



Recommended Books

Our professional child life staff recommend the following books to help you and your children through illness.

Books for Parents

- **[A Tiny Boat At Sea](#)** by Izetta Smith, M.A.
 - This book is for parents, caregivers, and professionals helping children in their adjustments to the cancer diagnosis of an adult family member.
- **[Cancer in Our Family](#)** by Sue Heiney PhD, RN & Joan Hermann, MSW, LSW (2013)
 - A comprehensive book published through the American Cancer Society, this publication offers information for parents and activities to help children cope.
- **[How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness](#)** by Kathleen McCue, M.A., C.C.L.S. & Ron Bonn (1994)
 - Kathleen McCue offers a broader view of parenting children through any parental illness and provides guidance for parents on supporting their children and helping them cope with the many challenges and changes illness brings.
- **[Kids Worry Too](#)** by The Nebraska Medical Center
 - A free PDF guide for adults to help children understand a hospitalization. Interventions to increase coping and examples of feelings and behaviors that may be expressed during a hospitalization.
- **[What Do I Tell the Kids?](#)** by Cancer Support Community
 - A free PDF guide overviewing children's understanding through different age groups, how to talk about cancer and tips for answering common questions.
- **[When a Parent has Cancer: A Guide to Caring for Your Children](#)** by Wendy S. Harpham, M.D. (2004)
 - This book for families, offers clear, direct, and sympathetic advice to parents trying to raise healthy children while fighting a potentially

life-threatening illness. sympathetic advice to parents trying to raise healthy children while fighting a potentially life-threatening illness.

Books for Children

Preschool Children (2-6 years old)

- **Let My Colors Out** by Courtney Filigenzi (2009)
 - Helps children identify their feelings and form a rainbow of hope through a parents diagnosis. This book helps children realize they are not alone and can help open up channels of communication between parents and their children.
- **Sammy's Mom Has Cancer** by Sherry Kohlenberg (1993)
 - Written by Sherry Kohlenberg, a mother of an 18-month old son, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, this story helps young children understand and accept the changes in their lives when a parent is diagnosed with cancer.
- **Someone I Love is Sick: Helping Very Young Children Cope with Cancer in the Family** by Kathleen McCue (2009)
 - Someone I Love is Sick is a customizable tool to use when talking with children ages 2-6 years old about a parent or grandparent who has cancer. It addresses all stages of the cancer journey including diagnosis, treatment, hospitalization, recurrence and end of life. The tool can be used by families and health care professionals.

School-age Children (5-10 years old)

- **Butterfly Kisses and Wishes on Wings** by Ellen McVicker (2006)
 - Ellen McVicker shares the story of a young boy who learns about his mother's cancer and finds hope and strength.
- **I Wonder What It's Like When a Parent Has Cancer: Max's Story** by Jacquelyn Rebeck, illustrated by Anna Boxall (2023)
 - The first book in the Wonders & Worries Book Series. This story follows a boy, Max, as he learns about and copes with his dad's cancer diagnosis. Strategies for sharing information with Max and his sister about cancer are brought to light. Max explores common feelings and questions throughout the book, and challenging points in the story are supported with "helpers" and coping ideas that assist Max along the way.

- **Nowhere Hair** by Sue Glader (2010)
 - This story focuses on hair loss in a fun, non-threatening way. Using rhyme and colorful illustrations, it provides honest information about cancer and hair loss.
- **Our Mom Has Cancer** by Abigail & Adrienne Ackermann (2001)
 - Sisters Abigail and Adrienne Ackermann, ages 11 and 13, describe what it was like for them when their mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery and chemotherapy.
- **The Cancer That Wouldn't Go Away** by Hadassa Field (2012)
 - Written especially for the child whose parent is living with metastatic cancer. This sensitively written tale uses a gentle, yet realistic approach to help children ages 4-10 face the unique uncertainties of life with incurable cancer. Unlike stories about early-stage cancer, after which the parent is cured and life goes back to normal, for the family in this story, life has irrevocably changed. The future is uncertain. But love and laughter remain constant, as they take life one day at a time.
- **The Hope Tree** by Laura Numeroff & Wendy Harpham, M.D. (1999)
 - This book is a compilation of stories from children whose mothers have breast cancer. The children describe life in their family from the time of diagnosis through treatment.
- **The Invisible Backpack: A Boy's Story About Huntington's** by Amber Cervantes (2025)
 - The Invisible Backpack is a gentle and compassionate story about a young boy whose father is living with Huntington's disease. When Jaxon starts noticing changes in his dad, sad expressions, clumsy moments, or forgetfulness, he begins to wonder if it's somehow his fault. But with his mom's loving guidance, Jaxon learns that his dad has a genetic condition that affects the brain, and most importantly, that it is not Jaxon's fault.
- **The Rainbow Feelings of Cancer** by Carrie Martin & Chia Martin (2001)
 - This book invites children to share their thoughts, feelings, and questions when a life-threatening illness has touched a parent or someone they love. Written and illustrated by a mother and daughter experiencing their own diagnosis of cancer, it is appropriate for preschool to elementary-age children.
- **What Happens When Someone I Love Doesn't Feel Good: A Book About Chronic or Terminal Illness That Won't Go Away** by Sara Olsher and Jenni Rogers

