

# Using picture books to explore bereavement

Activities to support children through grief and loss using books

**Age 3-13**

**CFE Early to Third Levels**

**Resource created by Child Bereavement UK**

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## About this resource

With all our resources, we highly recommend that you **read the book before using it with your class** and use your best judgement on whether teaching about this topic is appropriate for the children you work with.

It is important to use the real words such as “dead” and “died”. Euphemisms including “lost” or “gone to sleep” may seem kinder but can lead to confusion for a child.

Personal experiences of bereavement will have an impact when talking about death and grief; even the most experienced professional can be affected emotionally. It is important to be prepared for this and to recognise when you need support for yourself. We also advise schools to inform parents or carers in advance as this can be an emotive subject and it gives an opportunity to enquire about a child’s previous experience of death, so they can be supported in the lessons.

This resource uses three picture books: *The Memory Tree*, *The Garden of Hope* and *No Matter What*, are used as a basis for activities which develop the understanding of death and the feelings of grief.

Each activity has a specific focus – memories, worries, listening – although they are

all designed to encourage a wider use of emotional language, to learn new skills and to build resilience. This resource pack was created by [Child Bereavement UK](#). They provide excellent resources to support bereavement in school, including [the Elephant's Tea Party](#) resources and their [schools information pack](#).

## ***The Memory Tree***

### **Remembering activity**

HWB 0-04a/1-04a/2-04a/3-04a, HWB 0-07a/1-07a/2-07a/3-07a

Resources required:

- *The Memory Tree* by Britta Teckentrup
- Illustrations and text from the book (for each group)
- Recording sheet template (copied)
- Empty box, cartons or bottles,
- Optional: decorating materials, coloured pencils, pens

Read the book and make sure the children understand that Fox has died (use the word “dead” or “died”). Explore the feelings of the animals when they ‘...*sat in silence for a very long time.*’

Check the children’s understanding of the word “grief” and/or “grieving” and what it means. What does it feel like? Discuss emotions of grief – sad, angry, shocked, lonely. (Refer to examples of similar feelings which the children can relate to – lost or broken possession, special person going away) When you are sad, where do you feel it in your body?

Develop the emotional language of grief (frustration, anxiety, feelings of helpless/numb etc.) You could use [Worksheet 2 on page 12](#) to support this. Where in your body do you feel these emotions? Draw outline of body and label.

### **Remembering fox**

In groups, give pupils pictures and/or text from the book referring to the animals remembering Fox. Choose one animal's memory of Fox and draw a picture of it.

Use [Worksheet 1 on page 11](#) to show the animals' memories of Fox, a feeling this relates to and create a simple symbol to represent it (e.g. Owl – leaf shape).

Ask the questions, 'When they are remembering Fox, do the animals still feel grief?', 'How do memories of Fox help the animals?' Encourage discussions about how memories make us feel – thinking back to a happy, fun or exciting time; remembering someone's kindness/love; understanding that memories can be kept forever but not recreated.

Develop the understanding that memories are a way for the animals to maintain their relationship with Fox; explain that we make new memories every day; look ahead to something exciting, fun or new.

Ask the question, 'What do we know about Fox?' and 'How do we know this?' Allow the children to share their ideas about Fox as being "kind" and "helpful", giving examples.

## Extension activities

### **Own memories**

Pupils think of a special memory – prompt ideas (use pictures/photographs for younger pupils) – family days, fun with friends, birthdays, festivals, school trips. Draw a picture and/or write about the special memory – Who was there? Why was it special? What exactly can you remember? Pupils put this representation of their memory into a bottle or box to be saved and "treasured".

### **Memory box for fox**

In groups or as a class, pupils create a special memory box by decorating a box, packet or tub then filling it with special pictures, messages and items to remember Fox.

Draw pictures based on the animals' special memories of Fox, paint pictures of Fox, collect leaves or grasses to remember the fun Fox had with his friends, write messages to Fox, create images of Fox's animal friends, cut pictures out of a magazine which show the fun times that Fox had with his friends.

You could also write poems about Fox, decorate stones or pebbles, collect items which might mean something to Fox, write a letter to Fox from one of his animal friends.



## Poetry

Pupils chose some of their special memories and write a poem called 'I remember when...' where the lines always start:

- I remember when...
- This made me feel...

Create a printed template with the start of each line already included for them to fill in their own words or add pictures/cut out images from magazines or booklets.

You could also write a poem based on 'I remember when...This made me feel...' using memories which have different feelings/emotions attached to them to add

variety to the poem. Use a Thesaurus to develop the emotional language used.

You could take some time to discuss is it okay to laugh and have fun when remembering and grieving?

## ***The Garden of Hope***

### **Sorting our worries activity**

HWB 0-01a/1-01a/2-01a/3-01a, HWB 0-03a/1-03a/2-03a/3-03a

Resources required:

- *The Garden of Hope* by Isobel Otter and Katie Rewse
- Scrap paper
- Guatemalan worry dolls information
- Paper
- Optional wool, pipe cleaners, hoop

Explain that Maya is grieving; explore what this means and who has died. In the story, some of the characters have worries. What do you worry about?

1. Each pupil chooses one of these worries and writes it down onto a piece of scrap paper without using any names (one worry per piece of paper).
2. They screw the papers up and throw them into a target area (hoop, opposite side of room, empty bowl/bucket).
3. Pupils take turns to open and read out the worries, creating a class or group list.
4. Common and shared worries are identified and discussed.

