

A Note to Parents
Sharon Stein McNamara, Ed.D.
Licensed Psychologist

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I hope you have enjoyed reading *The Dragonfly Door* as much as I and my children have. I am a child psychologist, and here are a few things to think about when you read this book to your child.

When a child has experienced the death of a person close to them

Loss, death, and coping with grief are normal experiences that every human being has to deal with, eventually, in life. However, sometimes children are touched by the presence of death at a very young age. When a child experiences the death of someone they are very close to, such as a parent, grandparent, or sibling, it will change his or her life profoundly. Think of the death as a wound that will heal; it is like a scar that changes and fades with time, still reminding us of the original pain. The loss will be understood differently as the child ages, and may be processed or remembered differently as the child grows in maturity. Children cope with loss according to the cognitive and emotional abilities of their age and stage of development. Therefore, a preschooler will understand loss in a different way than an adolescent.

Just as a wound needs to be cleaned and attended to in order to heal, the most important thing for your child is to be able to talk about and remember the person that they loved. Just as with any traumatic event, the first thing most people want to do is to avoid thinking or remembering what happened. However, it is important that the child not feel as though the subject is “off limits.” Do not try to force the child to talk about the loss, but say things like, “I feel sad, and I miss grandpa. What are your feelings?” If the child sees and hears that it is okay to talk about the loss, he or she will eventually start sharing thoughts and feelings as well.

It is most important that the main caregiver in the child’s life take the responsibility to tell the child the truth about the loss in plain language. It is important not to lie to the child about the loss. Tell the truth in a way that conveys information so that the child can understand. For example, do not say, “Daddy went to sleep.” Say something more like, “Daddy’s body is no longer alive. He is dead. He won’t ever wake up again, and his body is going to be buried.” If you have a spiritual belief about life after death, tell the child what you believe. This allows children to move toward the acceptance of the loss, instead of being confused and wondering why he doesn’t wake up.

The healthiest way for anyone to cope with loss is to be able to express their feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, or fear, with others who knew and loved the person. This also allows the love and good memories of the person who has died to be acknowledged as a part of the child’s experience.

It is important to let the child who is affected by loss know that there are loving people who will watch over and care for the child’s needs. It is important to allow for ways for the child to

express his or her feelings of grief. One way is to have a ritual on the death day or birthday of the person who has died. Another is for the child to draw a picture or write a letter to the person who has died and to allow for the child to remember and think about the person. *The Dragonfly Door* is a book that can open up the opportunity to talk about the loss with your child.

Tips on reading this book with your child

The Dragonfly Door is written so that you, the parent or caregiver, can help your child understand the concept of death from a variety of perspectives. Some adults may read the book and help the child understand that just as Lea changed from a nymph to a dragonfly in a special place, death is a mystery that we don't understand. Others may read the book and bring in the concept of heaven, or dragonflies as a symbol of transformation. What is most important is that as a caregiver for a grieving child that you allow the child to talk about his or her experience of the loss, and how it feels.

Another important concept from the story is that Nym felt guilty about having a disagreement with Lea before she disappeared, and Nym worried that this might have caused Lea to leave. Many children have fears or worries that they are responsible for the loss of the loved one. It is important to help the child understand what the cause of the death really was, so that they do not hang on to negative beliefs about being responsible for the death of the loved one.

When to get extra help

Occasionally children may need extra help in dealing with the loss of a person they loved. Talk to your child and find out if your child needs extra help in coping with the loss. Signs to look for are if your child has thoughts of wanting to be dead to join the loved one who has died. Another warning sign is if the child is so fearful, angry, or depressed that he or she cannot participate in daily activities, such as school. It is normal for the child to have occasional upsets of crying, anger or fear. It is problematic if the feelings of grief are constant or do not get better over time. If your child shows these symptoms, you may want to consider consulting your pediatrician, finding a family grief support group, or consulting a child psychologist for your child.

Sincerely,

Sharon Stein McNamara, Ed.D.
Licensed Psychologist

Below are some references to help support your child's grieving process.

Reference List

Guiding your child through grief. By Mary Ann Emswiler, M.A., M.P.S., and James P. Emswiler, M.A., M.Ed. (Bantam Books: New York, 2000).

How do we tell the children: A step-by-step guide for helping children two to teen cope when someone dies. By Dan Schaeffer, Ph.D., and Christine Lyons. (Newmarketpress: New York, 2001).

The grieving child: A parent's guide. By Helen Fitzgerald (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1992)

Website Support

The Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families www.dougy.org

Other Resources for Teachers and Professionals:

- 1) Loss and Grief Lesson Plan K-3 ([Open PDF](#)) / ([Open HTML](#))
- 2) Science and Life Cycle Lesson Plan K-2 ([Open PDF](#)) / ([Open HTML](#))
- 3) Considerations when Adapting Book into a Play ([Open PDF](#)) / ([Open HTML](#))

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