- Explaining a chronic or terminal illness to a kid is hard. Medical terms are difficult to understand as adults, but figuring out how to translate them into kidspeak can be next to impossible. Join Mia and Stuart as they learn how bodies work, why some bodies don't always feel good, and what to do when someone they love has an illness that won't go away. Help kids learn to manage their expectations and cope with disappointment and big feelings. This groundbreaking book approaches a difficult topic with humor and honesty.
- **What Happens When Someone I Love Has Cancer? Explain the Science of Cancer and How a Loved One's Diagnosis and Treatment Affects a Kid's Day-To-Day Life** by Sara Olsher
 - Join Mia and her stuffed giraffe Stuart as they explain the science of cancer and how a loved one's diagnosis and treatment affects a kid's day-to-day life. *What Happens When Someone I Love Has Cancer?* uses bright and fun illustrations to show how cells can turn into cancer, and helps reduce confusion about how cancer treatment affects a person and the kids in their lives. A helpful book for families that want to explain what cancer actually is and how it affects a kid's life, and applies to mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, and many types of cancer, including breast cancer, colon cancer, blood cancers such as leukemia, and bone cancers.
- **When Eric's Mom Fought Cancer** by Judith Vigna (1993)
 - Judith Vigna shares the story of a young boy's ski trip with his father when he feels angry and afraid about his mother's diagnosis with breast cancer.
- **When Mommy Had a Mastectomy** by Nancy Reuben Greenfield (2016)
 - A children's book that explains in a simple and clear manner what a mastectomy and reconstruction are all about. It tells the story of a mother and daughter discovering new ways to show they care despite the painful illness of breast cancer and subsequent breast reconstruction surgery.
- **When Pete's Dad Got Sick** by Kathleen Long Bostrom (2004)
 - A story about a dad who has an illness that impacts his energy level and the use of his legs. He uses a cane and a wheelchair. The illness is never named and the book could apply to a variety of chronic conditions including multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue, etc. The story does have a Christian focus and references prayer, God, and the Bible but the pages with Christian references could be skipped.
- **Why Does Mommy Hurt?** by Elizabeth Christy (2014)
 - A young boy shares his journey learning about Mom's illness. This story puts the power into the hands of children learning about coping and understanding an illness. This book works for a wide variety of illnesses

associated with chronic pain such as fibromyalgia and autoimmune disease.

Pre-Teens and Early Teens (10-13 years old)

- **Can I Still Kiss You?** by Neil Russell (2001)
 - In a question-and-answer format, Neil Russell deals with questions frequently asked by children and adolescents about cancer. It is both an informative narrative and an interactive journal.
- **Nana, What's Cancer?** by Beverlye H. Fead & Tessa M. Hamermesh (2009)
 - This tale captures the questions of a young teen girl as she asks her grandmother about her cancer. The book provides honest answers to her questions and addresses questions related to recurrent cancer.
- **The Year My Mother Was Bald** by Ann Speltz (2002)
 - Written as a diary from a 13-year-old girl's perspective during the year her mother went through cancer treatment, this book provides a helpful teaching tool for discussing cancer cells, surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. It includes separate teaching pages appropriate for pre-teens and teens.

Teens (13 years and older)

- **Both Sides Now** by Ruth Pennebaker (2000)
 - As the control of Liza's once predictable high school life unravels, she sees her mother's courage facing recurring breast cancer in a whole new light.
- **My Parent Has Cancer and It Really Sucks** by Maya & Mark Silver (2013)
 - Written by 15 year-old Maya whose Mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011. Provides practical guidance including how to talk about the diagnosis, outlets for stress, friends, school, and therapy.

