



henshaws

beyond expectations

September 2020



● dealing with bereavement

Approaching the sensitive subject of bereavement with children is never easy. With the recent and ongoing world pandemic, children may be exposed to more news, conversations and information regarding bereavement than ever before. While it can be tempting to ignore the difficult conversations, having open and honest dialogue with children, at age appropriate levels, will help them to cope with feelings and emotions that they have never experienced before.

• **Speak honestly and use appropriate language**

While phrases like ‘passed away’, ‘went to sleep’ or we ‘lost’ someone may feel kinder, this abstract language can be extremely confusing particularly for young children, who may ask questions such as, ‘Where did you lose them?’ or ‘Where did they pass to?’ or become frightened of going to sleep themselves. Although the word death can be upsetting, it is important to use the correct terminology and explain what it means when someone has died. Use clear, simple words in a caring way.

• **Reactions will differ**

When breaking the news to a child, bear in mind that they might not have an initial reaction and may need time to process the news. Particularly for younger children, they may not understand that death is permanent and may continue as though nothing has happened, however, this may not continue and you may notice behaviour changes, such as crying and outbursts, later down the line.

As children struggle to understand and identify emotions, they will often show their feelings via behaviours, rather than words. Some children may ask lots of questions. It is important to answer the questions honestly and offer reassurance, hugs or time to process. Try to be led by what your child needs and how they respond but try not to overwhelm them with too much information at once. Keep dialogue open and allow them to ask questions about their loved one as they have time to process the information.



- **express your own emotions to help them express theirs**

Hiding your grief to protect your child may feel like the right thing to do, however, this could unintentionally create more distance and confusion. Children cope much better with knowing what is happening and how you are feeling, rather than guessing and making up their own conclusions. You will, understandably, require some time alone to express any raw grief, without having to consider your child, so asking a friend or family member to support you and give you some time alone would benefit everyone. This will make you emotionally stronger when children are around.

- **share happy memories of your loved one**

Addressing the sad emotions is important, but do not dwell on these feelings. It is also important to remember the happiness and good feelings that the person brought to your child's life. Even though loss is out of our control, making sure positive memories of family and friends are not forgotten is within our control.



Help your child understand that they will not always feel sad when they think about that person and activate positive feelings by trying some of these fun ideas using all the senses:

- Spraying perfume, aftershave or a scent that reminds your child of their loved one.
- Let them keep an item of their loved one's clothing. You could even get a memory bear or a pillow out of some of their clothes so they can be treasured forever.
- Plant a tree together in the garden to remind them of their loved one and provide a place for them to visit and feel close to them. You could even turn it into a memory garden by painting rocks etc and placing them around the tree. If you do not have a garden, try planting forget me nots in a plant pot in the house.
- Create a memory jar using chalk and salt. Each colour represents a happy memory that your child has of their loved one. For more information about making a memory jar, visit: <https://www.rainbowtrust.org.uk/for-children/memory-jar>
- Blow bubbles and fill the sky with happy memories. Each bubble represents a happy memory of a loved one.
- For older children, ask them to make a video of all the things that they would like to say to their loved one.
- Make a sculptured memory out of play dough, salt dough or clay. to make a sculpture that reminds him/her of something special that he/she used to enjoy doing with the person who died. If they had cookies at grandad's make a cookie. If they played football together, make a football.
- Create a playlist of your loved one's favourite music.
- Write a poem, like an acrostic, about your loved one, for example,

Giving

Reliable

Admirable

Nice

Devoted

Able

Dapper



- **prepare your child for the future without your loved one**

If a child has loved someone close to them, and this will change their routine or daily life, it is important to prepare them for how their life and routines will change; for example, if grandma used to pick them up from school, say things like, “Grandad will now pick you up from school.” As mentioned earlier, it is the unknown that your child is likely to find more difficult. Remind them of things that will stay the same; creating and keeping routine and structure will help them to feel more secure.

- **they may regress and/or become clingy**

A normal sign of bereavement in children is to regress in certain areas. This means that they may begin doing things that they had grown out of, such as sucking their thumb or wanting to always be by your side. This behaviour is a healthy way to meet their emotional needs and is a coping mechanism which takes them back to a time when they felt safe. Reassure them with plenty of cuddles, nurturing and listening to them.



