



Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre

A home for grieving hearts

BOOKS on GRIEF, DYING and DEATH for CHILDREN

Books for Youth Aged 11-14

Abelove, Joan. (1999). *Saying It Out Loud*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc.

- This is a story about a 16-year-old Jewish girl growing up in the early 1960's whose mother is suddenly diagnosed with a brain tumour. As Mindy slowly realizes her mother is dying, she struggles to come to terms with her feelings of loss, anger, guilt, and sorrow. Her father, in his own grief, isolates himself from her, and tries to keep her from her ailing mother. This book is unique in that it shows the extremely positive role that close friends can play for adolescents who are grieving. It is well-written and deals with these important issues in a sensitive manner.

Bauer, Marion Dane. (1986). *On My Honor*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, Clarion Books.

- The painful, deeply touching book is about a 12-year-old boy who loses his best friend on a dare to swim in a fast-flowing river. The story details the boy's shock, denial to friends and family, and then eventual grief. One of the aspects of this book that is particularly well-done is the guilt that the boy feels with respect to the death of his friend, something that many grieving individual's feel no matter the circumstances surrounding death. Finally, the book concludes with a touching moment between father and son as they try to comfort one another.

Blume, Judy. (1987). *Tiger Eyes*. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury Press.

- Tiger Eyes is a story about a 15-year-old girl who struggles to come to terms with her father's sudden and violent death. She and her mother and younger brother travel across the country to spend time with relatives, and Davey (the girl) is essentially left to her own devices. She meets a mysterious young man and bonds instantly with him, only later realizing that his father is also dying. Davey learns to cope with her own grief by sharing in someone else's, and eventually finds strength and resources within herself. This is a well-written, moving book that describes the long process Davey and her family must undergo in order to move on with their lives.

Heegaard, Marge Eaton (1990). *Coping with Death and Grief*. Minneapolis, MA: Lerner Publications.

- Coping with Death and Grief is a book that uses both narrative and instructive teachings to answer questions about death, dying, and grief, and advice on how to cope with all of these elements. Each chapter begins with a story that helps to illustrate the theme of the chapter, and therefore the book is laid out in a straightforward and logical manner, while maintaining an element of sensitivity

Hermes, Patricia. (1982). *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

- This beautifully written book is about a 13-year-old girl who finds out her mother has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and details her struggles with her mother's illness and eventual death. This story touches on many of the emotions a person feels when grieving, including disbelief, anger, and guilt, but is also unique in some ways: instead of ending the book on a rather upbeat note reminding the reader that 'life will go on,' the author plainly says that the death of a loved one is an awful experience - there is no other way around it. And perhaps people will one day not feel the pain as freshly, but grieving remains a very difficult experience and should not be minimized.

Hyde, Margaret O. & Hyde, Lawrence E. (1989). *Meeting Death*. New York: Walker Books.

- This book is a straightforward, thorough analysis of many issues surrounding death and dying. The authors examine beliefs about death from various cultures, as well as our encounters with the terminally ill, suicides, and accidental deaths. The concept of the 'good death' is also discussed, and finally the book looks at grief and mourning. The only drawbacks of this book are that it relies heavily on Kübler-Ross's five stages of dying, and does not leave room for more complex interpretations of the dying process.

Krementz, Jill. (1988). *How it Feels When a Parent Dies*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- This book contains a number of short narratives about the true stories of children who have lost one of their parents, through either sudden death or an illness. One of the strengths of this book is that it is illustrative of the many different grieving reactions, and normalizes them for other children who may be grieving. It also focuses on the fact that although the grieving process may be ongoing, these children have still managed to cope and grow.

LeShan, Eda. (1976). *Learning to Say Good-by When a Parent Dies*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

- This is a very frank and persuasive book, and is direct in the way it addresses the many problems faced by children who lose a parent. It is largely instructive, but uses some non-fictional narratives about children who have lost a parent in order to highlight important points. This book reassures children that the various emotions they may be feeling are a normal part of the work of grief, but also discusses seeking special help under certain circumstances.