Books for Stress & Coping

These books introduce children and teens to the concept of stress and the mind, body and spirit connections. They lead children and teens, along with adults, through a variety of coping strategies including belly breathing, positive self-talk, positive imagery, aromatherapy and acupuncture.

- **A Terrible Thing Happened** by Margaret M. Holmes & Sasha J. Mudlaff (2000)
 - Ages 4 to 8
 - This book follows Sherman after he sees something terrible happen. He becomes anxious and angry, but when a caring adult helps him talk about these emotions, he feels better.
- **Be the Boss of Your Stress** by Timothy Culbert, M.D. & Rebecca Kajander, C.P.N.P., M.P.H. (2007)
 - Ages 5 years to adult
 - Timothy Culber and Rebecca Kajander speak to kids ages 8 and up with the following message: When your body, mind, and spirit are balanced – or working together – they can help you stay healthy and positive, even when you are dealing with stress.
- **Don't Pop Your Cork on Mondays!** by Adolf J. Moser (1988)
 - Ages 5 to 10 years
 - Adolf J. Moser explores the causes and effects of stress and offers children practical approaches and techniques for dealing with stress in daily life.
- **Moody Cow Meditates** by Kerry Lee MacLean (2009)
 - Ages 5-10
 - Introduces children to a fun playful way of meditation and learning how to let go of frustrations.
- **The Bear is Not There: A Book About the Nervous System + Coping Strategies** by Sara Olsher (2022)
 - When a parent is ill or injured children's nervous systems respond in various ways. Explaining the science of our nervous system takes the confusion out of big feelings and huge emotional experiences, which makes it easier for kids to feel a sense of control over their emotions. This is important book is the second in Mighty + Bright's highly anticipated "Emotions" series, and introduces the science of the nervous system and the concept of developing coping skills.
- **The Rhino Who Swallowed a Storm** by LeVar Burton and Susan Schaefer Bernardo (2014)
 - In this poetic book-within-a-book, a caring rhinoceros is overwhelmed by a storm that sweeps away everything he loves. Swallowing the storm just makes him feel worse, so Rhino sets off on a whimsical journey toward healing. Along the way, he meets many friends, including a kind spider, a brave kangaroo, a wise tortoise, and an uplifting whale. With their help, Rhino lets go of the storm inside and learns to see the light in a world turned gray. This story helps address our natural instinct to protect our

loved ones and hold things inside while providing insight to the challenges that causes and the benefits of emotional release.

Books About End of Life

Adults

- [**Dying to Know: Straight Talk About Death and Dying**](#) by Tani Bahti (2006)
 - Introduces children to a fun playful way of meditation and learning how to let go of frustrations.
- [**What Will I Tell the Children**](#) by The Nebraska Medical Center
 - Free PDF pamphlet about helping a child cope with a death. Goes through different age stages and their understanding of death with interventions to help increase processing and understanding.

Preschool Children (2-6 years old)

- [**The Invisible String**](#) by Patrice Karst (2000)
 - A story that teaches of the tie that really binds. The Invisible String reaches from heart to heart helping overcome loneliness or separation.
- [**The Kissing Hand for Chester Raccoon**](#) by Audrey Penn (2014)
 - This book tells the story of a baby raccoon who does not want to leave his mother for the first day of school. His mother shares the secret of the Kissing Hand with him so he can find comfort every day.
- [**Wherever You Are, My Love Will Find You**](#) by Nancy Tillman (2012)
 - This is a beautiful story about how love is something that we can carry with us always, no matter how near, far, young or old we are. Tillman focuses on a parent's unending love for their child.

School-age Children (5-13 years old)

- [**Gentle Willow: A Story for Children About Dying**](#) by Joyce C. Mills (2003)
 - This is a comforting story about a tender-spirited tree who is dying, and her relationship with her friends in the forest. A healing metaphor, it addresses feelings of sadness, love, disbelief and anger, and provides children with a transformational way of viewing death and dying. This is a helpful book for beginning conversations with children about a loved one who is facing the end of their life.

