Helping Children Deal with Grief & Life-Threatening Illness
A list of resources compiled by the Children’s Library of the Akron-Summit County Public Library

Picture Books for the Grieving Younger Child

Sometimes, stepping into another’s shoes via a storybook will help and comfort a young child. This list contains suggested titles for parents and other adults to share with the grieving child. All titles are in the picture book (JE) section of the library.

Papa’s Gift
Kathleen Long Bostrom
From the moment of Clara’s birth, her special friend is her Papa Clarence. They share rocking in the old rocking chair, telling stories and playing in the snow. After Papa dies, Clara comes to understand that she can see him in her heart.

I Remember Miss Perry
Pat Brisson
When his teacher, Miss Perry, is killed in a car accident, Stevie and his elementary school classmates take turns sharing memories of her, especially her fondest wish for each day.

Grandma’s Purple Flowers
Adjoa J. Burrowes
A young girl who delights in visiting her grandma and bringing her purple flowers, is very sad when grandma dies, but with the coming of spring the girl discovers a way to remember her special loved one.

You Hold Me and I’ll Hold You
Jo Carson
When a great-aunt dies, a young child finds comfort in being held and in holding, too.

Turtle Girl
Carole Crowe
As her grandmother taught her, Magdalena continues to protect the sea turtles that nest near her home even after Grandma’s death.

The Giant
Claire Ewart
As the seasons pass on the family farm after her mother’s death, a young girl searches for the giant that her mother said would look after her.

Grandpa Never Lies
Ralph J. Fletcher
A poetic description of the special relationship between a grandfather and a young child helps to soothe the pain of Grandpa’s death.

A Season for Mangoes
Regine Hanson
Sareen is concerned about participating in her first sit-up, a Jamaican celebration of the life of her recently deceased grandmother, but discovers that sharing her stories of Nana’s passion for mangoes helps lift the sadness.

Grandma’s Gone to Live in the Stars
Max Haynes
In the moments after grandmother has passed away, her spirit is at peace as she says goodbye to her sleeping family and her home.
Kaddish for Grandpa in Jesus’ Name Amen
James Howe
Five-year-old Emily tries to understand her grandfather’s death by exploring the Christian and Jewish rituals that her family practices during and after his funeral.

That Summer
Tony Johnston
Two brothers are freed from school to fill their summer days as they choose. As they indulge in fishing, playing baseball, and catching lightning bugs, the boys discover that one of them is dying, and soon each moment becomes precious.

Remembering Grandpa
Uma Krishnaswami
When Grandma comes down with a "bad case of sadness" one year after Grandpa’s death, Daysha collects objects that will remind her grandmother of Daysha’s grandfather.

What is Heaven Like?
Beverly Lewis
Missing his grandfather who recently died, a young boy asks many people, including his teacher, his dentist, the ice-cream truck driver, and his grandmother, about heaven. Includes a Bible verse about heaven on each page, and contains a note for parents and Christian educators.

Blackberry Stew
Isabell Monk
When her Grandpa Jack dies, Hope remembers the time she went with him to pick blackberries, and she realizes that he will continue to live in her and in her memories.

Lighthouse: A Story of Remembrance
Robert Munsch
After her grandfather’s funeral, Sarah wakes her father in the middle of the night so they can go to the lighthouse her grandfather loved and remember other night-time visits there.

Flamingo Dream
Donna Jo Napoli
Grieving over her father’s death from cancer, a young girl celebrates their last year together by making a book that includes mementos and a story.

Thank You, Grandpa
Lynn Plourde
A little girl learns to appreciate nature while walking with her grandfather through the years, and remembers his lessons with love and thankfulness after his death.

Where Do People Go When They Die?
Mindy Avia Portnoy
Children ask different adults and themselves about death and receive a wide variety of answers. Includes an afterword and suggestions for parents.

The Purple Balloon
Chris Raschka
Easy-to-read text reveals that dying is hard work, for the old and especially the young, and how good it is that so many people help when a person dies, from medical staff to clergy and friends to family members.

Michael Rosen’s Sad Book
Michael Rosen
A man tells about all the emotions that accompany his sadness over the death of his son, and how he tries to cope.

In the Piney Woods
Roni Schotter
Grandpa and his granddaughter spend his last summer visiting and enjoying the pine woods near their house.

Hello Grand Mamoon!
Donna Steinmann
Tula, saddened over the death of her beloved Grandma Nellie, searches the full moon for the face of the woman her grandma used to tell her about, and is delighted and comforted when she finally sees the image her grandmother saw and called Grand Mamoon.

Together Forever
Jeannie St. John Taylor
A young girl, grieving the death of her brother, dreams that he came back to Earth again for one day.
Non-Fiction for Children and for Adults Working With Children

Many of these titles are within reach of an older child’s understanding and may be used by the child. They are also designed to be used by adults working with younger children.

