

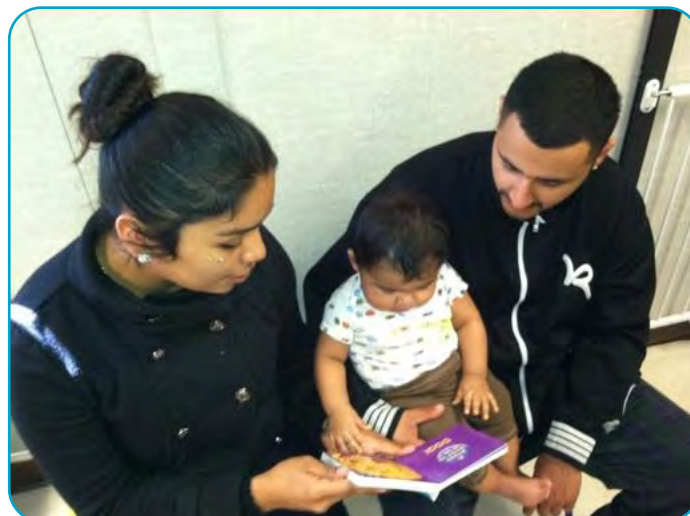
## Children's Books About Death and Grief

Tandem, Partners in Early Learning<sup>®</sup> is a nonprofit organization working towards equity and racial justice in the area of early learning and care. At Tandem, we believe that magic happens when a child and an adult gather together around a book—and a key element of our programming involves providing families with high-quality books that promote conversations that support language, literacy, and social-emotional development.

We take pride in the uncompromisingly high quality of our book collection. Consisting of 1,300 unique titles in 21 languages, Tandem's book collection tackles the diversity problem in children's literature head on: the titles in our library provide authentic, affirming representations of individuals from diverse backgrounds and many of them are in [#ownvoices](#), lifting up the work of authors and illustrators who represent the same communities as the characters they write about.



Death and grief are part of the natural life process. *And* we acknowledge that talking about it with young children can be challenging. Children who experience loss rely on adults to help them process difficult feelings. Books serve as a powerful vehicle for having the conversations needed to deal with these feelings. Books allow children a concrete reference point to make connections and talk about their own experiences. Alternatively, books can provide a safe distance to process emotions by talking about and giving advice to the characters. The following list recommends storybooks with themes of losing someone, processing overwhelming feelings, and continuing life without them. We hope that these books can serve as a powerful foundation for encouraging rich conversations that support children in dealing with grief and loss.



## [A Last Goodbye](#)

written by Elin Kelsey and illustrated by Soyeon Kim

This book explores the universality of death and explores different ways animals grieve. Featuring many animals, from parrots to lemurs to elephants to humans, this book shows that all species have rituals to mourn and help each other through tough times.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** This book shows many different ways that animals grieve. Ask your child what they do when they are sad or miss someone. Discuss the different animals and ask how the way they grieve is similar or different.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [critical thinking](#).



## [Always Remember](#)

written by Cece Meng and illustrated by Jago

This magnificent illustrated book tells the story of an old sea turtle who takes his last swim. The book serves as a memorial as each sea creature recounts all the wonderful things he did for his fellow friends. As each creature shares their fond memories, they process their grieving little by little.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** In this book, each sea creature shares their fond memories of their old turtle friend.

Ask your child what fond memories they have of their favorite person or pet who is still alive. Then ask them about a fond memory of someone who already passed away.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [relationships](#), [social interaction](#), and [critical thinking](#).



## [Grandpa's Stories: A Book of Remembering](#)

written by Joseph Coelho and Allison Colpoys

A little girl remembers the powerful bond she shares with her grandfather and recounts the stories he told her throughout the different seasons of the year. This beautiful book reminds us to cherish the memories we have of our loved ones.

**Age level:** Kindergarten

**Talking Tip:** In the story, the girl remembers her grandfather and their fond memories together. Talk about the word “remember” with your child. Ask your child if they remember a loved one (person or pet) who has moved or passed away. Take turns sharing good memories of that person or pet.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## **Grandpa's Top Threes**

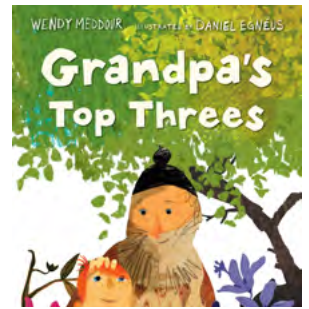
written by Wendy Meddour and illustrated by Daniel Egneus

Henry and his grandfather talk all the time. However, after his grandmother dies, the conversations with his grandfather stop. One day Henry tries to play his favorite game, "Top Three," and his grandfather suddenly starts talking again.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** The little boy learns more about his late grandmother by asking his grandfather to name his favorite three things about her. Is there someone in your family your child wants to know more about (whether they have passed away or are no longer nearby)? Ask your child what questions they would have for them. Talk about the top three things you enjoyed about that person and ask your child to do the same.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [early mathematics](#).



