Rowan's Meerkat Service

The small book of BIG conversations

Guidance for families supporting children through serious illness and bereavement

THE Rowans HOSPICE

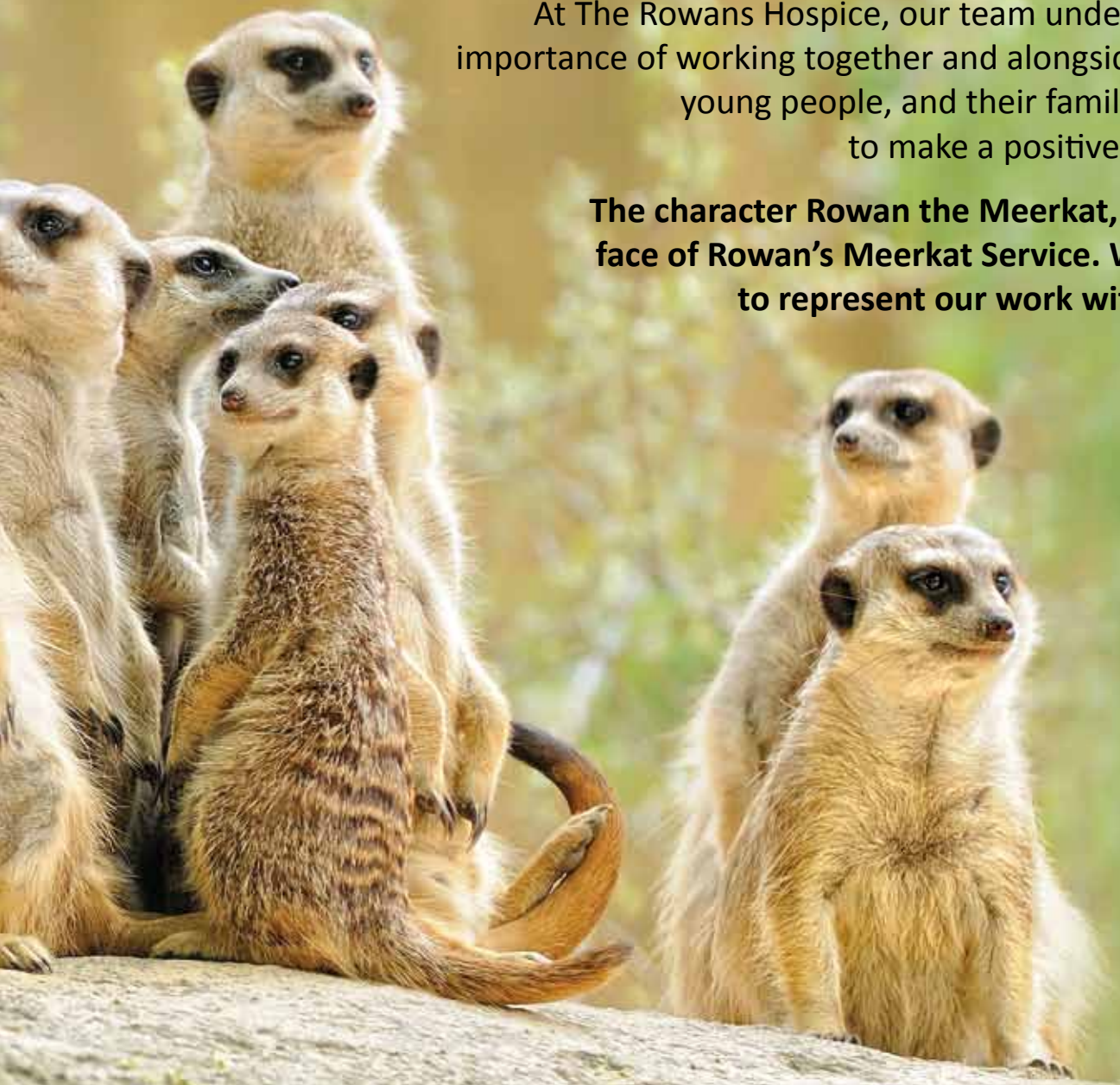
Why meerkats?

Rowan's Meerkat Service is part of The Rowans Hospice. Our service supports children and young people up to the age of 18 who have either been bereaved of a significant person (such as a parent or grandparent), or have someone close to them with a life-limiting illness.

When we are facing loss, we all need support from family, friends and the community around us. Meerkats are renowned for the support they provide in their family groups and for being protective towards the rest of their community, particularly of their young.

At The Rowans Hospice, our team understands the importance of working together and alongside children, young people, and their families, striving to make a positive difference.

The character Rowan the Meerkat, acts as the face of Rowan's Meerkat Service. We use him to represent our work with families.



Rowan's Meerkat Service
The Rowans Hospice
Purbrook Heath Road, Waterlooville
Hampshire
PO7 5RU
(023) 9225 0001
www.rowanshospice.co.uk
meerkats@rowanshospice.co.uk

Dear parent or guardian,

Supporting children through illness and loss is not easy, particularly when you may also be struggling. The balance of wanting to protect children and knowing the 'right' thing to say, can feel impossible at times.

The information in this pack offers guidance for people caring for children. The first few pages focus on supporting a child who has someone close to them with a life-limiting illness and pages 7-18 explore the needs of children who have been bereaved. 'What about me?' on pages 19 and 20 are for your child to read. Although this information has been included in one book, please choose the sections that feel relevant to you and your family. Read through the book at your own pace; some people may find it overwhelming to try and absorb all the information at once.

Towards the end of the book, we have included some useful websites for both children and adults and suggested book titles, which can help facilitate conversations between you and your child or may simply bring some comfort and reassurance.

It may be hard to talk to others about what is happening for you and your family but if you can, try to maintain communication with your child's school so they are able to have some understanding of the pressures your child may be under and how best to support them.

All children are different and their responses will vary depending on their age and experiences. However, with support from family and friends, most children will manage to cope with their loss.