LeShan, Eda. (1986). *When a Parent is Very Sick*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

- This is an instructive, teaching book for teens that deals with the issues of coping with a parent's illness and possible death. It uses specific stories to illustrate various grieving reactions, and interactions with other people that the grieving child might encounter. This book also examines the issue of anticipatory grief, and how the death of a parent after a long illness can bring a different sort of grief than the sudden death of a parent. This book is valuable because it emphasizes that individuals should never apologize for their feelings, because the work of grief can be complicated and confusing. Finally, the book examines adjustment after the death of a parent and how adolescents can negotiate going on living.

Pringle, Laurence. (1977). *Death is Natural*. New York: Four Winds Press.

- This book explains life and death from an evolutionary biology perspective. It talks about the cycling of resources, natural selection, predator/prey interactions, etc. but does not attempt to discuss the human emotional side of the equation. It would be useful to a child who is perhaps more scientifically minded, as it reads like a science textbook.

Rofes, Eric E. and 'The Unit' at Fayerweather Street School. (1985). *The Kids' Book About Death and Dying: By and For Kids*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

- This is a unique book because it is written essentially from the observations and experiences of 14 young students to help other children gain a better understanding of the issues surrounding death and dying. As well as using specific narrative, it offers general information about death, grief, and human experience. One of the best aspects of this book is that it opens with a section on how to talk about death itself, and thereby acknowledges that death is often a taboo subject in Western society.

Saynor, John Kennedy. (1990). *Goodbye Buddy*. Ajax, ON: W.L. Smith and Associates, Limited.

- This book tells the story of a boy who is grieving over the death of his best friend. It is a well-written and touching, and includes activities after the story that ask the reader to reflect on their feelings, and help them to remember a loved one that has died.

Books for Youth Aged 13 – 16 Years

Wilson, Jacqueline (1996). *Double Act*. Illustrated by Nick Sharratt. *Corgi Children's* ISBN: 978-0440867593 (Also on audiocassette)

- Ruby and Garnet are 10-year-old twins. They do everything together, especially since their mum died three years ago. When their dad finds a new partner and they move house, Ruby and Garnet find it hard and get into all sorts of trouble. Eventually, they settle down and learn to live with the changes. A lively and humorous book that deals sensitively with change.

Wilson, Jacqueline (2002). *Dustbin Baby*. *Corgi Children's* ISBN: 978-0552547963 (Also on audiocassette)

- April was abandoned in a dustbin as a baby on the 1st April. Having spent all her life in a children's home and with different foster parents (one of whom committed suicide), things haven't been easy and April is struggling. Now she's fourteen and on her birthday, determined to find out more about her past, sets off to find some important people. This is an emotive book with a great storyline in usual Jacqueline Wilson style. It is open and honest.

Grollman, Earl A. (1999). *Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love*. *Sagebrush Ed Resources* ISBN: 978-0807025017

- This book was written after the author spoke to thousands of teenagers and found they often felt forgotten after someone has died. Written in short, clear sentences that are easy to read, it covers feelings, different types of death and the future. This book gives the reader many options of what can happen, how s/he may feel, giving advice and reassuring readers grief is normal.

Lloyd, Carole (1997). *The Charlie Barber Treatment*. Walker Books Ltd; New Edition ISBN: 978-0744554571

- Simon's Mum died suddenly from a brain haemorrhage and he came home from school to find she had died. With his GCSE coursework piling up and having to help around the

house, Simon finds it hard and doesn't go out much with his friends. He then meets Charlie, who is visiting her Grandma, and believes their meeting was fate. Simon starts to enjoy life again and to re-build relationships with his family and friends. A sensitive and realistic book that conveys some of the thoughts and emotions of a teenage boy.

Gibbons, Alan (2004). *The Lost Boys' Appreciation Society*. Orion Children's Books ISBN: 9781842550953

- Teenage life is difficult enough for Gary and John, but when their Mum dies in a car accident, things get steadily worse. John struggles to keep the peace as Gary goes off the rails, saying his new mates are now his family. With GCSE exams looming and his Dad going out on dates, things become unbearable for John. A gripping book exploring relationships and how different people react to life events.

