

## SELECTED READINGS FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN & THEIR CAREGIVERS:

### **The Grieving Child; a parents guide;**

Helen Fitzgerald; Fireside book, Simon & Schuster, 1992. ISBN 0-671-76762-3. for caregivers.

**Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent & Child;** Earl A. Grollman; Beacon Press, 1976. for caregivers.

**About Dying;** an open family book for parents and children together; Sara Bonnett Stein, Gilbert W.

Kliman; Walker, 1974. ISBN 0802761700.

### **The Grieving Child; a parents guide;**

Helen Fitzgerald; Fireside book, Simon & Schuster, 1992

ISBN 0-671-76762-3 for caregivers

**Lifetimes;** a beautiful way to explain death to children;

Bryan Mellonie & Robert Ingpen; Bantam Books, c1983. ISBN 0553340239. ages 3 – 10.

**Learning to say Goodbye; when a parent dies;**

[Discusses the questions, fears, and fantasies many children experience when a parent or someone close to them dies.] Eda J. LeShan; Avon Books, c1988.

ISBN 0380401053. ages 8 – 12.

**After the Rain;** Norma Fox Mazer; W. Morrow, 1987;

[After discovering her grandfather is dying, fifteen-year-old Rachel gets to know him better than ever before and finds the experience bittersweet.]

ISBN 0688068677 ages 12 - 18

**Kid's Book about Death and Dying;**

by and for kids at Fayerweather Street School; edited and coordinated by Eric E. Rofes; Little, Brown, c1985. ISBN 0316753904.

**Fall of Freddie the Leaf**

Leo Buscaglia; Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1982; ISBN 003062424X. all ages.

**Tenth Good Thing About Barney;** Judith Viorst;

Antheneum, 1975. ISBN 0689206887. ages 4 - 6

**Teenagers Face to Face with Bereavement;** Karen Gravelle, Charles Haskins; J. Messner, c1989; [Young people express feelings of pain, anger, and guilt as they come to terms with the death of a parent, sibling, or close friend.].

ISBN 0671658565 ages 11+

**But won't Granny need her socks?** dealing

effectively with children's concerns about death and dying; Knowles, Don (Donald W.), Nancy Reeves; Dubuque, Iowa : Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., c1983.; ISBN 0840329024

"Healthy children will not fear life if their elders have integrity enough not to fear death.

~ Erik Erikson

---

A loss early in life is a tremendously painful event. However, this may also present a significant opportunity for the child to learn how to better cope with inevitable future losses. They also learn that you will be there for them in the case of future difficulties.

You are not responsible for providing all answers and solutions to your child, but you can provide the simple details, reassurance and love that they need.

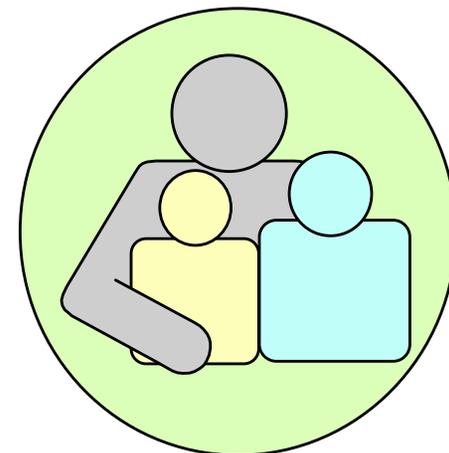
---

*Working together for  
excellence in suicide  
prevention, intervention  
and postvention*

**PRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM  
S.A.F.E.R. COUNSELLING SERVICES**

Suicide Attempt Follow-up, Education & Research  
#300, 2425 Quebec Street  
Vancouver, B.C., V5T 4L6  
Telephone: (604) 879-9251

# Helping Children Grieve



***When little hearts are hurting...***

Children are often referred to as “the forgotten mourners”. They are forgotten because we believe that they don’t really understand and are therefore not as upset as we are. This is not true. They can experience the same overwhelming emotions as adults, but may not understand or have the vocabulary to describe what they are feeling. For this reason, children require honest and clear answers to their questions. Age plays a large part in how a child will commonly respond because children of different ages have different perceptions of death.

