

Bereavement Resource Assignment

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As a prospective child life specialist, there will be times when I will be asked to disclose a death to a child. This topic can be a delicate, daunting as well as challenging task. All children are different and even knowing about their background, life experiences, their age and developmental level nothing can prepare you for the reaction they may have. What helps aid us in talking to a child and can help support parents in communicating with their child is finding resources. Resources such as books that address death and dying with appropriate developmental language for every age level.

Every age level is different when it comes to developmentally appropriate language. At 2 to 3 years old the child begins to understand the simplest questions dealing with his environment and activities and relates his experiences so that they can be followed with reason, but they should not be expected to answer every question. (Myers, 2011) At 3 years old a child should understand concepts for longer periods of times. At age 4 to 5 children begin asking questions, listening to stories and comprehending simple events in sequence. During this age they also begin expressing more feelings. From 5 to 6 years a child “should be able to tell one a rather connected story about a picture, seeing relationships between objects and happenings.” (Myers, 2011) For children under 5 it is important to explain death briefly and with concrete terminology. Before age 6 children tend to believe death is temporary which also stems from how death is portrayed to them. At 6 to 7 years old children should be able to read simple words and phrases. After 8 children learn to adjust their language to the individuals they are speaking to, shows a vast improvement in listening skills and they further their vocabulary through reading.

I chose two books that illustrate developmentally appropriate language for each developmental level including the toddler/preschool children, school-age children, and adolescents. The first book is called *When Dinosaurs Die: A guide to understanding death* by

Laura Krasny Brown and the second book is called *I Miss You: A First Look at Death* by Pat Thomas. Both books are simplistic and explain death in an open and honest manner that makes it easy for children of all ages to understand.

The first book I would share with parents to read with their child is a Scholastic book called *When Dinosaurs Die: A guide to understanding death* by Laura Krasny Brown. This book should be read by the parents first. It explains what it means to be alive, what it means to be dead and what happens after death. This book is very blunt and straightforward. It also states how people could die from old age, illness, accidents, and heavier topics like suicide. It is strongly encouraged for parents to read this book to their child and skip the parts they feel may not be appropriate for a child their age. According to the article *The Do's and Don'ts of Talking with a Child about Death* it is important to share information of death in small doses and based on questions the child may get. As they grow up and they have more questions parents can read it to the child, or the child can read it in its entirety. There are also no metaphors to explain death in this book. Metaphors can be extremely confusing to children leaving the child with more questions than answers. That is why I also believe it is a developmentally appropriate resource. Words such as alive and death are given as age-appropriate definitions. *When Dinosaurs Die* is also an excellent book for children, who are curious and full of questions as it answers many questions about death. Making sure the child knows the words dead and died is important for the grieving process. It covers the stages of grief, how to say goodbye to a loved one and keeping customs or traditions. It is an honest portrayal of what to expect when death happens. Though this book is recommended for ages six and up if modified it can be used for younger age groups.

The second book I choose was *I Miss You: A First Look at Death* by Pat Thomas. This book is essential for children who are learning about death for the first time giving the child

honest and straightforward facts about the death and dying process such as a funeral. My favorite part of the book which I feel like most child life specialist or parents would like is the question at the bottom of every few pages. For example, on one of the pages there is a box at the bottom which reads “What about you? Has anyone you know died? How did they die?” (Thomas, & Harker, 2014) Questions like this allow the child to reflect and interact with the book as a part of a coping strategy using developmentally appropriate language. According to *Clinical Center Patient Education Materials Talking to Children about Death* the key to talking to children about death is answering questions in simple and sensitive language appropriate for the child’s age. It should be explained briefly in a way not to overwhelm the child while encouraging other attempts to communicate. The book provides children with listening skills and how to put emotions into words which according to *Helping your Child Deal with Death* is essential. *I Miss You: A First Look at Death* helps children better understand their feelings after someone has died and missing the individual who has died.

In conclusion, every child is different. They each have different experiences customs, backgrounds and experiences. When a child or adolescent experiences the death of a friend, or family member these books can be helpful during a difficult time as these books and the ones listed in the bibliography are simplistic. The other books referenced in the bibliography below are told as stories and can help parents who want to have a conversation about death and dying explain it through a different approach.

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