Chodzin, Sherab & Koh, Alexandra. (1999). *The Man who Didn't Want to Die: From The Barefoot Book of Buddhist Tales*. Illustrated by Marie Cameron. Barefoot Books ISBN: 1841480096

- This short story is based on a Japanese folk tale and approaches death from an unusual angle. When a man decides he doesn't want to die, he is sent to the Land of Never-ending Life and expects to meet the happiest people in the world. However, the realities of living forever are not as attractive as he thought and he consequently learns an important lesson. This story is very thought provoking and could lead to some interesting discussions.

Downham, Jenny. *Before I Die*. David Fickling Books ISBN: 978-0385613460

- With only months left to live, 16-year-old Tessa makes a list of things she must experience: sex, petty crime, fame, drugs and true love. Downham's wrenching work features a girl desperate for a few thrilling moments before leukaemia takes her away. Although Tessa remains ardently committed to her list, both she and the reader find comfort in the quiet resonance of the natural world. Tessa's soul mate, Adam, gardens next door; a bird benignly rots in grass; psychedelic mushrooms provide escape; an apple tree brings comfort; and her best friend, Zoey, ripens in the final months of pregnancy.

Moon, Pat (2003). *The Spying Game*. Politico's Publishing Ltd ISBN: 978-1842750049

- Joe's dad died in a car accident and he feels really angry towards the man who killed his father. He decides to set up a secret 'Nightmare Plan' to vent his anger and begins to persecute the man and his family by scratching his car and sending hate mail. This powerful book reveals the difficult emotions Joe faces both at home and at school. A very readable and fast paced book that would appeal to many young people.

Gleitzman, Morris & illustrated by Andy Bacha (1999). *Two Weeks with the Queen*. Puffin Books ISBN: 978-0141303000

- Twelve-year-old Colin, an Australian boy, is sent to stay with relatives in England when his brother becomes ill with cancer. He is determined to find a way of curing his brother, which leads him into all sorts of adventures including trying to visit the Queen! Colin finds a friend in an older man named Ted who helps him express his feelings and understand what he has to do. (Also on audiocassette.)

Fine, Anne (2006). *Up on Cloud Nine*. Corgi Children's ISBN: 978-0552554657

- Stol falls out of a top floor window and ends up unconscious in hospital with lots of broken bones and no-one knows whether it was attempted suicide or an accident. This book is written from the perspective of his best friend Ian whilst he is sitting by his bedside. He recalls all the fun times they have had together as well as acknowledging the slightly different way Stol sees the world. Ian captures the emotions of his own adoptive parents

as well as Stol's family and the hospital staff in an amusing yet moving way illustrating how Stol has had an inspirational effect on everyone. (Also available in audiocassette)

Wilson, Jacqueline & illustrated by Nick Sharratt (2001). Vicky Angel. Corgi Children's ISBN: 978-0440865896

- When Jade's best friend Vicky, is run over by a car and dies in hospital everyone at home and school starts treating her differently. 'Vicky Angel' then starts following Jade around, distracting her and getting her into trouble. This moving but amusing story illustrates how hard it is to carry on with every day life after a tragic accident. (Also available in audiocassette)

Gray, Keith (2008). Ostrich Boys. Definitions. ISBN: 978-0099456575

- It's not really kidnapping, is it? He'd have to be alive for it to be proper kidnapping.' Kenny, Sim and Blake are about to embark on a remarkable journey of friendship. Stealing the urn containing the ashes of their best friend Ross, they set out from Cleethorpes on the east coast to travel the 261 miles to the tiny hamlet of Ross in Dumfries and Galloway. After a depressing and dispiriting funeral they feel taking Ross to Ross will be a fitting memorial for a 15 year-old boy who changed all their lives through his friendship. Little do they realise just how much Ross can still affect life for them even though he's now dead. Drawing on personal experience Keith Gray has written an extraordinary novel about friendship, loss and suicide, and about the good things that may be waiting just out of sight around the corner...

Valentine, Jenny (2008). Broken Soup. Harper Collins Children's Books ISBN: 978-0007229659

- When the good-looking boy with the American accent presses the dropped negative into Rowan's hand, she's sure it's all a big mistake. But next moment he's gone, lost in the crowd of bustling shoppers. And she can't afford to lose her place in the checkout queue -- after all, if she doesn't take the groceries home, nobody else will. Rowan has more responsibilities than most girls her age. These days, she pretty much looks after her little sister single-handedly -- which doesn't leave much time for friends or fun. So when she finds out that Bee from school saw the whole thing, it piques her curiosity. Who was the boy? Why was he so insistent that the negative belonged to Rowan?