## CHILDREN’S’ CHANGING CONCEPTS OF DEATH:

**3 years old and under** sense the upset of those around them and may become irritable. They require patience, attention, and comfort.

**3 to 5 years old** - see death as temporary or like a prolonged sleep. They don’t understand the intense sadness of others and need loving reassurance repeatedly.

**5 to 7 years old** - examine their role in the death and may feel guilty that their thoughts or behaviour somehow caused this death. They may seem indifferent at times, but this response is their way of coping with the difficult emotions of anger, guilt, blame and sadness. They need to talk about the details of the death, such as how and why the death occurred.

**7 to 9 years old** - begin to see death as permanent and sometimes unpredictable. Children may ask questions and they need to hear simple answers. They may “act out” feelings that they can’t express by misbehaving, showing aggression, or displaying physical symptoms of illness. They have a growing need for control and need to talk about the death.

**9 to 13 years old** - need to be encouraged, without pushing, to share their feelings. A fear of death occurring to others or themselves may develop. They need to hear that you aren’t going to leave them.

**13 years old and over** - may seem indifferent on the surface because they are often so preoccupied with their own identity, but these young people are often hiding intense inner turmoil. Usually, they are uncomfortable admitting their emotional confusion to others

close to them. Some adolescents may turn to substance abuse or promiscuity in an attempt to find relief from their pain and sorrow. Do not take control; rather, listen and be available.

Children have special needs when grieving, and often require the help of caring adults.

## CHILDREN REQUIRE HONEST & CLEAR ANSWERS

### HOW TO HELP:

- 1. Be honest.** Secrets are scary. Children fill the gaps in their understanding of death with their imagination. No matter what age they are, studies have illustrated the importance of children knowing what they need to know. Don’t use vague phrases like “Daddy has gone on a long sleep”, or “God wanted Grandma to be His special angel”. Children take these phrases literally and may become afraid of going to sleep or may resent God for taking grandmother away. You may want to explain by saying that “Grandpa’s body has stopped working and won’t start again”, and be prepared to give details. By including children in funeral arrangements and mourning rituals, parents can provide them with a significant learning experience in coping with loss.
- 2. Be open.** Children will adapt their reactions to those around them. Model your grief for them. Show your grief and let them know that it’s okay to cry or be angry. If they are having difficulty describing their feelings, you might tell them a story about a little boy or girl “just like them” who suffered a similar loss, and how “angry” they were. Then ask them, “Do you feel angry too?” Reassure your children of your love constantly as they need to feel secure.

- 3. Be available.** Invite young people to ask questions and reassure them that it is okay to talk with you about the death. Encourage them to remember both good and bad things about the person who died.
- 4. Be aware.** When thinking about what you’re going to say, think of how it will be heard by your child. Be clear. Their behaviour may confuse you at times, but don’t be misled into thinking that they are not upset and confused. They are attempting to cope with feelings they may not understand, and may not have the vocabulary to express them.
- 5. Be gentle with yourself.** Dealing with children can be difficult when you are grieving also. Monitor your own frustration and ask other caring people to help care for the children if you can no longer be patient. Seek help for yourself. You will have a difficult time supporting the children if you are needing support for yourself. This also sets the example that seeking help is okay.
- 6. Be creative.** Children are taught at an early age the names of all their body parts, but are left to discover on their own the names of their emotions. Help them to express themselves through drawing pictures, telling stories, reading children’s books on death, and developing a sense of humour.
- 7. Be patient.** Children may “act out” emotions that they cannot explain, (i.e. misbehaving in class when they feel angry.) Encourage them to explore their feelings. Let them teach you why they are behaving this way and what they need. IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.

## SECRETS ARE SCARY