Finally, please be kind to yourself as well. You can only meet your child's needs if there is support for you too. Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect, 'superhuman' parent!

If you do have any questions or concerns regarding your child, then please contact Rowan's Meerkat Service on (023) 9225 0001 and we will be more than happy to help.

Best wishes,

Sophie de Bere

Rowan's Meerkat Service Co-ordinator

Contents

Tough conversations

Telling a child that you or someone you love has a life-limiting illness can feel huge. Finding the 'right time' and the 'right words', whilst worrying how your child might respond and managing your own emotions is probably a very frightening prospect.

Children quickly sense when there is something wrong with people they are close to. However, children may not ask questions unless the subject has already been approached by their parent or guardian. This may be due to a child's young age and their limited vocabulary or to simply not knowing what to ask and worrying that asking questions may distress family members.

Children have the capacity to manage the truth if it is shared by adults they trust; often it is the 'not-knowing' that is most worrying. Letting your child know that it is okay to talk about the changes that are happening in your family is likely to encourage more open conversations.

There probably won't ever feel like the 'right time' to tell your child that someone has a life-limiting illness. It is advisable to avoid bedtime but aside from this, you may just need to make time for the conversation.

Even with very young children, naming the illness rather than just saying 'Daddy has got a poorly head' can help children to make sense of the situation, e.g. 'Daddy is very poorly, he has a brain tumour.' Without this information children may worry that if in future, they or someone close to them also has a poorly head that this means they have the same illness.

You may not have all the answers to your child's questions but be honest and if you need to, simply say 'I don't know' but perhaps follow this with 'I don't know the answer to that question but how about I/we chat to Dr. Baker to find out more?' or 'that's a really interesting question, I'm just going to take a bit of time to think about it and then I'll come to back to you.'

Try to avoid making promises you can't keep. Offering updates regarding medical appointments, treatment and changes in the person's physical appearance will help your child to feel included and reassured. Some children will not want to know all this information; they will lead you in what is and is not helpful for them.

Children may feel responsible when things go wrong. It is important they are given reassurance that they are not to blame for causing a person's illness.

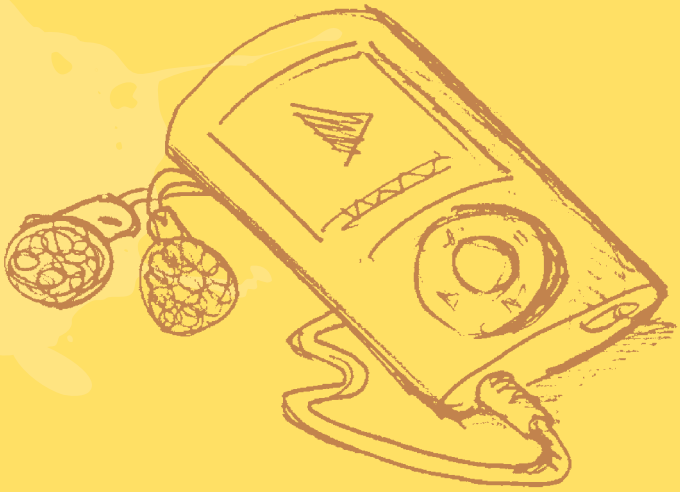
When it is clear someone is not going to recover

When it is clear that a person's health is deteriorating and they are going to die, then you will need to have what is likely to be the hardest conversation you will ever have with your child. However, this honesty will give your child time to prepare and the chance to say 'goodbye'.

Sometime parents' initial instincts might be to not tell their child because they want to protect them or because saying it out loud makes the situation too painfully real and perhaps because they are frightened at how their child might respond. However, not talking about it will not prevent someone from dying. There is also a risk that children will receive the information from a different source. This could be from a friend/ family member, overhearing a conversation, or by looking on the internet. Excluding children by not talking together can leave them feeling angry, upset and confused.

Finding the words will not be easy but trust that you know your child and follow your instincts. It is important to use the word 'die' to help your child understand what is happening.

'I've got some very sad news to tell you. You know mummy has been poorly with cancer for a long time, well the doctors have told us that they can't make mummy better. This means mummy is going to die. This isn't anybody's fault; not mummy's, mine, yours or the doctor's fault, mummy is just too poorly.'



Children need the opportunity to spend time with the person with the knowledge they are going to die. Although watching the physical deterioration of someone so special can be frightening, with support and guidance, children can get past this. Offering updates about any changes in the ill person's physical appearance will help children to feel further involved and prepared.

Spending the last few days with someone you love is inevitably heartbreaking but allowing your child to be part of this will help them in their grief.

Some children will find it too difficult to spend time with the person who is ill. Although this can be upsetting for family members, there are other ways a child can maintain links with that person: phone calls, cards, pictures, flowers or suggesting your child creates a playlist of the person's favourite music for them to listen to.

A muddle of feelings

Children's reactions to the news someone has a life-limiting illness will be different for each child. They may be upset, angry or may even appear uninterested; this does not mean they do not care but it can take time for children to process and understand what they have been told.
Children often struggle to find the words to express how they are feeling. They may know they can speak to you if they are worried, but finding the words can be difficult; children are more likely to demonstrate their emotions through their behaviour. If you see your child isn't quite themselves, naming this can be a helpful way of beginning conversations. Children may not want to have a long conversation, but simply saying:
'You don't seem yourself today, are you worried about mummy?'
can be enough for them to share their thoughts with you.

On the next page are some of the feelings your child might experience and some of the changes in their behaviour you may observe.

Some children may worry about upsetting other members of their family and therefore bottle up their feelings. It can be reassuring for children to understand that all feelings are okay and that everybody (adults and children) has different ways of showing their grief; there is no such thing as a 'right' or a 'wrong' way.

It can be helpful for children to see that the adults around them are also finding things tough. It is really hard for anyone to 'stay strong' all the time for their child. Sometimes, sharing your sadness can validate a child's feelings and reassure them that it is okay to cry. At the same time, children just need to know that you are still able to look after them.