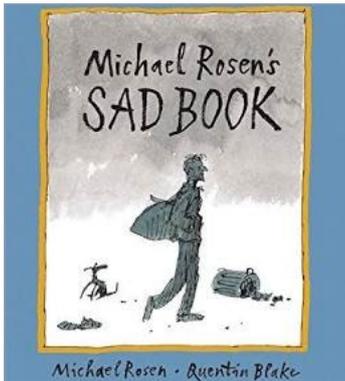
• be prepared for lots of questions

A child who is grieving may ask lots of questions about what happened. This shows that they are processing and making sense of their world. They may even repeatedly ask the same questions. It is important to answer questions honestly and address any fears that they have. A common concern is that other people, or themselves, are going to die. Be factual and explain that everyone dies, but usually when they are old. If someone has died from cancer, for example, they may want to know if they can catch it and die. Provide basic, age appropriate responses to their questions and, if you do not have the answers, it is OK to say that you do not know and ask for support from others. Try the Yes/No/Maybe sheet to start an open dialogue and answer some of their questions.

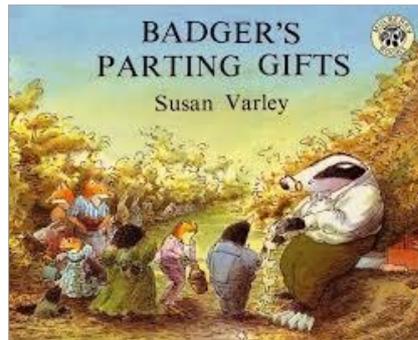
Remember, you know your child best. You will be aware of what they understand and if any changes have occurred in their behaviour. Keep communication open and honest and ask for additional support if you feel that yourself or your child needs it. There is no 'quick fix' to dealing with bereavement, so allow yourself, and your child, the time that is required to grieve.



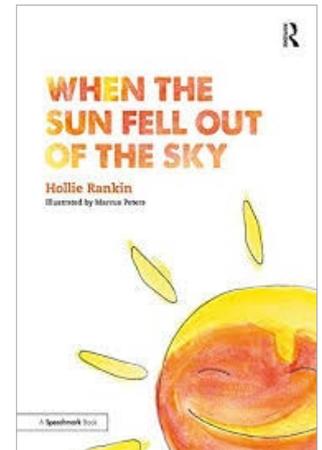
• children's books about grief and bereavement



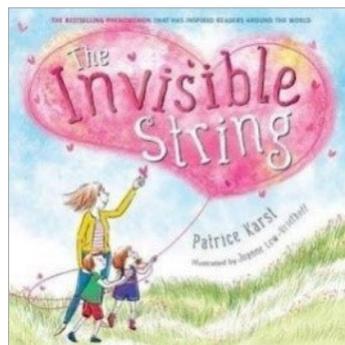
Sad



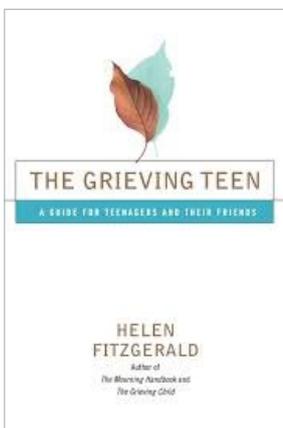
Badger's Parting Gifts



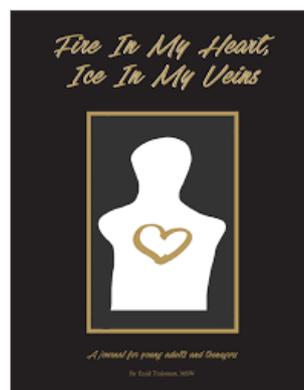
When the Sun Fell Out of the Sky



Invisible String



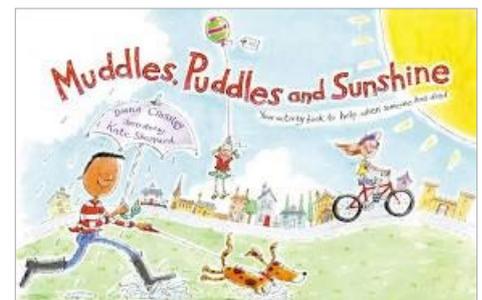
The grieving teen



Fire in My Heart,
Ice in My Veins



The Memory Tree



Muddles, Puddles & Sunshine



● useful links

[https://www.childbereavementuk.org/
supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people](https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people)

[https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/
for-parents/
how-to-help-a-child-or-young-person](https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents/how-to-help-a-child-or-young-person)

[https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/
supporting-a-bereaved-child/](https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supporting-a-bereaved-child/)

[https://www.sueryder.org/how-we-can-help/
someone-close-to-me-
has-died/advice-and-support/
how-do-i-support-a-bereaved-child](https://www.sueryder.org/how-we-can-help/someone-close-to-me-has-died/advice-and-support/how-do-i-support-a-bereaved-child)

[http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/
help-around-a-death/find-help-near-you.aspx](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/find-help-near-you.aspx)

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