Sometimes Bad Things Happen  
*Ellen Jackson* 2002  
J155.9 J12s

Let’s Talk About Going to a Funeral  
*Marianne Johnston* 1996  
J155.937 J73L

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death  
*Laurene Brown* 1996  
J155.937 B878w

Dealing With the Loss of a Loved One  
*Sara Latta* 2002  
J155.937 L364d

After You Lose Someone You Love: Advice and Insight from the Diaries of Three Kids Who’ve Been There  
*Amy Dennison* 2005  
J155.937 D411a

Gentle Willow: A Story for Children about Dying  
*Joyce Mills* 1993  
J155.939 M657g

Part of Me Died, Too: Stories of Creative Survival among Bereaved Children and Teenagers  
*Virginia Lynn Fry* 1995  
J155.937F947p

Sad Isn’t Bad: A Good Grief-Guidebook for Kids Dealing With Loss  
*Michaelene Mundy* 1998  
J155.039 M965s

When People Die  
*Sally Hewitt* 2009  
J155.937 H611w

Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children  
*Doris Stickney* 1997  
J155.937 St854w

Can You Hear Me Smiling?: A Child Grieves a Sister  
*Aariane Jackson* 2004  
J155.937 J12c

Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children  
*Bryan Mellonie* 1983  
J306.9 M527L
Non-Fiction for Adults Working With Children
From the Parent-Teacher Collection

Helping Children Grieve
Ruth Arent 2005
PT 155.93 Ar 681h

Caring For Your Grieving Child
Martha Wakenshaw 2002
PT 155.9308 W 149c

Your Grieving Child: Answers to Questions on Death and Dying
Bill Dodds 2001
PT 155.937 D642y

Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers
The Dougy Center 2003
PT 155.937 H483g

Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One: A Guide for Grownups
William Kroen 1996
PT 155.937 K93h

25 Things to Do When Grandpa Passes Away, Mom and Dad Get Divorced, Or the Dog Dies: Activities to Help Children Heal After a Loss or Change
Laurie Kanyer 2004
PT 155.937 K16t

Helping Children Cope with the Death of a Parent: A Guide for the First Year
Paddy Lewis 2004
PT 155.937 L675h

What Children Need When They Grieve: The Four Essentials: Routine, Love, Honesty, and Security
Julia Rathkey 2004
PT 155.937 R234wc

Never the Same: Coming To Terms with the Death of a Parent
Donna Schuurman 2004
PT 155.937 Sch396n 2004

35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child
The Dougy Center 2004
PT 155.937 T447 2004

Talking With Children and Young People about Death and Dying
Mary Turner 2007
PT 155.937 T949t

What about the Kids? Understanding Their Needs in Funeral Planning and Services
The Dougy Center 1999
PT 155.937 W555a
Books for Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy uses selected reading materials to assist a person in solving personal problems or for other therapeutic purposes. While not formal psychotherapy, the books listed here can provide an outlet for emotions encountered in the face of dealing with a life-threatening illness, whether that illness is that of oneself, a friend, a classmate or a family member. This list includes titles for many situations in all age levels.

Altman, Linda Singing with Momma Lou JE Ages 6-9
Nine-year-old Tamika uses photographs, school yearbooks, movie ticket stubs, and other mementos to try and restore the memory of her grandmother, who has Alzheimer’s disease.

Banks, Kate Lenny’s Space JFIC Ages 8-12
Nine-year-old Lenny gets in trouble and has no friends because he cannot control himself in school and his interests are not like those of his classmates, until he starts visiting Muriel, a counselor, and meets Van, a boy his age who has leukemia.

Cheng, Andrea Brushing Mom’s Hair JFIC Ages 10-12
A fourteen-year-old girl, whose mother's breast cancer diagnosis and treatment have affected every aspect of their lives, finds release in ballet and art classes. The story is written in a series of poems.

Christopher, Matt Shoot for the Hoop JFIC Ages 8-12
Rusty Young wants to play basketball in the summer league, but his parents object because Rusty has been diagnosed with diabetes. That is only one of the obstacles Rusty has to overcome before he can join the team.

Douglas, Mary-Kyle Clara’s Gift from the Heart JE Ages 6-9
Seven-year-old Clara decides to do something wonderful with her long hair which she finds troublesome to brush.

Hamilton, Virginia Bluish JFIC Ages 9-14
The kids at school call her Bluish because leukemia is making her pale. But when two other girls reach beyond their fear, the three begin to construct an unbreakable friendship.

Hannigan, Katherine Ida B--: And Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World JFIC Ages 9-11
In Wisconsin, fourth-grader Ida B. spends happy hours being home-schooled and playing in her family’s apple orchard, until her mother begins treatment for breast cancer and her parents must sell part of the orchard and send her to public school.

Hobbs, Valerie Defiance JFIC Ages 10-17
While vacationing in the country, eleven-year-old Toby, a cancer patient, learns some important lessons about living and dying from an elderly poet and her cow.

Hrdlitschka, Shelley Sun Signs TEEN FICTION Ages 12+
Taking online correspondence courses while she battles cancer, fifteen-year-old Kaleigh Wyse collaborates with several new cyber-friends on an astrology-themed science project and finds that electronic relationships can be deceiving.
Johnston, Tony *That Summer*  JE Ages 7-10
Two brothers are freed from school to fill their summer days as they choose. As they indulge in fishing, playing baseball, and catching lightning bugs, the boys discover that one of them is dying, and soon each moment becomes precious.