Angry

Confused

Guilty

Sad

Relieved

Worried

Shocked

Uncertain

Numb

Anxious

Withdrawn

Regretful

Distracted

Tired

Anxious

Scared

Painful

After someone has died

Understanding loss

It is often perceived that babies and very young children are unlikely to be affected by the death of a significant person. However, babies will miss someone with whom they have formed an attachment. Babies and young children will be aware of someone's absence but they do not have any concept of time or death. They may believe that if they want someone back enough, they might return.

Young children are likely to have little understanding of death and its permanence. A 4-year old may be able to tell someone exactly when and how someone died but later that same day might then say...

'My mummy died. Will she be home for tea tomorrow?'

or say

'I hope daddy will be back for my birthday.'

Children may appear to 'dip in and out' of their sadness. At one moment they can be tearful and then, ten minutes later they are asking to go out and play, their previous distress seemingly forgotten. While this may be difficult to observe, it is a normal reaction and it does not mean they do not care.

Complaints of tummy aches, headaches and incidents of bed-wetting, can be ways for children to demonstrate their feelings of anxiety and grief.

It is essential children are given clear, age-appropriate information about what caused a person's death. Children who are not included in these conversations may resort to 'magical thinking.' This is when, in the absence of information, children create their own story in order to explain things they don't understand. This can be damaging as their story may be very different from reality. There are cases whereby children have clung on to their version of events even into adulthood.

Even when you have explained things to your child, check what they have understood. Sometimes children appear to have taken in far more information than they really have.

Developing a clearer understanding about the permanence of death and the realisation not everybody dies of 'old age', can bring a child anxieties about the future and the health and safety of other family members. Within this, children can become 'clingy' with significant family members and reluctant to leave them for any amount of time. If this happens, it can be helpful to reassure children that most people live for a long time and die when they are very old.

Sometimes children blame themselves when somebody dies. Even though from an adult's perspective, this can seem like a ludicrous idea, for children it can be a very real fear. A child may think that they either caused or could have prevented someone's death, 'If I hadn't made daddy cross…' or 'I should have given granny a hug when she asked me to.' Sometimes it is reassuring to say to your child something like 'you do know, there wasn't anything anybody could have done to stop daddy from dying, it wasn't anybody's fault.'

Honest, open conversations with children usually help to relieve anxieties.

Children feel more safe and secure if usual family rules and routine are maintained.

Talking to children

Children need information, reassurance and involvement. It can be more frightening for children if they are not clear about what is happening. They can become confused, anxious or feel unable to ask questions.

If possible, new information is best given by you rather than a professional, friend or extended family member. Avoiding conversations around the subject of death can be very isolating for a child who has been bereaved.

Using simple, straightforward words like ‘dead’ and ‘dying’ can help a child’s understanding. Other language such as ‘gone away’ or ‘gone to sleep’ can be confusing for children as this can lead them to believe that the person who has died chose to leave them or will wake up.

Sharing books with children can help open up conversations. You can find the details of some of the books we suggest towards the end of this booklet.

It can be helpful for children to see their family is also grieving. It’s hard for an adult to ‘stay strong’ all the time for their children. Sometimes sharing your sadness can validate a child’s feelings and reassure them that it is okay to cry. At the same time children just need to know that you are still able to look after them.

Children are naturally curious about the world and may wish to explore different beliefs about what happens after someone dies. Some families will have particular religious faiths or spiritual beliefs and others do not. However, by inviting the discussion with your child, you can demonstrate you are comfortable in exploring the subject, even if it means acknowledging that you don’t know what happens after death. Explain that people have different beliefs and you’re interested to hear what your child’s views are.

Try to encourage your child to talk, ask questions and listen to what they want to say.

Younger children often talk about heaven, but this can present confusion: how can the person who died be buried at a funeral and be in heaven at the same time? From a child's point of view, if people physically go to heaven when they die, then why can't children visit their loved ones in heaven? In this situation, you could use a simple explanation:

'When somebody dies, their body stops working. This means they can't move, talk or eat anymore because they have died. When we go to nanny's funeral, her body will be in a coffin but the bit of nanny that made her really special, that bit has gone to heaven. It's just nanny's body which is left behind.'

It is common for children to ask the same repetitive questions. Try to be patient and consistent with your answers. It is okay for children to know that adults do not always have the answers and sometimes you may be unsure what to say, needing to come back to your child with a response.

It is really important to maintain contact with your child's school. Keeping the school up-to-date with information can assist teachers in providing the right support.

Talking to adolescents

‘Being a teenager is about the struggle between dependence and independence. It’s about the desire to abandon childhood patterns while feeling frightened by the consequences of adult behaviours. It’s about sorting out a tangle of physical, emotional, moral and social changes. It’s about deciding “What do I want for my life?”

But life for a teen-in-grief is even more complex. The emotional turmoil of grieving can be unnerving for even the most secure teen.’

(Mary Kelly Perschy, 2004)

For adolescents, the emotional rollercoaster of grief can bring further intensified feelings of confusion, isolation and insecurity. It can also lead to anxieties over a young person’s self identity and place in the world.

Adolescents are likely to have developed an adult understanding of death, but without the same experiences and coping mechanisms. Developmentally, they are experiencing a range of confusing changes and emotions, which may be heightened by a bereavement. Adolescents may have developed an awareness of their own vulnerability which can make the world feel like a scary and unsafe place.

Sometimes the needs of adolescents can be overlooked. Young people may adopt more responsibility around the house, e.g. looking after younger siblings in order to relieve some of the pressures on adult family members. It is important to recognise adolescents are still young people and not yet adults. Young people will be reaching milestones in their lives such as taking exams, learning to drive or planning to start college or work. Bereavement and feeling a duty to support their family can make these plans seem less of a priority. Young people may need reassuring messages that these things are still important.