## **One Wave at a Time: A Story About Grief and Healing**

written by Holly Thompson and illustrated by Ashley Crowley

Kai and his family are dealing with the loss of their father. Like ocean waves, Kai's emotions surge, wane, and crash and change color. But with the support of his friends and family, his healing begins.

**Age level:** Kindergarten

**Talking Tip:** Talk to your child about the different emotions Kai feels and how they are represented by the waves. Ask your child how they would feel if they lost something or someone important. Ask them what color their emotions would be or how they would look if they were an ocean wave.

Talk with your child about what it means to support someone when they are feeling sad. Ask them how they would comfort Kai and his family if they met them.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [social interaction](#), [relationships](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## **Rosie and Crayon**

written and illustrated by Deborah Marcero

This is a story about Rosie and her dog, Crayon. Crayon and Rosie have many adventures together, but when Crayon passes away, Rosie's colorful days change. Until one day, when she helps someone else who is missing their pet and learns a powerful lesson.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** Each page features a different adventure Rosie and Crayon had together. On each page, ask the child what Rosie and Crayon are doing and how each of them may feel while doing it. Ask your child what they would say to Rosie to comfort her when she misses Crayon.

If your child has also experienced a loss of a pet or loved one and is okay talking about it, ask them what activities they liked to do together and how it made them feel. Ask your child how they can make themselves feel better when they are missing their loved one.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## [The Boy and the Gorilla](#)

written by Jackie Azúa and illustrated by Cindy Derby

To deal with his mother's death, a young boy imagines a friend to help him through his grief: a gorilla. The gorilla guides the boy through questions about death, sadness, and loss, emphasizing that talking to someone might be the thing that helps most.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** Look through the pages and ask your child what they see. Ask your child to identify different feelings by looking at the facial expressions of the characters.

This book shares many questions children have about death and loss. Ask your child if they have any more questions they would like to talk about.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [relationships](#), [social interaction](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## [The Goodbye Book](#)

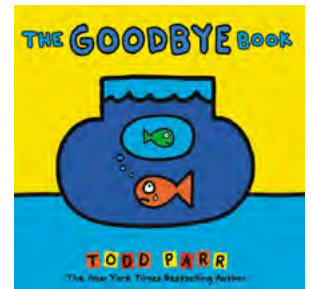
written and illustrated by Todd Parr

Through the perspective of a fish who loses his friend, this book discusses the different feelings people experience after losing a loved one and how to keep the memory of that person alive. It reminds us that it is okay not to have all the answers, and that someone is always there to love and support us even when times are tough.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** This book talks about feelings we experience when we say goodbye. Ask your child how they think the fish feels after losing his friend. Ask your child if they have ever felt sad after saying goodbye to someone important. Talk about how these feelings are different or similar to the ones mentioned in the book.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to discuss [sense of self](#) and [relationships](#).



## [The Invisible String](#)

written by Patrice Karst and illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff

The human experience means having connections with families, friends, and community. This book discusses the metaphor of an invisible string we have, to connect to those we love and care for, no matter where they are. This tangible metaphor helps children to understand the concept of connections and the bond people have with each other.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** Talk about the invisible string in the book. Ask your child to whom the string connects. Then, ask your child to whom their invisible string connects. Help them by asking who their favorite person or best friend is, and who loves them or cares for them. Explain that the feelings they have for these people are like an "invisible string."

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [relationships](#), [social interaction](#), and [critical thinking](#).





## [The Memory Box: A Book About Grief](#)

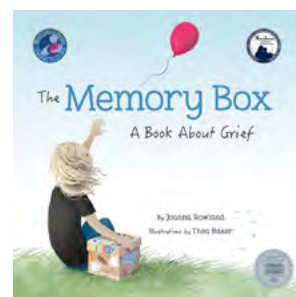
written by Joanna Rowland and illustrated by Thea Baker

Told from a young child's perspective, this book is about remembering someone who is no longer there. To process the loss of a loved one, a young child creates a memory box with keepsakes to remember her loved one. This book encourages a child to think about anyone they have lost, from a family member to a pet, and ways to keep memories of them. A parent guide in the back of the book offers information on supporting a child to manage feelings of loss and grief.

