

One way an adult can encourage children to discuss and openly express their feelings about death is through children’s stories. Joan Fassler, a psychologist at Yale University’s Child Study Center, has found the following children’s books helpful in such discussions.

The Dead Bird

By Margaret Wise Brown
 Addison-Wesley, \$4.50

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney

By Judith Viorst
 Atheneum, \$6.95; paper, \$1.25

Growing Time

By Sandol Warburg
 Houghton Mifflin, \$5.95; paper, \$1.50

Each of this group describes the death of pets or the reactions of young children to the discovery of a dead animal. In *The Dead Bird*, a group of children find a dead bird and decide to bury him. During their funeral rites, they cry quietly. For a time, they put fresh flowers on the grave every day. At the end of the book, the children are busy at play once again, suggesting that they are now ready to move on to other things.

In *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*, a little boy grieves over the death of his cat, Barney. His mother suggests that he think of 10 good things about Barney to tell his friends at the funeral ceremony. The boy can recall only nine. Later, after helping his father plant some seeds, he thinks of a 10th: “Barney is in the ground and he is helping to grow flowers.” There is an open expression of feeling in this story, understanding parents, and an affirmation of the ongoing nature of life.

In *Growing Time*, a small boy named Jamie mourns the death of his well-loved collie, King. The book makes psychologically sound points, for example: Jamie in no way caused the dog’s death; death is not a retribution for any wrongdoing—it simply happens.

My Grandpa Died Today

By Joan Fassler
 Behavioral Publications, \$5.95

Annie and the Old One

By Miska Miles
 Little, Brown & Co., \$5.95

Scat

By Arnold Dobrin
 Scholastic Books Services, \$4.95; paper, 95 cents

This group of stories deals with the death, or imminent death, of a loved one. In *My Grandpa Died Today*, the grandparent senses that he will soon die. He meets this realization with acceptance and dignity, thus helping his grandson understand more about the cycle of life and death.

Emotions surrounding the death of an elderly person are also explored in *Annie and the Old One*. Annie, a young Navajo girl, attempts to prevent the weaving of a rug, since her grandmother has announced that she expects to die by the time the rug is finished. When the grandmother discovers Annie’s desperate efforts, she explains that one cannot stop time or change what must be.

Scat makes the point that each person should be allowed to deal with death individually. Scat, a boy who loves jazz, acknowledges his grandmother’s death in his own way by playing this harmonica near her grave after the funeral.

A Father Like That

By Charlotte Zolotow
 Harper & Row, \$4.95

Sam, Bangs & Moonshine

By Evaline Ness
 Holt, Rinehart and Winston, \$5.95

These two books involve the loss of a parent sometime in the past. In *A Father Like That*, a young boy whose father “went away before he was born” is realistically reminded by his mother that the father he carries in his thoughts is a fantasy figure, but a figure whose admirable qualities he may himself possess some day. In *Sam, Bangs & Moonshine*, a little girl whose mother died some time before has trouble coming to terms with the reality of the death. Her father helps her understand the difference between what is real and what is “moonshine” (in word for fantasy).

Joan Fassler recommends that adults use books like these in a warm, leisurely manner when dealing with children. She does not suggest their use as formal “lessons in death,” but rather as a way of sharing thoughts on the topic.

--Sherida Bush

The use of juvenile books to help children deal with death and other stress-producing situations will be further discussed in Joan Fassler’s book *Helping Children Cope*, due later this year from Macmillan Publishing Company.

Suggested Books for Children and Adolescents by Age Group

Compiled by Edie Stark
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Preschoolers – Ages 3-6

Anderson, Phoebe. Mr. Red Ears. Boston: United Church Press, 1979

Bartoli, Jennifer. Nonna. Harvey Press, 1975

Bernstein, Joanne and Gullo, Stephen. When People Die. New York: Dutton, 1976

Brown, Margaret Wise. The Dead Bird. Illustrated by Remy Charlip. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1965

Carrick, Carol. The Accident. New York: Seabury Press, 1976

_____. The Foundling. New York: Seabury Press 1977

Grollman, Earl A. Talking About Death – A Dialogue Between Parent and Child. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970

Hughes, Phyllis Rash. Dying Is Different. Illinois: Mech Mentor Educational Publishers, 1978

Lichtman, Wendy. Bleu And The Death Of The Mag. Berkely: Freestone Publishing Company, 1975

Stein, Sara Bonnett. About Dying: An Open Family Book For Parents And Children Together. New York: Walker and Company, 1974