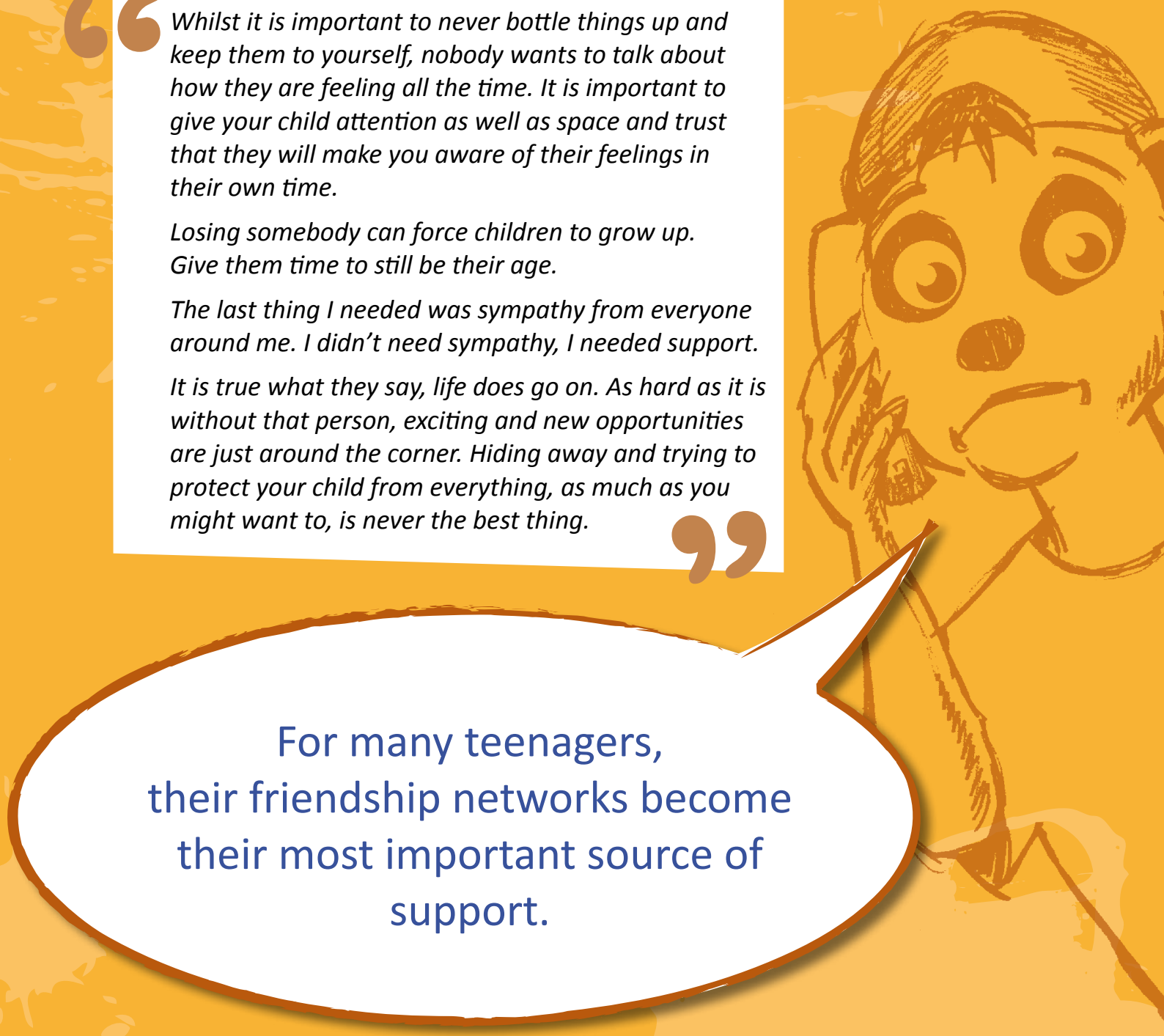
Caitlin (15) was supported by Rowan's Meerkat Service, she was 12 when her Dad died. These are Caitlin's thoughts:

Whilst it is important to never bottle things up and keep them to yourself, nobody wants to talk about how they are feeling all the time. It is important to give your child attention as well as space and trust that they will make you aware of their feelings in their own time.

Losing somebody can force children to grow up. Give them time to still be their age.

The last thing I needed was sympathy from everyone around me. I didn't need sympathy, I needed support.

It is true what they say, life does go on. As hard as it is without that person, exciting and new opportunities are just around the corner. Hiding away and trying to protect your child from everything, as much as you might want to, is never the best thing.



For many teenagers, their friendship networks become their most important source of support.

A young person who has been bereaved may choose to speak most openly with their closest friends before family members. If this is the case then ensuring your child knows you are also there to listen and support can provide the right balance.

Towards the end of this book, we have listed some websites that young people may find useful to access.

Viewing the body

Adults may believe children will be scared and overly distressed at seeing a dead person. However, with the right information, children are usually able to make their own decision whether or not this is something they want to do. For some children, the opportunity to see the body of the person who has died can be reassuring, particularly if they were not able to say goodbye before the death.

If the last time a child saw someone alive was in hospital, from their perspective it can feel as if that person simply disappeared. The visual experience of seeing someone after they have died can support children in their understanding of what has happened.

It is helpful for children to know the following before viewing the body:

The person, or people who will come with them.

The location of the dead person (in a chapel of rest, in a bed at home).

What will the dead person will look like?

