



## BOOKS on GRIEF, DYING and DEATH for CHILDREN

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Most books are available through the Toronto Public Library.

### Books for Children Ages 3-8

Carlstrom, Nancy White (1990). *Blow Me a Kiss, Miss Lilly*. New York: Harper and Row Publishing.

- This book tells the story of a little girl and an old woman who were next door neighbours, and best friends. They shared their lives together, and thus when the woman fell ill and died, the little girl was devastated. One of the important aspects of this kind of loss that is illustrated in this book is the simple separation from a loved one. The girl stares longingly out her window towards her neighbour's house and feels the absence strongly. However, the girl adopts the woman's cat, and after some time is able to remember her older friend fondly.

Carson, Jo (1992). *You Hold Me and I'll Hold You*. London, UK: Orchard Books.

- This is a lovely story about a little girl whose great aunt dies, and she, her sister, and her father travel to Tennessee to attend the funeral and memorial service. This book is unique because the little girl never knew her aunt that well, so the story is more about understanding death, funerals, and the grief of others than dealing with her own. It is well-written, and realistically outlines what a young child's thought process might be when told of the death of a distant relative (e.g. the child thinks about the death of her pet, and what happened under those circumstances, and she also considers 'loss' in general while thinking of her parent's divorce). Great illustrations.

Wilhelm, Hans (1985). *I'll Always Love You*. New York: Crown Publisher's Inc.

- This is a story about a boy and his dog, and their relationship from beginning to end, when the dog dies. It is a nice story, and deals with the sadness of losing a loved one, accompanied by the eventual reality of coping with a life without them.

### Books for Children Ages 4-9

Brown, Laurie Kransy and Marc Tolon Brown (1996). *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*.

New York: Little, Brown and Company.

- This is an excellent picture book for children that uses human-like dinosaur characters to explain death, dying, and bereavement. It answers many common questions that children may have concerning death and dying, and suggests activities that children can take part in to remember someone. This book also discusses the more difficult subjects of suicide, war, prejudice, and poverty as ways in which some people die, and explains death rituals from several different cultures. It is a thoughtful and open-minded endeavor.

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Buscaglia, Leo (1982). *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages*. Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

- This is a beautiful story that will help young children gain a better understanding of the meanings of life and death, and the cycles that take place among all living things. It is often metaphorical, and leaves the reader free to explore the journey of life through the eyes of a leaf. Importantly, this book portrays death as a natural process which may be sad, but is not to be feared.

Mellonie, Brian and Robert Ingpen (1983). *Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children*. New York: Bantam Books.

- This is a book that illustrates how the living and dying of people is a natural process, like that of all living things. The book discusses the life cycles of various plants and animals as well as humans, in simple and direct language. However, it does not discuss grief and bereavement, or use personal narratives.

Mills, Joyce C. (2003). *Gentle Willow: A Story for Children About Dying*. Gareth Stevens Pub.

- This is a story for children who are facing death: their own, or that of a loved one. The book follows Amanda, who calls upon the Tree Wizards of the Forest to help Gentle Willow, who is suffering from a mysterious ailment, but the Tree Wizards are unable to help. Amanda struggles with loss, confusion, anger, and finally, hope, as she helps Gentle Willow understand and accept her death.

Hanson, Warren (2003). *The Next Place*. Waldman House Press.

- This is a poetic and inspirational exploration of where people go when they leave 'this place.' Although it does not name death specifically, it presents a beautiful and hopeful view of where people go when they die without prescribing any one spiritual view other than the imagination that the next place is wonderful and liberating.

## Books for Children Ages 8 - 11

Goldman, Linda (2006). *Children Also Grieve*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- This combination narrative and interactive memory workbook is an imaginative resource that offers support and reassurance to children coming to terms with the death of a close friend or relative. The story tells of the experiences of Henry, the dog of a family whose grandfather has died.

Coerr, Eleanor (1977). *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

- This is a beautiful and heart-wrenching tale based on the true story of a young Japanese girl called Sadako, who died as a 12-year-old of leukemia after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. It details the grief of Sadako and her family as they come to realize that she is dying, and their struggle to maintain hope against all odds. This book also touches on the difficult issue that families and caregivers face when trying to decide how much a child should know, and whether to talk about their inevitable death openly, or continue to pretend there is hope for survival. Finally, this book represents the tragedy that war does not always bring a quick and

sudden death for those engaged in battle, but can hurt those seemingly untouched. The call for peace is restated at the end of this book.

Greene, Constance C. (1976). *Beat the Turtle Drum*. New York: Viking Press.

- This is a touching, thoughtful story about the relationship between two young sisters, and the tragedy that befalls their family when the younger one dies in an accident. Although it does not deal with terminal illness, death and grief are handled in a realistic, sensitive manner. This book touches on the feelings of anger and confusion that are aroused in many when a young person dies, but the narrative also discusses the various coping strategies attempted by the young girl's family and friends.