professional caregivers who support suicide survivors. Marcus has clearly done a great deal of research and literature review along with personal interviews of those impacted by suicide, those who have been suicidal and some who have attempted suicide and lived to tell their stories. Throughout the book he combines information from the latest research and data along with stories and testimonies of individuals who have struggled with suicidal ideation and who have had a family member or friend die of suicide.

WORKBOOKS

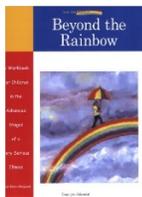
After a Murder: A Workbook for Grieving Kids by The Dougy Center, www.dougy.org.



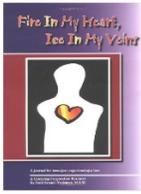
After a Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids by The Dougy Center, www.dougy.org.



Beyond the Rainbow: A Workbook for Children in the Advance Stages of a Very Serious Illness by Marge Heegaard.



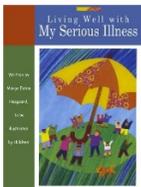
Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for Teenagers Experiencing a Loss by Enid Traisman.



Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies by Janis Silverman.



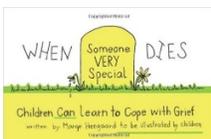
Living Well with My Serious Illness by Marge Heegaard.



Saying Goodbye to Your Pet by Marge Heegaard.



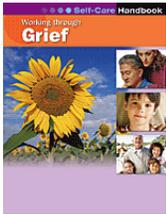
When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief by Marge Heegaard. Available in Spanish.



When Someone has a Very Serious Illness by Marge Heegaard.



Working Through Grief: Self-Care Handbook by Channing Bete Company, www.channing-bete.com. Available in Spanish.



SOURCES FOR GRIEF-RELATED BOOKS, LITERATURE, AND VIDEOS

Centering Corporation
1531 North Saddle Creek Road
Omaha, NE 68104
402-553-1200
www.centering.org

Compassion Book Service
477 Hannah Branch Road
Burnsville, NC 28714
828-675-5909
www.compassionbooks.com

*Special thanks to Chris Brown, MS, CCLS, Director, Child Life and Education, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (1998) for her contributions to this list.