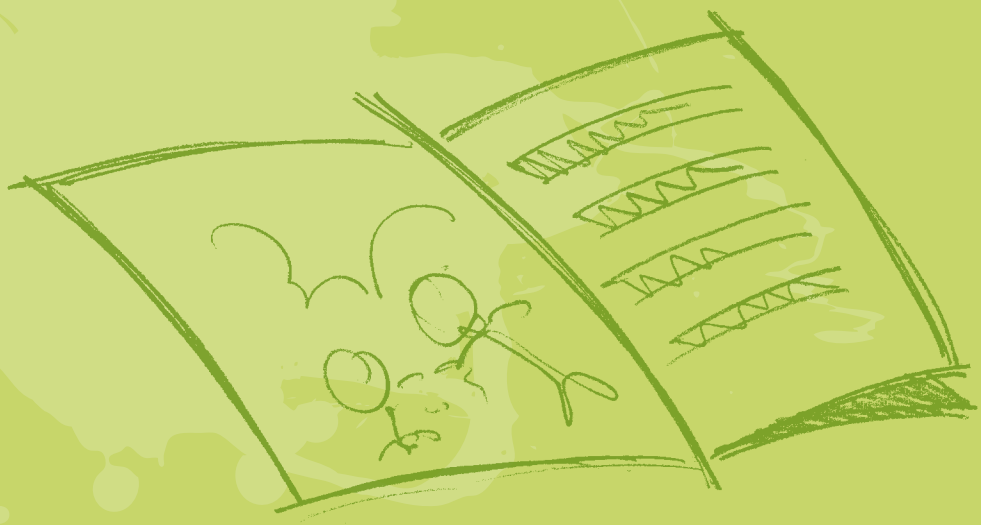
Think about if the person's physical appearance is very different to when they were alive. Include information about what the person is wearing. If there has been time between the person dying and the child seeing the body then It is important for the child to know that the person will look pale and will feel cold.

Children may have questions afterwards and may want to talk about how they feel; make sure there is someone who is able to answer any questions and to be with them.

They can touch the dead person if they want to.

They can change their minds about seeing the body at the last minute.

There are other ways for children to say goodbye if they do not want to see the body (e.g. making a card or writing a letter).



The funeral

Making the decision as to whether or not children should attend the funeral may feel difficult to do, particularly if your child is very young. However, children are part of the family and excluding them from an occasion where all the family are likely to be present can leave children feeling very isolated, whatever their age.

Although very young children will probably have little understanding about what is happening during the funeral service, as they grow up, knowing they were part of the funeral for someone significant is important.

Most children will know very little, if anything, about what a funeral is and what to expect. With enough information, children are usually able to make their own decision about whether or not they wish to attend.

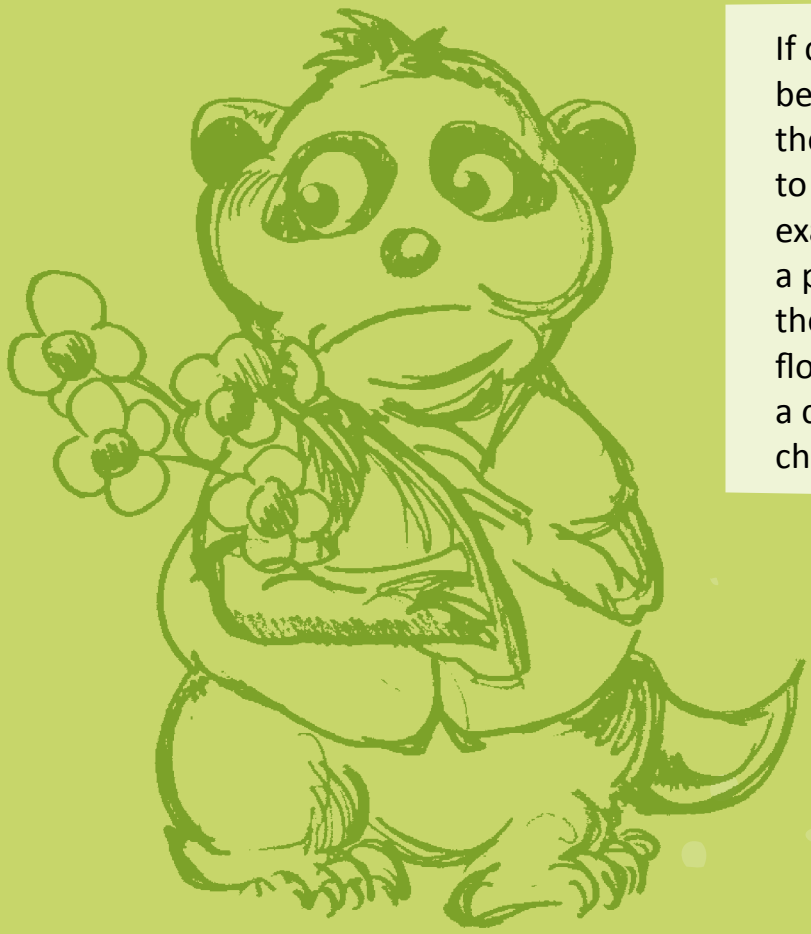
Just like adults, children may find the experience of attending a funeral painful and upsetting, this is okay; the situation is likely to be painful and upsetting for everyone. The funeral ceremony is also an opportunity for people to share happy memories about that person's life and is a chance for adults and children to say goodbye.

Try not to overload children with details but be led by their questions and what they want to know. If possible, children having the opportunity to meet the minister or the person who will be leading the service can be beneficial.

Sharing information about where the funeral will be, how many people will be there, what people might be wearing and the order of service, will help a child to build a picture of what to expect.

It can be reassuring for children to sit near someone with whom they have a good relationship and who is able to leave the service with them if needed. This can help very young children who may become restless during the service and older children who may feel less anxious about attending knowing that they have the option to leave at any point. Talk to the minister or person who will be leading the service about involving the children. If you would like to bring your child for a private moment at the beginning or end of the service, this can usually be arranged. This can encourage children to feel part of the event even if they feel they cannot stay for the duration.

Children may like to draw a picture or write a message and take this to the funeral. They may also want to suggest some music to be played during the ceremony. Older children might like to write something and read it aloud during the service or ask someone to read it for them.



If children do not attend the funeral, either because you have made that decision or they do not wish to go, there are other ways to help children feel part of the day. For example, children may want an adult to take a picture they have drawn to the funeral on their behalf. Perhaps photographs of the flowers at the funeral could be taken and a copy of the order of service given to the child to keep.

