



Parents Guide

Reading books with children is a good way to introduce different ideas about death, dying and the afterlife. This section contains suggestions on how to use books with your children. You can also check-out our list of additional books, movies, and websites for further ideas on creating a comfortable setting in which to initiate conversations with your entire family.

***Poppy's Chair* by Karen Hesse** (Scholastic Trade, 2000)

This book explains a child's fear and hesitation after someone dies. In the story, the girl faces her first visit to her grandparent's home after her grandfather has died. The child's fears and the grandmother's conversation about death can be used to initiate discussions with your child. As you share this book, you may want to stop at different points in the story, and discuss them with your child.

- Ask your child why she thinks Leah is afraid to look at Poppy's picture.
- Discuss some of the changes that Leah notices since her last visit.
- Talk about the significance of the charm bracelet to Leah, and how she shared choosing the charms with her grandfather.
- Ask your child how she thinks Poppy's song makes Leah feel.
- Ask your child why she thinks Leah avoids Poppy's chair.
- Discuss what Leah's fears are when she wakes up in the night and can't find her Gram.
- Discuss how Gram explains her feelings to Leah, and how these feelings are common ones.
- Talk about Gram's words, "But sooner or later you'll let those awful feelings go. Then you'll have room for the good feelings to come back again."

Make a charm bracelet with your child. You can use the following suggested shapes to make charms of your own: circle, heart, teddybear, triangle, flower, and diamond. Choose a pet or a person who has died, and on each charm write a special memory of them. String the charms together using a pipe cleaner or a piece of yarn.

***Saying Goodbye to Daddy* by Judith Vigna** (Albert Whitman & Co., 1991)

This is a well-written, child-friendly book that describes a young girl's experiences when her father is hit by a car and dies. It focuses on the different emotions a child may confront when facing the loss of a parent.

As you share this book, you may want to stop at different points in the story, and discuss them with your child.

- Ask your child what she thinks about the way the mother describes what happened to the father.

- Point out how the mother explains that it wasn't the child's fault that the father was in a car accident.
- Ask the child to find the words that show the girl's anger about her loss, and her anger towards her mother.
- Discuss the reasons why the girl was feeling fearful, and her need for reassurance.
- Focus on how the mother gave the child the choice of whether to attend the church funeral and cemetery burial of her father.
- Discuss how the mother told her where her father went.
- Ask your child to describe how the grandfather talked about the girl's memories of her father. Find some examples of how they did this.

This book can teach both you and your child some effective ways to deal with death and dying. The following examples may be helpful:

- Use clear language to explain what happens.
- Reassure the child that his actions or feelings did not cause the death.
- Allow the child to express emotions, and describe all the different kinds of feelings they might experience.
- Reassure the child when he is fearful.
- Give the child choices about attending funerals.
- Discuss your beliefs about the afterlife.
- Think of ways to preserve the memory of loved ones with your child.

Journal Writing

Writing in journals can provide an avenue for both children and adults to express their feelings. Young children may draw in their journal and then explain their picture. Adults may even write what the child is expressing about the picture on the journal page.

A Final Thought

"Death catches us unprepared, overwhelmed by not knowing what to do or say. We may hold our breath until it passes, only to be consumed later with regrets and suffering that we pass on down through generations."

-from *The Wisdom of Dying: Practices for Living*, authors: N. Michael Murphy and Thomas Moore (Element, 1999)

The Authors

KQED Education Network (KQED EdNet) inspires learning through innovative understanding, use and creation of media that respects diverse perspectives. KQED EdNet is committed to the exchange of ideas and resources in partnership with the community. To this end, it provides an instructional television service, curriculum materials, projects for youth and professional development for teachers, child care providers and families; organizes public forums; and sponsors local events.

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