

Recommended books about death and grief for children and adolescents

For Pre-school and early elementary school children

Everett Anderson's Goodbye by Lucille Clifton

An African-American boy copes with the death of his father. I found this story to be contrived and complicated. The language was far more sophisticated than one would expect from children ages 10-11. The story's only saving grace was the message that we need the help of others in dealing with loss.

Goodbye, Mousie by Robie H. Harris (2004)

This story about the death of a pet effectively conveys the permanence of death and illustrates how burial provides closure.

The Happy Funeral by E. Bunting

An exceptionally interesting story about a little girl who participates in the rituals of her grandfather's funeral.

I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas (2001)

This story gently touches on the theme of the permanence of death and will help a child understand a person who has died will not return. The book's message is grief gets easier to manage over time.

Jasper's Day by Marjorie Blain Parker

A beautiful book about a terminally ill dog who has been part of a loving family. As the dog's pain worsens, the family makes a difficult decision

Last Week My Brother Anthony Died by M.W. Hickman (1984)

A poignant, ultimately upbeat story told through the eyes of a girl whose infant brother died of congenital heart disease. The family minister provides support for the grieving family.

Lifetimes by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (1983)

This simply written and informative book about life cycles is ideal for parents and children to read and discuss together. It describes lifetimes for different living things as well as lifetimes that are shortened due to unusual circumstances.

The Purple Balloon by Chris Raschka (2007)

This story deals with the deaths of both a young friend and a grandparent and shows how a support system helps the characters handle their feelings of loss.

A Quilt for Elizabeth by B. Tiffault (1992)

After a girl's father gets sick and dies, the girl and her grandmother decide to make a quilt from her father's garments. This highly recommended book creatively deals with loss and mourning.

Samantha Jane's Missing Smile: Coping with the Loss of a Parent by Julie Kaplow, Donna Pincus, and Beth Spiege (2007)

After her father dies, Sammy Jane doesn't know how to express her grief. With the help of a neighbor, she learns to express her feelings and accept her loss. Suitable for children up to age twelve.

For Elementary School Children

The Accident by C. Carrick (1976)

In this story, a little boy's dog is run over by a truck. The boy reacts with anger at the truck driver, his parents and himself. While limited in scope and time frame (only one day), the book accurately portrays the child's emotions and shows adults as being helpful to him.

Dusty Was My Friend by A. F. Claudy (1984)

This is a beautiful, well-told story of an eight-year-old boy whose ten-year-old friend dies in a car accident. This is an excellent book for anyone who has lost a close friend.

Emily's Sadhappy Season by S. Lowden-Golightly (1993)

This is an excellent story about a little girl's reaction to the sudden death of her father from a heart attack. The story is realistic and portrays honest and sincere emotional responses to loss. At the end of the book, there are some helpful tips for children grieving the death of a parent. Highly recommended for children ages six to ten.

Grandpa Abe by Marisabina Russo (1996)

The story follows the course of events in a relationship between a grandfather and grandchild. When the grandfather dies, a funeral is held where family members comfort one another.

Mustard by C. Graeber (1982)

This excellent story about the aging and death of a cat is highly recommended for its realism and sensitivity.

Poppy's Chair by K. Hesse (1993)

A story about a little girl trying to come to grips with the death of her grandfather. She is afraid to touch the grandfather's picture, sleep in his bed, or sit in his chair. This book handles the subject of fear, an important element of mourning, in a thoughtful manner.

Saying Goodbye to Grandma by J.R. Thomas (1988)

A charming and realistic story about a seven-year-old girl who attends her grandmother's funeral. One of the main strengths of this book is its portrayal of children behaving like children in spite of the solemnity of the occasion.

A Taste of Blackberries by D. B. Smith (2004)

The story of a little boy whose best friend dies and his struggles to come to terms with the loss. The story covers the events leading up to the death, the loss and the funeral. With the help of adults, there is some resolution of the loss.

For Late-elementary and middle-school children

Bridge to Terabithia by K. Paterson (1979)

A well-told novel about a boy and girl who become friends and build a tree house together. While the girl is visiting the tree house on her own, she falls in a creek and dies. The boy's reaction to her death is accurately portrayed but too brief.

Her Mother's Face by Roddy Doyle (2008)

A little girl whose mother died remembers many things about her mother, except her face. She meets a mysterious woman who tells her a secret that could help bring back forgotten memories.

Lanky Longlegs by K. Lorenzen (1983)

This prize-winning book is about a girl who experiences the death of her brother and the birth of her dog's puppies. Appropriate for children who experience any kind of loss. Translated from Norwegian.

Sun & Spoon by Kevin Henkes (1997)

This thoughtful, well-written book describes how a ten-year-old boy deals with the death of his grandmother in a constructive way.

You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye by P. Hermes (1982)

A touching story of a young girl's struggle to deal with her mother's imminent death.

For Middle-school children

Beat the Turtle Drum by C. Greene (1976)

A beautiful story about the love and friendship between two sisters. When the younger one dies after falling out of a tree, the older one (thirteen years old) describes her feelings in a very honest and realistic manner. An excellent book for children who have lost a sibling.

Tiger Eyes by Judy Blume (1987)

This excellent book is about a fourteen-year-old girl whose father is shot in a store robbery. The story describes the attempt by her, the mother, and the younger brother to cope with the loss in the course of a year. (Also appropriate for high school students.)

Puggy Brown Ears' Purr Song by Linda Fausey (2005)

This is a beautifully illustrated book about a cat's loss of his best cat friend. The message is paradoxical: the loved one is a part of you and you can keep the memory of the loved one inside you, but you also have to let it go in order to move through the grieving process. A good resource for children ages 8 to early adolescence who likes cats.

For High school children

After Suicide: Living with the Questions by Eileen Kuehn (2001)

This book provides a definition of suicide and describes its effects on survivors and the stages of grieving. It suggests ways teens can cope with suicide and heal.

Just One Tear by K.L. Mahon (1994)

A novel in the form of the diary of a 13-year-old boy who witnesses the shooting death of his father. The book explores the boy's wide range of emotions.

A Matter of Time by R. Schotter (1979)

A very moving, beautifully written book about a high school girl coping with her mother's illness and anticipated death.

A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort by Rachmiel Tobesman (2008)

This nonfiction guide for children explains Jewish mourning rituals and customs. It also helps children understand their feelings about loss, discusses how to manage their feelings and suggests whom to lean on for support.

What Do I Do: When Teenagers Deal with Death by Steven Gerall (2009)

This book offers a Christian perspective on the death of a teen or other loved one. It describes different causes of death (sudden, due to terminal illness) and provides suggestions on coping with death. Includes bible verses.