Treasuring memories

Making a memory box or a memory book can help children to talk about the person who has died. This also gives children the opportunity to continue to have a link with that person.

Children may want to choose their box or book and decorate it using glitter, stickers, photographs etc.

Children are likely to need some support in creating a memory store, the level of this support will vary from child to child. A parent, grandparent, teacher, or any other professional who has a relationship with the child can help with this. Memory work can also be done by people who have a life-limiting illness and wish to leave a legacy for their child.

For very young children, someone could make a memory box or a memory book on their behalf for when they are older.

Ideas for memory boxes include jewellery, mementoes from special events, music, photographs, particular items of clothing such as a scarf or perfume (smells are very evocative).

Memory books could include photographs and information about the person who has died, such as where they grew up, the school they went to, their likes and dislikes and the funniest/silliest thing they ever did.

Children may wish to record details about memorable holidays or trips.

Children may dip in and out of interest of doing this; it is important they are able to work at their own pace. These memory stores can be added to over the course of years, it is not something that has to be completed straight away.

Children should be able to keep their box/book in a safe place that is easily accessible, in this way they can look through their memories and special items whenever they wish.

You can design your own memory box or buy them from Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org.uk/shop

Remembering

It is important people are able to talk about and remember someone after they have died. For children, opportunities to remember can assist in maintaining a special relationship with the person, which is likely to have a positive impact on their future emotional development.

For all of you, some days will feel harder than others. However, there are particular occasions and anniversaries that may intensify these feelings.

We have listed some ideas of different practical ways to remember people. These may be useful to do at any time but also to keep in mind for days such as birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day and at Christmas. Please keep in contact with your child's school. It will help them to provide the appropriate support if they are aware of any particular anniversaries or occasions that may be difficult for your child.

Below are some suggested activities you, another relative, friend or the school might like to support your child in doing:

- take a special card to the grave, or to where their ashes were buried or scattered
- tie a card or special message to a helium balloon and let it go into the sky
- plant some bulbs or a plant in a place that holds special memories of the person who died
- make or buy a new frame for your favourite photograph
- write a letter, poem or song
- at Christmas time, decorate shatterproof baubles using glitter and glue. You could put the name of the person who died on the bauble or a picture of something they liked. When the decorations are put away, you could decorate a box to keep it in until the following year.

What about me?

Kids - these pages are for you

Hi!

This book has been written for adults but we thought it was pretty important to include a section for you too! At Rowan's Meerkat Service, we meet lots of children and young people who have experienced the death of someone close to them and they tell us how lonely and tough life can suddenly feel.

When someone dies, the people who loved that person are left with all sorts of feelings. These can include sadness, anger, confusion, shock, relief, guilt, fear, regret and disbelief. You may have felt all of these feelings, or none of them. There may be some days when you're feeling okay and then suddenly you're overwhelmed with wanting to cry, shout or hide away from the world.

There aren't any rules to grief so there isn't a 'right' or a 'wrong' way to feel. Everyone is different so people's reactions when someone dies will be different too. Please know that whatever you're feeling is normal.

There are websites listed for young people at the end of this book. You might not find them helpful at all, but sometimes, it's just worth checking these things out.

The suggestions below will not make everything feel okay again, but we hope at least one or two will make sense to you and will offer ways of coping with what is happening to you and your family.

1. It's good to ask questions. Sometimes you might worry that your questions will sound silly – they really won't! Hearing the facts from a trusted adult will help your understanding.

2. Grief is really tiring. Remember, you're not going crazy if you're finding it hard to think straight or to concentrate on anything.

3. Life can feel really different when someone is ill, for example, the things you used to do as a family might have changed a lot. After the person has died it's okay to feel relief, this isn't selfish and doesn't mean you didn't love them.

4. Kids often tell us they try not to talk to their family about the person who has died because they worry that doing this will upset family members even more. It's almost impossible for adults and children to 'stay strong' all the time. Sharing thoughts/feelings on the 'good' and the 'not-so-good' days could help you all to support each other.

5. Ask for a 'time out' card to use at school. You could use this if you're finding a lesson too much and just need a bit of space.

6. When someone you love dies, this can make you worry about the health and safety of other family members. This makes sense, but bottling up these thoughts could make you worry even more. Try to share these worries with someone.

7. Look after yourself. Don't give yourself a hard time if you find you're having a really tough day or if you're having a better day. Share the good stuff and the not-so-good stuff with a trusted adult so they can understand the best way to support you.

8. Know that it's okay to have days when all you can think about is the person who died and other days when you hardly think about them at all.

9. Find ways of remembering the person who died. There may be places you can go, favourite songs to listen to, photographs or items that belonged to the person that hold special memories.

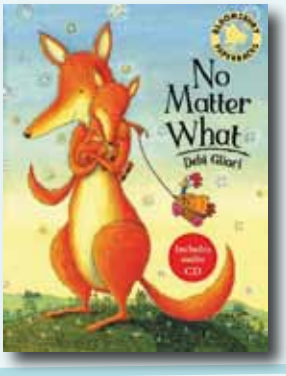
10. There will be days when you can laugh and have fun. Try not to feel guilty when this happens. Enjoying yourself doesn't mean you're 'over it' or you've 'forgotten' or 'don't care.'

Suggested books

Here is a list of books which you may find helpful to share with your child. Some of these books are not directly related to bereavement but address other issues that your child may be experiencing. We have also included some books written for adults who are supporting a bereaved child.

The following book descriptions have been taken from **www.amazon.co.uk**. However, all of the books can be purchased from either **www.winstonswish.org.uk** or **www.amazon.co.uk**.

