



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
BIRMINGHAM



# Support with loss and bereavement

for families, children and young people



## Supporting children who are facing the death of a loved one

When someone who a child knows well dies, their world changes in an instant. The temptation is to try to protect children from the effects of grief and facing the stark reality of death. However, the reality is that children need to know about death and to be supported in helping them work out responses and to deal with their own grief. This is complicated by the fact that those who care for children are grieving themselves at the same time as trying to support children.

### Language used

Ensuring that children are told about the death using the correct language is important. 'death' and 'died' are stark words, but using terms as 'passed', 'passed on', 'passed away', 'fell asleep' are very unhelpful because they suggest that the person is only temporarily gone – or that they may wake up. Saying that someone is 'asleep' is also unhelpful because children can associate sleeping with dying and it can create fear for themselves and others.

Children need to know that sadness and crying are ok and that talking about how we are feeling and asking questions are good – even if we don't have all the answers.

Listen really carefully to the question the child has asked, if you are unsure of what they are asking get them to repeat it, then answer it. If a child asks 'what happens when someone dies' we can give them a full, detailed answer, explaining about the body, funerals, the home, and a hundred other things, but the child may simply want to know that the person who died is safe and that someone will be looking after them.

Children need to feel part of the family – in age appropriate ways. The danger of excluding children from grief and funeral planning is that they can feel pushed out, excluded and go on to have a lack of trust in adults 'why did you stop me from going to grandad's funeral? He was my grandad!?"

For children of Christian families, there are some helpful Biblical ideas that we can use. Revelation tells us that in heaven there are no tears, sadness or pain (Revelation 21:4). In John's gospel Jesus tells us that his Father's house has many rooms and that Jesus is going ahead to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). So, asking 'I wonder questions can be a good way of exploring this, e.g. "I wonder what granny's room in heaven would be like? Applying the same idea to the child can be helpful too. 'I wonder what your/ my room in heaven would be like? Talk about it, draw pictures, make it in playdough.

### Help children to remember

- Create a memory box - let the child gather together some nick nacks or items that belonged to loved one – a book, magazine, a mug, a pipe, jewellery... Decorate the box.  
Or make a little box out of fimo / air drying clay, make tiny things the person who died liked and put them in the box.
- Create a memory book – annotate photos of the loved one to create a collection of photos. The child can add their own drawings and writing as appropriate

- Memory jar – on post it notes, write memories and little anecdotes – this can be added to over time and then, when the family are feeling sad, or on a special occasion such as a birthday. Post it notes could include things like the loved one's favourite colour, food, tv programme, book, funny things they said or did, I remember when...

These activities all give lots of opportunities to talk while making. Space to talk about everything is the most important thing for children.

## Funerals

Under current circumstances, the number of people attending funerals is limited, so this might add additional pressures and challenges for families. However, finding ways to include children in the planning of the service can be helpful.

A candle can be lit by children at the beginning of the service (or indeed on a separate occasion):

John 8.12

Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'

This candle reminds us that ..... shone as a light in this world, that s/he now shines among the lights of heaven and will shine forever in our hearts. Amen

Children can put special items with the coffin - e.g. granny's walking stick or grandad's gardening shoes, a letter or a picture...

Funeral services themselves don't have anything 'scary' in them. It is often the fear of children seeing adults crying that is the concern, but again children need to feel part of their family and to be able to contribute – ideas of music, poems, readings...

At the end of the service – or at another time – a balloon release can work well. Write a message or prayer on a label and tie to the balloon and the release it with words like;

*Into the freedom of wind and sunshine*

*We let you go*

*Into the dance of the stars and the planets*

*We let you go*

*Into the wind's breath and the hands of the star-maker*

*We let you go*

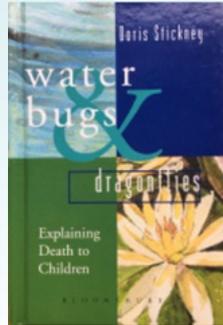
*We love you, we miss you, we want you to be happy*

*Go safely, Go dancing, go running home.*

## Resources to help when talking about death and dying with children

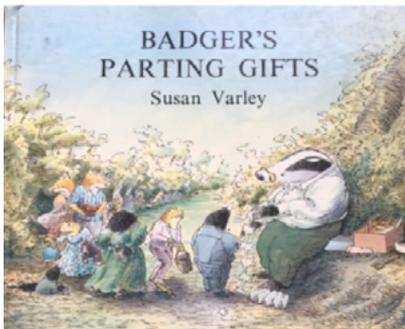
All these books are still able to be purchased online, if you are unable to find them please contact **Ruth (ruthy@cofebirmingham.com)** as she has copies of them all.