Viorst, Judith. The Tenth Good Thing About Barney. New York: Antheneum, 1973

Zolotow, Charlotte. My Grandson Lew. New York: Harper & Row, 1974

Children Ages 6-9

Blue, Rose. Grandma Didn't Wave Back. New York: Dell, 1976

Buck, Pearl. The Beech Tree. John Day Company, 1958

_____. The Big Wave. New York: Scholastic Book Service, 1948

De Paola, Tomie. Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs. New Jersey: Rae Publishing Company, 1978

Children Ages 6-9 (Continued)

Fassler, Joan. My Grandpa Died Today. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1971

Kuskin, Karla. The Bear Who Saw The Spring. New York: Harper & Row, 1961

Lee, Virginia. The Magic Moth. New York: Seabury, 1972

Pre-teens – Ages 9-12

Cleaver, Vera and Bill. Grover. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969

Cohen, Barbara. Thank You, Jackie Robinson. Lothrop Press, 1974

Moody, Anne. Mr. Death: Four Stories. New York: Harper & Row, 1975

Pringle, Laurence. Death Is Natural. New York: Four Winds Press, 1977

Smith, Doris B. A Taste of Blackberries. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1976

White, E.B. Charlotte's Web. New York: Harper & Row, 1982

Junior High School Level – Ages 12-14

Armstrong, William H. Sounder. New York: Harper & Row, 1972

Erdman, Lola G. A Bluebird Will Do. Dodd, 1973

Frank Anne. The Diary Of A Young Girl. New York: Doubleday, 1952

Lund, Doris. Eric. New York: Dell, 1974

Marxhausen, Joanne. If I Should Die – If I Should Live. Concordia, 1975

High School Level – Ages 14-17

Armothy, Christie. I am fifteen And I Don't Want To Die. New York: School Book Service, 1974

Buck, Pearl S. The Good Earth. New York: John Day Company, 1981

Crane, Stephen. Red Badge Of courage. New York: Random House, 1951

Craven, Margaret. I Heard The Owl Call My Name. New York: Doubleday, 1973

High School Level – Ages 4-17 (Continued)

Dooley, Thomas A. Doctor Tom Dooley, My Story. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1960

Johnson, Margaret. Eighteen – No Time To Waste. Zondervan Press, 1971

Klein, Stanley. The Final Mystery. New York: Doubleday, 1974

Rhodin, Eric. The Good Greenwood. Westminster Press, 1971

Rosenthal, Ted. How Could I Not Be Among You? New York: Avon Books, 1973

Service, Robert. The Shooting Of Dan McGrew And The Cremation Of Sam McGee. Young Scott Books, 1969

Stolz, Mary. The Edge Of Next Year. New York: Harper & Row, 1974

Suggested Books for Adults and Parents

Bernstein, Joanne E. Books To Help Children Cope With Separation And Loss. New York: R. r. Bowker, 1977

Davidson, Glen W. Death: What do You Say To A Child? Springfield, Illinois: Order of The Golden Rule, 1979

Gordon, Audrey and Klass, Dennis. They Need To Know: How to Teach Children About Death. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979

Grollman, Earl. Explaining Death to Children. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970

_____. Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent And Child. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970

Jackson, Edgar. Telling A Child About Death. New York: Channel Press, 1968

LeShan, Eda. Learning To Say Goodbye: When A Parent Dies. New York: MacMillan, 1976

Stillman, Peter. Answers To A Child's Questions About Death. Stamford, New York: Guideline Publications, 1979

Vogel, Linda J. Helping A Child Understand Death. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975

Suggested Books for Educators and Counselors

Anthony, Sylvia. The Discovery Of Death In Childhood And After. New York: Basic Books, 1972

Bluebond-Langner J. The Private Worlds Of Dying Children. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978

Erickson, Eric. Childhood And Society. 2nd Edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1963

Kastenbaum, Robert. "Death And Development Through The Lifespan", in H. Feifel, New Meanings Of Death. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977

_____. "Intimations Of Mortality: In Children's Hour", Death, Society And Human Experience. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Company, 1977, pp 114-134

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. Questions And Answers On Death And Dying. New York: Collier Books, 1974

Mauer, Ada. "The Child's Knowledge Of Non-Existence". Journal Of Existential Psychiatry, 1961, Vol. 2, pp. 193-212

Nagy, Maria. "The Child's View Of Death", in H. Feifel: The Meaning Of Death. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959, pp. 79-98

Rudolph, Marguerita. Should The Children Know? New York: Schocken Books, 1978

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