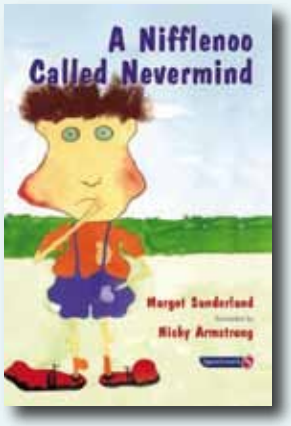
Books for children



No Matter What

Debi Gliori, 2003. Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.

A rhyming story with large, bright pictures about Small, a young fox who is feeling cross because no one loves him. Large then reassures him that she'll love him no matter what. A fun and imaginative book that only briefly talks about death but would be a useful story to help support a young child through difficult times.



A Nifflenoo called Nevermind: a Story for Children who Bottle up their Feelings

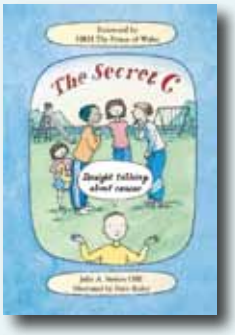
Margot Sunderland, 2001. Speechmark Publishing Ltd.

Nevermind always carries on whatever happens! Each time something horrible happens to him he just tucks his feelings away and carries on with life. However, during the story, Nevermind begins to understand that his feelings do matter and learns to express them and stand up for himself. This is a lovely story and very colourfully illustrated.

The Huge Bag of Worries

Virginia Ironside, 2004. Hodder Children's Books.

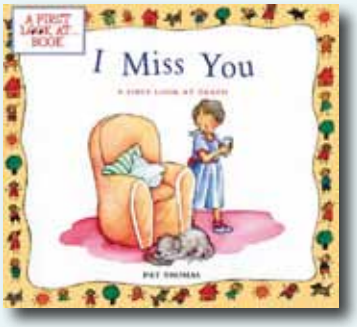
Jenny begins to worry about lots of different things and these worries build up and get out of control. She just can't get rid of them, until she meets the old lady next door who helps her feel better. A lovely story with fun illustrations encourages children to talk about their worries.



The Secret C: Straight Talking About Cancer

Julie A. Stokes, 2nd revised edition, 2009. Winston's Wish.

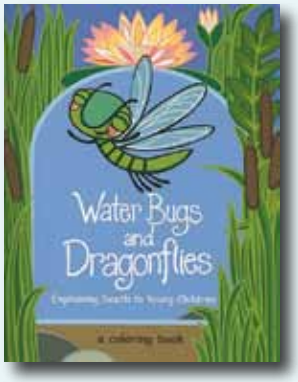
The Secret C attempts to answer some of the questions and worries a child may have about cancer, especially when it involves someone in the family. This reassuring book will help adults and children continue to talk about the difficult issues and feelings involved when someone is seriously ill and briefly talks about the possibility of death.



I miss you: A First Look at Death

Pat Thomas, 2001. Turtleback Books.

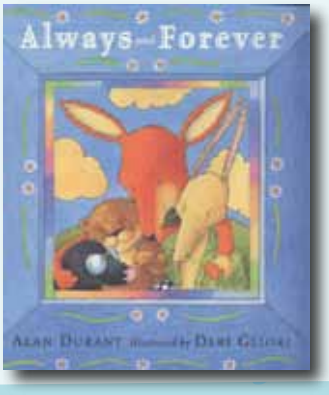
This bright and colourful picture book very simply talks about life and death. It briefly covers a range of issues such as why people die, how you may feel when someone dies and what happens afterwards. It includes questions for the reader to answer about their own experiences and a section at the back for adults on how to best use the book. An excellent educational book, which could be used as a starting point for discussion.



Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children

Doris Stickney, 2009. The Pilgrim Press.

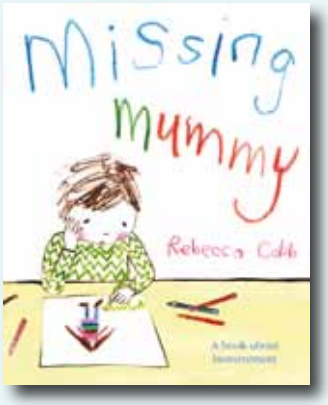
This pocket sized booklet with small black and white pictures is based on a fable, associating death with a water bug's transformation into a dragonfly. It portrays the mystery around death but may need an adult to explain the analogy and help a child relate it to their own experience. It uses Christian beliefs with a focus on life after death and also contains advice for parents.



Always and Forever

Alan Durant & Debi Gliori, 2004. Corgi Books.

Otter, Mole and Hare miss Fox when he falls ill and dies. They stay at home and don't want to talk about him because it makes them sadder. Then Squirrel visits and reminds them all of the fun times they had together. They all find a way to remember Fox and get on with their lives. Colourful, detailed pictures in this book emphasise the importance of holding onto memories.



Missing Mummy

Rebecca Cobb, 2012. Macmillan Children's Books.

Perfectly pitched text and evocative artwork explore the many emotions a bereaved child may experience, from anger to guilt and from sadness to bewilderment. And importantly, the book also focuses on the positive – the recognition that the child is still part of a family, and that his memories of his mother are to be treasured. Beautifully illustrated with moments of wonderful warmth and the gentlest humour.

Heaven

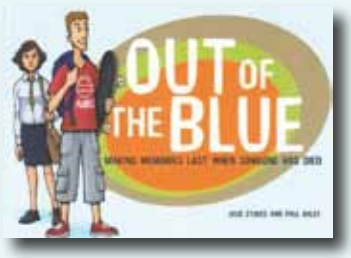
Nicholas Allan, 2006. Red Fox Books.

Dill, the dog, knows his time is up, so he packs his case and tells Lily, his owner, that he's off "up there". "Can I come too?" asks Lily. "Er... not yet," replies Dill. While he is waiting for the angels to collect him, Dill explains to Lily what he thinks heaven is like: hundreds of lampposts to pee against, lots of whiffy things to smell and bones everywhere—with meat on them! But, Lily completely disagrees, she thinks heaven is quite different. Luckily, they agree to disagree just in time for a fond, and very poignant, last goodbye.

