

grief books for children

For Parents, Relatives, Church Workers, Community Leaders, and Teachers:

When Children Grieve: For Adults to Help Children Deal with Death, Divorce, Pet Loss, Moving, and Other Losses (James, Friedman and Matthews)

From the authors of *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, this book focuses specifically on children's needs in grief. Our family used the "grief completion" prompts each night at dinner to share memories of Rob as we began our grieving process. This resource was foundational to my understanding of the developmental needs of my children as they mourn. This is a must-read for all those who work with children.

For Younger Children:

After a Death: An Activity Book for Children (Lindholm)

This book is an amazing hands-on resource for young children grieving the loss of a loved one. From the absolutely fabulous Dougy Center for Grieving Children, *After a Death* offers activities that walk a young child through the grieving process. Brightly colored pages and engaging prompts allow children to narrate their loss and give it context in their lives in developmentally appropriate ways. This resource has been invaluable for my 7-year-old as she has processed her father's death.

Home in the Woods (Wheeler)

From the creator of *Miss Rumphius* and *Miss Maple* comes *Marvel*, a darling little girl who must find a new home with her mother and siblings after her father dies. This gentle, beautiful story of grief and resilience helps to shape a narrative of hope for young children as they reckon with loss. Wheeler's lush illustrations create a beautiful landscape for this tender story. We've read this book over and over again, and it still makes me cry. (All credit for this selection and the next is due to my sister, elementary librarian extraordinaire, who gifted these to us after Rob died.)

Goodbye to Goodbyes: A True Story about Jesus, Lazarus and an Empty Tomb (Chandler)

When talking to children about death, it is vital that we tell the truth. I've found this becomes a particularly complicated task for Christians who feel like every story must end with heaven, joy and resurrection. The truth of death is that it hurts, badly. The pain of death runs deep and spreads out wide across a lifetime. Children know this. Our beliefs about Jesus, God and heaven offer comfort, but they do not remove the sting of death in this life. (Paul writes that the sting of death will vanish only when Jesus returns again.) We do children harm when we gloss over this pain of loss. They are wiser than we give them credit for.

I love *Goodbye to Goodbyes* because it speaks the truth about death.

In its beautifully illustrated pages, we see people hurt and grieve. Retelling the story of Lazarus, this book places death into the narrative arc of God's redemptive purposes. Instead of mostly being about heaven, *Goodbye to Goodbyes* is mostly about dying. This refreshing honesty resonated in our household when we read it the first time, and it's the book I return to when we need a reminder of God's good plans for us in the midst of sorrow.

For Older Children:

The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise (Gemeinhart)

This book was our first family read aloud after Rob died. I bought it because it was about a girl whose mom and sister had died, but I had no idea how integral its themes would be in setting the course for our grieving. Readers will take a wild ride with a father actively running away from his grief and his daughter discovering how she can express hers. In the early weeks after Rob's death, our family talked about this book every night — hashing out what healthy grieving looked like, exploring how we would express our own grief. It was the perfect "show don't tell" novel for us.

The Tiger Rising (DiCamillo)

It's probably no surprise that a Kate DiCamillo book made my list. She's one of my very favorites. Like *Coyote Sunrise*, Rob Horton is fighting despair after the death of his mother. The narrative is thick with metaphor as we see Rob face and release his own deep grief as he fights to save a caged tiger in the woods. For middle grade and YA readers, grief is all about sorting out feelings. This book allows us to observe a character doing just that. Our family read *The Tiger Rising* before Rob died, so I hear his voice now whenever I read it.

After the River the Sun (Calhoun)

I'm a sucker for local writers and novels in verse, and *After the River the Sun* had both! Set in the stunning Methow Valley of Washington state, this sequel to *Eva of the Farm* tells the story of a boy whose parents have died in a rafting accident. Courage runs through this book as a dominant theme, and I love this for grieving youth. Showing up to your grief takes lots of courage, and *After the River the Sun* shows readers they can be brave in the face of loss too.

The Big Wave (Buck)

My final choice is a short classic from Pearl Buck. This story is *All About Death*. We watch a village destroyed by tsunami, and we watch as the village grieves and rebuilds. One of my favorite passages about grief in any book I've ever read comes from *The Big Wave*. (I challenge you to read it and see if you can figure out what it is!) I found Buck's portrayal of grief comforters particularly poignant. Their insight into the journey through loss informed my own as I learned how to companion my children after Rob's death. This book offers great opportunities to talk about sorrow, despair and resilience.

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