### Faith-based

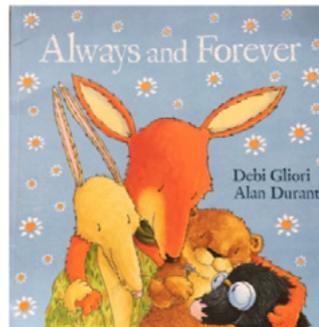


**Waterbugs and dragonflies, Doris Stickney**  
– a short story explaining death through the fable of the transformation of the dragonfly

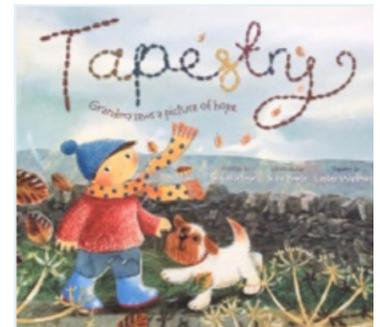
### Story book



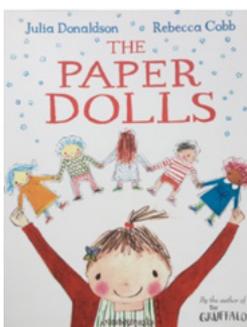
**Badgers parting gifts, Susan Varley** – a story about badger's friends learning to come to terms with his death



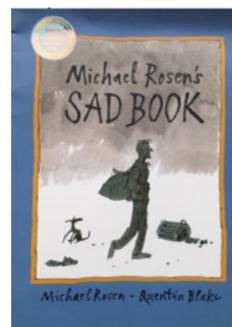
**Always and Forever, Debi Gliori and Alan Durant** – a story that explains death gently



**Tapestry, Susie Poole and Bob Hartman** – a story book explaining the 'forever-after' to a child

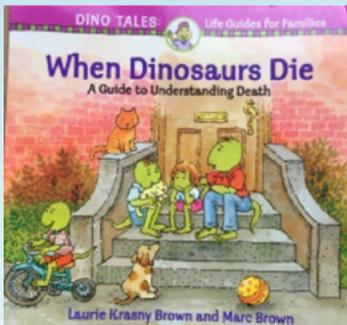


**The Paper Dolls, Julia Donaldson and Rebecca Cobb** – gentle way to introduce loss. lightly touches upon some things or people not being around anymore and finding them all in your memory.

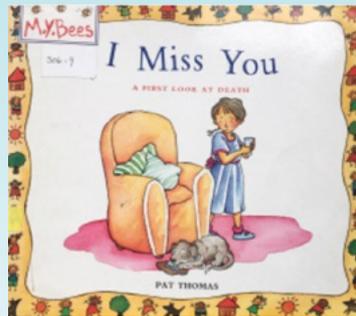


**Michael Rosen's Sad Book, Michael Rosen** – can help children understand and explore their own sadness following the death of a loved one.

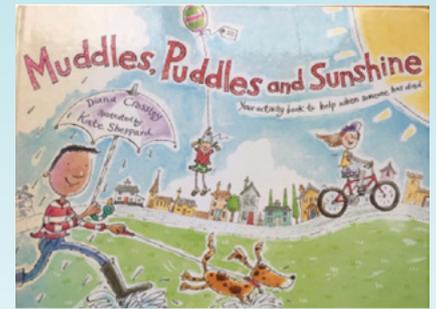
## Picture books (more factual)



**When dinosaurs die, Laurie Raszynski and Marc Brown** – a book dealing with most common asked questions and exploring the feelings we may have when someone dies. In 'chapters' so can easily dip in and out of as appropriate.



**I miss you, Pat Thomas** – picture book exploring death. Children's feeling and questions are looked at in a simple but realistic way. 'What about you' questions throughout the book can open discussion about personal feelings/experiences



**Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine, Winston's Wish** – An activity book offering practical and sensitive support for bereaved younger children.

## Websites

### Child Bereavement UK

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

A charity that supports families when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, and when a child is facing bereavement. Short guidance films available to watch, plus helpline. Excellent downloadable resources to help parents/adults talk about death with children, including children's understanding of death at different ages.

### Winstons Wish

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

A charity supporting bereaved children and their families. Website with helpful resources, plus helpline available. Includes a page all about how to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible.

## Youth and Children Resources from Youth For Christ

“Over the coming weeks, Youth for Christ will release three videos a week for each of these groups to help you stay in continuous communication and togetherness. All the content produced for you in this time of uncertainty is completely free. Please also share it with other team members in your church or other children’s and youth workers that you know to help them stay connected.

We’ve made this process as easy as possible. Tell your friends, family and colleagues to go to [yfc.co.uk/youthworkonline](https://yfc.co.uk/youthworkonline) and sign up to the mailing list. We will send new videos directly to people on this mailing list once a week as soon as they are released.

We really hope that you enjoy using this new resource. Our prayer is that you can help the children and young people that you work with to stay connected to you, your church and Jesus through this time.”

### **Week 1 Resource - Fear and Anxiety**

### **Week 2 Resource - Living Wisely**

*The Youth for Christ Resources Team*