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine

Diana Crossley, 2009. Winston's Wish.

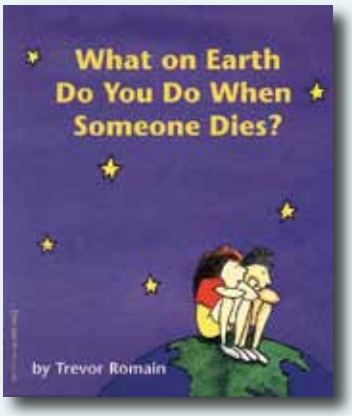
This activity book offers invaluable practical and sensitive support for bereaved younger children. Beautifully illustrated, it suggests a helpful series of activities and exercises accompanied by the friendly characters of Bee and Bear. The book offers a structure and an outlet for the many difficult feelings which inevitably follow when someone dies.



Out of the Blue: Making Memories Last when Someone has Died

Julie Stokes & Paul Oxley, 2006. Winston's Wish.

This book has been written & designed specifically for teenagers with the aim of supporting them through their bereavement using a range of activities. Narrated throughout by teenagers' words and stories, the book talks openly about the real feelings they may struggle with when someone important in their life dies. The activities in the book allow those feelings to be worked through and safely explored. Each character in the book reinforces the message that "I'm not alone". Out of the Blue can be completed by a teenager on their own or with the help of a family member or appropriate professional.



What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

Trevor Romain, 2003. Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

This book can help you through a painful time. Trevor answers questions you might wonder about - *Why do people have to die?, Is the death my fault?, What happens to the person's body?, How can I say good-bye?* - in simple, honest words. He describes the strong, confusing feelings you might have and suggests ways to feel better. He tells you it's okay to cry, talk about the death, grieve ... and go on with your life.

Books for adults supporting children

As Big as it Gets: Supporting a Child When a Parent is Seriously Ill

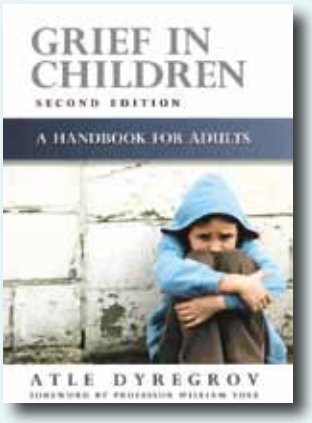
Julie Stokes, Diana Crossley, Di Stubbs, 2007. Winston's Wish.

This booklet provides a range of ideas for parents and carers so that they feel able to involve their children in what is happening. The book also includes some suggestions about what parents might say to children and how to offer support.

A Child's Grief: Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family has Died

Julie Stokes, 4th revised edition, 2009. Winston's Wish.

An information booklet for an adult who is supporting a child through bereavement. It covers a variety of issues that may affect a child when someone close to them dies. It also includes practical suggestions and ideas for activities to do together with a child.



Grief in Children: a Handbook for Adults

Atle Dyregov, 2008. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This is a very practical and useful book written for adults to help them understand how children feel when someone important in their life dies. It covers areas such as children's grief reactions at different developmental levels, gender differences and different types of death. It makes many useful suggestions about how children can be helped to cope with their grief in an open, honest and positive way.

Hints and tips

Information is best given in small chunks. A child's attention span can be limited, especially when taking in difficult information.

Even when you have explained things to your child, check what they have understood. Sometimes children appear to have taken in far more information than they really have.

Avoid making promises you can't keep.

Sometimes children/young people can find it hard to talk about 'tough stuff' (just like us adults!); suggesting alternative ways of communicating can work well, e.g. children may find it helpful to record their thoughts in a journal, use post-it notes to encourage ways of writing messages to each other or even texting and emailing.

Children step in and out of feelings in a way that may seem insensitive. Whilst this may be difficult to see or hear, it is a normal reaction and it does not mean they do not care. It is impossible for children to stay sad all of the time!

Praise children for being helpful and thoughtful but not for being brave which could imply it is wrong to be upset.

Children may feel responsible when things go wrong. It is important they are given reassurance that they are not to blame for causing a person's illness or death.

When children are distressed, adults might feel like offering more treats and relaxing boundaries and discipline. At times this may be appropriate but generally, children feel more safe and secure if usual family rules and routine are maintained.

Please keep in contact with your child's school. It will help them to provide appropriate support.

It's okay not to know the answer to every question. Talk to family, friends or professionals, no-one expects you to go through bereavement on your own.

Useful organisations

Riprap

www.riprap.org.uk

Website for young people who have a parent with cancer. There is also a section on bereavement support for young people.

Winston's Wish

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Guidance, information and resources for families of bereaved children. The Winston's Wish website also provides a separate website for young people who have been bereaved:

www.winstonswish.org.uk/foryoungpeople

Simon Says

Helpline: 023 8064 7550

www.simonsays.org.uk

Counselling, guidance, information and resources for families of bereaved children living in Hampshire. Simon Says also facilitates monthly support groups for children and young people.

Cruse Bereavement

Helpline : 0808 808 1677

www.rd4u.org.uk

Website for young people who have been bereaved. This website is run by the organisation Cruse Bereavement.

We are always seeking ways to improve our service, so if you have any helpful comments or suggestions, please contact us.

@ meerkats@rowanshospice.co.uk
www.facebook.com/rowansmeerkatservice
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The Rowans Hospice is a voluntary independent hospice which exists to provide specialist palliative care to patients with life-limiting illnesses resident in Portsmouth and South East Hampshire and their relatives and carers. The service is provided free of charge, irrespective of the nature of the illness, creed or means, and aims to compliment the overall provision of palliative care within the community.

The Rowans Hospice, Purbrook Heath Road, Purbrook,
Waterlooville, Hampshire PO7 5RU
Tel: 023 9225 0001 www.rowanshospice.co.uk
@RowansHospice facebook.com/RowansHospice

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