Kadohata, Cynthia *Kira-Kira*  JNBRY/JFIC Ages 10-14
Two Japanese-American sisters share a close relationship growing up in rural Georgia during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the despair when one sister becomes terminally ill.

Knowlton, Laurie *A Young Man’s Dance*  JE Ages 6-8
Grandma Ronnie’s grandson has a hard time adjusting to her needing a wheelchair, living in a nursing home, and not recognizing him when he comes to visit her, but the two find common ground in dancing.

Krisher, Trudy *Kathy’s Hats: A Story of Hope*  JFIC Ages 6-10
Kathy has always liked hats but finds a fresh use for them when she must undergo chemotherapy treatments for cancer.

Louie, Therese *Raymond’s Perfect Present*  JE Ages 4-10
When Raymond’s mother becomes sick, he remembers that she misses the living things of the country and, with the help of their neighbor, he tries to prepare the perfect present for her.

McDaniel, Lurlene *Breathless*  TEEN FICTION Ages 12+
A high school diving champion’s diagnosis of bone cancer affects not only his life, but those of his best friend, his sister, and his girlfriend.

McKinty, Adrian *The Lighthouse Land*  TEEN FICTION Ages 12+
Shortly after moving with his mother from Harlem to Ireland, teen cancer survivor Jamie O’Neill discovers a portal in a lighthouse that brings him to a distant planet, where he helps a community of aliens fight against invading warriors.

Martin, Ann *On Christmas Eve*  JHOLI Ages 9-12
Eight-year-old Tess is convinced that if she believes and stays aware of the magic around her, she will meet Santa Claus on Christmas Eve of 1958, when she will thank him for his gifts and ask him to use his magic to cure her best friend’s father of cancer.

Morgan, Nicola *Chicken Friend*  JFIC Ages 9-12
When her parents decide to move their family to the English countryside, homeschool their children, and raise chickens, Becca tries to make friends with her new neighbors by hiding her diabetes and throwing a twelfth birthday party for herself.

Negron, Ray *The Boy of Steel: A Baseball Dream Come True*  JE Ages 4-9
A young boy stricken with cancer has his dream come true when he gets to be a Yankee batboy for a day.

Nicholls, Sally *Ways to Live Forever*  JFIC Ages 9-11
Eleven-Year-Old Sam McQueen, who has leukemia, writes a book during the last three months of his life, in which he tells about what he would like to accomplish, how he feels, and things that have happened to him.
Pearce, Emily **Isabel and the Miracle Baby** JFIC Ages 8-12
Eight-year-old Isabel feels her mother no longer cares about her because she has no time or energy even to listen with Isa tries to share her sadness about being unpopular, her jealousy over her new baby sister, and, most importantly, her fear that her mother’s cancer will come back.

Oelschlager, Vanita **My Grampy Can’t Walk** JE Ages 4-9
A group of children enjoy having fun with their grandfather despite the fact that he is in a wheelchair and cannot walk.

Polacco, Patricia **The Lemonade Club** JFIC Ages 6-9
After learning that they both have cancer, Marilyn and her teacher, Miss Wichelman, support and encourage each other through their treatments.

Preller, James **Six Innings: A Game in the Life** TEEN FICTION Ages 10-14
Earl Grubb’s Pool Supplies plays Northeast Gas & Electric in the Little League championship game, while Sam, who has cancer and is in a wheelchair, has to call the play-by-play instead of participating in the game.

Richter, Jutta **Summer of the Pike** JFIC Ages 11-14
Three children who live on the grounds of a German castle spend the summer trying to catch a pike trapped in the moat, while the mother of two of the children is slowly dying of cancer.

Ries, Lori **Punk Wig** JE Ages 7-9
Tells a story of how a young boy helps to care for his mom who is going through chemotherapy, and accompanies her to the salon to purchase a wig.

Scott, Liz **Alex and the Amazing Lemonade Stand** JE Ages 3-10
Shares the true story of Alex Scott, a little girl who developed childhood cancer, and though sick herself, decided to set up a lemonade stand to earn money for her hospital to search for a cure for other children—sparking a nationwide movement.

Tinkham, Kelly **Hair for Mama** JE Ages 4-7
When Marcus’s mother has chemotherapy for her cancer and loses her hair, he tries to find new hair for her to make her well again.

Tusa, Tricia **Bunnies in My Head** JE Ages 5-7
A charming little girl joyfully explores the world—both real and imaginary—through her drawings. Artwork by some of the young patients from M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas is featured.

Urdahl, Catherine **Emma’s Question** JE Ages 5-8
When Emma’s grandmother, who takes care of her after school and takes her out for bagels on Wednesdays, gets sick and has to go the hospital, Emma is afraid that she will die—but she is also afraid to talk about her fear.

Vigna, Judith **When Eric’s Mom Fought Cancer** JE Ages 6-9
A ski trip with his father helps a young boy who feels angry and afraid when his mother gets sick with breast cancer.

Winthrop, Elizabeth **Promises** JFIC Ages 6-8
A young girl experiences a range of emotions when her mother undergoes treatment for cancer.