- **[What Happens When Someone I Love Can't Get Better: A Book to Prepare and Cope with End of Life](#)** by Jenni Rogers and Sara Olsher
 - Millions of families, when faced with a shortened life expectancy, struggle with how to talk to their kids about it. We don't want to take away their innocence or end their childhood. How do we have this conversation in a way that isn't devastating or super scary? We start by making it make sense, from a scientific point of view. Join Mia and her stuffed giraffe Stuart as they explain how bodies work and what happens when important body parts aren't able to do their jobs anymore. What Happens When Someone I Love Can't Get Better uses bright and engaging illustrations to explain what keeps bodies alive and helps reduce confusion about why bodies die.

Teens (13 years and older)

- **[A Teen's Guide to Coping: When a Loved One is Sick and Preparing to Die](#)** by Fairview Hospice (2003)
 - Fairview Hospice's booklet is for teenagers who have a loved one who is very sick and facing the end of their life. It provides answers to common questions facing teens, focuses on positive ways to cope, and provides information about what to expect in terms of feelings and grief. The booklet also provides space for teens to write and draw to express their emotions and capture memories.

Books About Bereavement

Adults

- **[Men Don't Cry... Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief](#)** by Kenneth J. Doka & Terry L. Martin (1999)
 - Emphasizes many ways to cope with grief and offers readers a refreshing change from the popular gender stereotypes of grief. Looks at grief patterns and theories of grief, patterns of coping that may influence grief and interventions on how to be effective with different types of grievers.

Preschool Children (2-6 years old)

- **[I Miss You: A First Look at Death](#)** by Pat Thomas (2001)

- This book helps young children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have following a loved one's death.

School-age Children (5-13 years old)

- **[How I Feel: A Coloring Book for Grieving Children](#)** by Alan D. Wolfelt Ph.D. (1996)
 - Wolfelt's coloring book for children explores many of the feelings grieving children often experience and the simple text accompanying the drawings provides grieving children with words to describe their new, sometimes scary feelings.
- **[Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children](#)** by Bryan Mellonie & Robert Ingpen (1983)
 - This sensitive book is a useful tool in explaining to children that death (including the loss of pets) is a part of life and that, eventually, all living things reach the end of their own special lifetimes.
- **[What's Heaven?](#)** by Maria Shriver & Sandra Speidel (1999)
 - Through a grandmother's death, Maria Shriver and Sandra Speidel discuss how parents can start talking to their children about death.
- **[When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death](#)** by Laurie Brown & Marc Brown (1996)
 - This guide explains what it means to be alive and what it means to die. Appropriate for preschool- and elementary-age children, Laurie and Marc Brown also cover the importance of the funeral and other aspects of loss, including feelings that young children may experience at these times.
- **[Badger's Parting Gifts](#)** by Susan Varley (1984)
 - In this book, animals share memories of their friend, Badger, after he dies. The special things the animals learned from Badger continue to live on through them.
- **[The Brightest Star](#)** by Kathleen Hemery & Ron Boldt (1998)
 - The Brightest Star tells the story of a little girl grieving the death of her mother. She finds comfort in looking for the brightest star in the sky to remind her of her mother's love.

Teens (13 years and older)

- **[Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for Teenagers Experiencing a Loss](#)** by Enid Traisman (1992)
 - This journal allows teens to write letters, note lyrics, create songs and finish conversations with the loved one who died in a creative way.
- **[Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss](#)** by Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen (2004)
 - In this book, Grand has suffered a big loss in her life and is cooking up her own unique batch of Tear Soup for her own grief process.

Books About Parenting

- **[Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain](#)** by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. (2015)
 - Dr. Siegel shows parents how to turn one of the most challenging developmental periods in their children's lives into one of the most rewarding.
- **[Parenting from the Inside Out](#)** by Dan Siegel & Mary Hartzell (2013)
 - In Parenting from the Inside Out, child psychiatrist Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and early childhood expert Mary Hartzell, M.Ed., explore the extent to which our childhood experiences shape the way we parent.
- **[Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child](#)** by John Gottman, Ph.D. (1998)
 - This book is a guide to teaching children to understand and regulate their emotional world.
- **[The 5 Love Languages of Children](#)** by Gary Chapman & Ross Campbell (2016)
 - This book helps young children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them.
- **[The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers](#)** by Gary Chapman (2016)
 - This book helps teens understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them.
- **[The Explosive Child](#)** by Ross W. Greene, Ph.D. (2010)
 - Explosive kids are lacking some crucial skills in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving, and they require a different approach to parenting. Throughout this compassionate, insightful, and practical book, Dr. Greene provides a new conceptual framework for understanding their difficulties, based on research in the neurosciences.