**Age level:** Preschool

**Talking Tip:** The child in this book keeps a memory box of keepsakes to help her remember someone she has lost. Talk to your child about the memories they have of something or someone they have lost. If possible, create a memory box with things that remind your child of that person, pet, or thing. The child can draw pictures, use photos, or find things that may represent something about that person to put in the box.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## [The Yellow Suitcase](#)

written by Meera Sriram and illustrated by Meera Sethi

Asha visits her grandmother in India every summer. This time, she is struck with grief after finding that her grandmother has passed away. The yellow suitcase which her grandmother filled with gifts to take back and forth to California sits empty. However, one day Asha finds a special gift her grandmother left for her. Asha learns a valuable lesson that no matter where she is, her grandmother's memory will always be present.

**Age level:** Early Elementary

**Talking Tip:** After her grandmother dies, Asha's parents offer prayer. Talk about the traditions your family practices after someone dies. Ask your child how they are similar or different to what Asha's family does.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [sense of self](#) and [relationships](#), and [social interaction](#).



## [Why Do Things Die?](#)

written by Katie Daynes and illustrated by Christine Pym

This lift-the-flap book features questions and answers about death and grieving. It explains why some things die and some don't, things we do when someone dies, helpful things to do when feeling sad after losing someone, and how to remember people who have passed away.

**Age level:** Toddlers

**Talking Tip:** Have you ever had a plant die or experienced the death of a pet?

Ask your child what they know about the words "death" or "die," and ask them for examples of things that can die. As you go through each flap, ask your child what they notice and understand and invite them to ask questions.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [relationships](#), [social interaction](#), and [vocabulary](#).



# Teaching Tips Glossary

## Kindergarten Readiness Skill

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### Definition

#### **Critical Thinking**

The ability to use information and skills in a variety of ways to solve problems prepares children to handle complex tasks in academic areas including math, science, and reading. We can foster this skill by encouraging children to answer questions and make predictions as we read together.

#### **Early Mathematics**

A foundation in early math prepares children for “math thinking” and for later academic success. Early Math includes number sense, classifications and patterning, measurement, mathematical reasoning, and geometry (shapes). A good “math storybook” will include elements of these foundations. Counting together, pointing out numbers in print, identifying shapes, and using relational language (bigger, smaller, close, far) are all ways to develop a child’s early math skills while sharing a book together.

#### **Phonological Awareness**

A child’s ability to recognize the prosody or “music” of a language and to notice, think about, and manipulate the individual sounds in words is an important early literacy skill. Rhyming books and songs are great tools for developing this skill and laying the groundwork for “sounding words out” when learning to read.

#### **Print Awareness**

Before they can begin the process of learning to read, young children must become comfortable with holding and handling books and identifying letters and words in print. When we focus children’s attention on the printed words we are reading, they begin to recognize that those symbols have sounds and meanings. Asking children to help turn pages and hold a book is also a great way to foster print awareness and build confidence.

#### **Relationships**

Children need to build healthy attachments to parents, caregivers, and close friends. This includes understanding how to respect and keep boundaries, as well as express care and love for others.

#### **Self-Regulation**

Read alouds that engage children in structured movement games and verbal participation help develop the ability to manage impulses and ignore distractions without stifling creativity or motivation. The better a child can stay calmly focused and alert, the better they will be at handling more complex tasks and working cooperatively with others.

#### **Sense of Self**

When children are aware of their own thoughts and feelings, they are better able to communicate their needs and ideas to other people. A deeper understanding of themselves supports children in recognizing the emotions and perspectives of others and allows for empathy. A strong sense of self gives children confidence in their ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, which builds their enthusiasm and motivation for learning.

#### **Social Interaction**

In order to be a thriving member of society, children must learn how to form healthy relationships with others, including familiar adults and peers. Knowing how to interact socially supports children in learning how to function within a group through cooperation and responsibility.

#### **Vocabulary**

Young children are developmentally equipped with an incredible memory for learning new words. The more words they hear at this age, the more they will begin to develop broader vocabularies. A strong vocabulary allows children to express themselves more accurately and improves reading comprehension.