Books for Young Adults 17 and up (and Adults)

DeVita-Raeburn, Elizabeth (2004). The Empty Room: Surviving the Loss of a Brother or Sister at Any Age. Scribner.

- In 1972, when the author was six, her nine-year-old brother, Ted, developed huge bruises all over his body. Diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a rare immune deficiency disease, Ted lived in a sterile hospital "bubble room" until his death eight years later. In this beautifully written account, DeVita, a science journalist, describes how Ted's life and death have affected her and, drawing on 77 interviews with others who have lost siblings, examines a subject that has largely been overlooked. DeVita considers survivors, rather than academicians or researchers, to be the real experts on this subject. Many gripping stories are told by brothers and sisters of all ages, including those who have endured the death of a twin. In order to protect their other children and deal with their own grief, many parents, like DeVita's own, did not often discuss the deaths and, in a sense, deprived the surviving siblings of the mourning process. In haunting and evocative narratives, many of those interviewed share how they finally found a way, years later, to acknowledge their terrible loss. DeVita recalls her relationship with the brother who loved and teased her, as well as his bravery during the years of isolation when almost no one touched him. "Meredith," who suddenly lost

her beloved teenage brother to cancer, now runs marathons in his memory, among other coping strategies. DeVita recounts the interviews she conducted with her own parents and movingly illuminates the tragic situation of her father, an oncologist, who could not save his own son, and her mother, who found the inner strength to do her best for her dying son.

Harris, Maxine (1996). *The Loss That Is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father*. Plume.

- More than 60 men and women who lost a parent at an early age contributed their stories to this investigation of an important life event by a practicing psychotherapist. Their stories, including accounts of some famous figures: C.S. Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Eleanor Roosevelt, shed light on a legacy of loss the author views as "the psychological Great Divide, separating the world into a permanent 'before and after.'" Whatever form the impact of this loss takes in later adult life, it can be rage, driving ambition, fear of intimacy, these life stories amply demonstrate the indelible character of the mark left on the child. These are also stories of recovery, of people who became more than survivors, testifying to the repair of damage from childhood trauma. This enlightening presentation opens up a seldom discussed topic.

Lewis, C.S. (1961). *A Grief Observed*. Faber and Faber Ltd.

- C.S. Lewis joined the human race when his wife, Joy Gresham, died of cancer. Lewis, the Oxford don whose Christian apologetics make it seem like he's got an answer for everything, experienced crushing doubt for the first time after his wife's tragic death. *A Grief Observed* contains his epigrammatic reflections on that period: "Your bid--for God or no God, for a good God or the Cosmic Sadist, for eternal life or nonentity--will not be serious if nothing much is staked on it. And you will never discover how serious it was until the stakes are raised horribly high," Lewis writes. "Nothing will shake a man--or at any rate a man like me--out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs. He has to be knocked silly before he comes to his senses. Only torture will bring out the truth. Only under torture does he discover it himself." It is a beautiful and unflinchingly honest record of how even a stalwart believer can lose all sense of meaning in the universe, and how he can gradually regain his bearings.

Didion, Joan (2005). *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Knopf.

- The author of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and 11 other works chronicles the year following the death of her husband, fellow writer John Gregory Dunne, from a massive heart attack on December 30, 2003, while the couple's only daughter, Quintana, lay unconscious in a nearby hospital suffering from pneumonia and septic shock. Dunne

and Didion had lived and worked side by side for nearly 40 years, and Dunne's death propelled Didion into a state she calls "magical thinking." "We might expect that we will be prostrate, inconsolable, crazy with loss," she writes. "We do not expect to be literally crazy, cool customers who believe that their husband is about to return and need his shoes." Didion's mourning follows a traditional arc—she describes just how precisely it cleaves to the medical descriptions of grief—but her elegant rendition of its stages leads to hard-won insight, particularly into the aftereffects of marriage. "Marriage is not only time: it is also, paradoxically, the denial of time. For forty years I saw myself through John's eyes. I did not age."