

Talking About Death with Children

with children



Helpful quotes from an out-of-print booklet, "Talking With Young Children About Death" by Hedda Bluestone Sharapan, M.S., the assistant producer of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood:

"We need to remember that when there are unanswered questions (or even unspoken ones), children will find their own fantasy explanations. Often these fantasies are scarier than reality..."

"...one of the best kinds of "protection" we can give children is to provide them with simple and straightforward answers to their questions and ample opportunities to let us know what questions they have. It is precisely because young children don't understand what death is all about that they especially need us to talk about it with them."

"Children tend to take what we say literally. ...here's one example of children's literalism I came across recently that taught me the importance of trying to find out whether a child has correctly understood what we've said. In this instance a family was trying to prepare their young son for a visit to a funeral home where the boy's grandfather was awaiting burial. They explained that Grandpa's body would be lying in an open coffin. The boy was very anxious -- until he saw his grandfather in one piece. He had expected his head to be missing and only his body to be there..."

"Sometimes we can be more helpful by answering a child's questions with 'No one knows for sure, but I believe...' For some people, saying, 'You know, I wonder about that, too' is a special kind of honesty and a kind that their children can understand..."

"...there will be times, too, when we need to grieve alone in our own unique ways. For a child it may be withdrawing or misbehaving or shouting. Nor should we be surprised to find children running out to play as usual. Most children find it hard to tolerate prolonged exposure to grieving, and that's an important reason for letting them know that sadness isn't forever and that little by little the sadness will go away..."

Other good resources on helping families deal with death, as well as other key topics for parents, are available through

[The Fred Rogers Company](#)

Other Helpful Websites for Parents

Good Grief, Inc. (Helping Children Cope with Loss)
<http://www.good-grief.org>

Helping Your Child Deal with Death (from Kids Health)

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/death.html#>

Centering Corporation and Grief Digest Magazine

<http://www.centering.org>

Resources for Bereaved Families

<http://www.griefwatch.com>

Books to Look for at the Library

- *Badger's Parting Gifts*, by Susan Varley. Badger's friends are sad when he dies, but they treasure the legacies he left them.
- *Everett Anderson's Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton. This short book describes Everett Anderson moving through the five stages of grief after his father's death.
- *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages* by Leo Buscaglia. A story that compares the lifespan of a leaf through the seasons to the journey of the human life cycle from one life to the next.
- *Good Grief: Helping Groups of Children When a Friend Dies* by Sandra Sutherland Fox. A highly-recommended classic.
- *Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When A Special Person Dies*, by Janis Silverman. An art therapy and activity book for

children coping with the death of someone they love. Sensitive exercises address all the questions children may have during this emotional and troubling time.

- *I Remember Miss Perry* by Pat Brisson. A story about grieving over the death of a teacher.
- *Lifetimes: The beautiful way to explain death to children* by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen. Explains to children how everything has a beginning and an end and that life happens in between. Done very simply, making it easier for young children to understand.
- *The 10th Good Thing About Barney*, by Judith Viorst. “My cat Barney died this Friday. I was very sad. My mother said we could have a funeral for him, and I should think of ten things about Barney so I could tell them....” But the small boy who loved Barney can only think of nine. Later, while talking with his father, he discovers the tenth and begins to understand.
- *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing With Loss* by Michaelene Mundy. Loaded with positive, life-affirming advice for coping with loss as a child, this guide tells children what they need to know after a loss – that the world is still safe; life is good; hurting hearts do mend.
- *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing after Loss* by Pat Schwiebert, a nurse working in the area of bereavement for over 30 years. It is a picture book but geared more to older children and adults than to young kids.
- *Waterbugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Children* by Doris Stickney. A story for children which compares the mystery of death with the metamorphosis of the waterbug to a dragonfly, with helpful suggestions for parents from the author.