### **How do worries feel?**

How do you feel when you have a worry? Where do you feel this? What can you do when you have a worry? Put a large piece of paper on each table and ask the pupils to come up with as many ideas as they can for people, strategies or things which can help when you have a worry.

Model ideas of what could help – tell someone, ask for help, talk to a teacher, take deep breaths/use a strategy, have a hug, do something fun etc. Make a poster of things to help when you have a worry.

What do you think Maya worried about? Why do you think that?

These could reference events or worries indicated in the book but could also be worries for any child. You could ask, 'Does Maya worry about her friends at school?', 'Does she worry about doing her homework/learning her spellings/going to clubs?'

What does Maya do when she has a worry? How does this help? When do you need to speak to an adult about a worry?

### **Guatemalan worry dolls**

According to legend, children in Guatemala tell their worries and fears to the Worry Dolls and place them under their pillow when they go to sleep at night. The doll looks after the worry or problem during the night, so the child can sleep peacefully. Remind the pupils that if they have big worries then they should talk to a trusted adult.

Make some worry dolls which could be:

- Paper cut out paper chain people (pupils write worries onto each one)
- Pom-pom pets (easier to make for younger children)
- Woollen tassel people
- Pipe cleaner worry dolls
- Create a display of worry dolls – sharing some of the things that members of the class worry about, with some strategies and helpful ways to minimise the worry and understanding when to get help







Easy to make pom poms:



Wind wool around a piece of cardboard with a slit cut into it.



Tie a piece of wool securely around the middle then snip the top and bottom.



Slide the pom-pom out of the card and add any features.

## ***No Matter What***

### Listening ears activity

HWB 0-01a/1-01a/2-01a/3-01a

Resources required:

- *No Matter What* by Debi Gliori
- Illustrations from the story (on board or printed onto paper for tables)

At the beginning of the story, Small is feeling “grim and dark” what does this mean?

Pupils discuss these feelings and link them to Small’s actions, ‘...*toss and fling and squash...*’ identifying Small’s feelings of anger. They could draw a picture of what angry looks like for them.

Pupils show feelings of anger using their body language only. Can you tell if



someone is angry? Develop the language of anger, how does it feel when you are angry and what sort of thing you might do when you feel angry?

### **Calming down**

Small calms down when he talks to Large about his worries. Ask the pupils, 'Why is it important to talk about things which make you angry or worried?', 'Who could you talk to?' Identify trusted adults in school. When someone talks, it is important to listen very carefully.

Pupils create a mind map style picture with themselves at the centre showing all the people who can listen to them – include school adults and trusted family members.

Using illustrations of the story on the board (or sheets on tables), put children into pairs. Each pupil chooses their favourite picture and tells their partner which one they chose and why (limit the time 30 secs/1 minute). The "listener" may not speak until the end and they can ask one question.

Partners swap over and the other person shares. Partners then change around so they all have a new partner, and they must share their original partner's choice. The new people check back to see if the information they received was correct.

Reflect on the activity, is it difficult to keep quiet and listen? Did you want to interrupt? Why is it important to listen carefully?

How could you tell if your partner was listening to you? What made it easier to listen? What makes a good listener? What skills do you need to be a good listener? Can you learn to be a good listener?

### **Further resources**

#### Recommended by Child Bereavement UK

- [\*Red Chocolate Elephants\* by Diana C. Sands](#) is a book for children bereaved by suicide

- [\*Benny's Hat\* by Juliet Clare Bell and Dave Gray](#), [\*My Brother and Me\*](#) and [\*I Miss My Sister\*](#) by Sarah Courtauld are picture books that explore loss of a sibling
- [\*Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?\* by Alex Barber and Anna Jarvis](#) and [\*My Daddy Is My Superhero\* by Michaelagh Broadbent and Foxhart](#) are books that explore loss of a father
- [\*Goodbye Grandma\* by Melanie Walsh](#) is a lift the flap book exploring death of a grandparent
- [\*I Miss You: A First Look at Death\* by Pat Thomas](#) is a more generic exploration of grief and loss

### Scottish Book Trust resources

- You could use our [Mental health awareness resources](#) to extend some of the activities in this resource
- On our website you can find our book lists of recommended [picture books](#) and [children's books](#) that explore grief and loss

## Worksheet 1: Remembering fox

Print this page

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Memory</b>	<b>Feeling</b>	<b>Symbol</b>
Owl			
Mouse			
Bear			
Rabbit			
Squirrel			

## Worksheet 2: Emotional vocabulary sheet

Print this page

Angry	Frightened	Sad
Cold	Lonely	Surprised

Angry	Cold	Nervous	Surprised
Annoyed	Helpless	Quiet	Tearful
Afraid	Lonely	Sad	Worried

Angry	Cold	Quiet	Stressed
Anxious	Frightened	Sad	Tearful
Amazed	Lonely	Surprised	Worried
Calm	Needy	Scared	Weepy

Abandoned	Cross	Helpless	Scared
Angry	Detached	Hopeless	Surprised
Anxious	Disappointed	Isolated	Stressed
Apprehensive	Distant	Lonely	Tearful
Astonished	Furious	Needy	Thoughtful
Brave	Frightened	Numb	Uncertain
Bereaved	Glad	Panicky	Vulnerable
Calm	Greif-stricken	Peaceful	Withdrawn
Cold	Guilty	Quiet	Worried
Crushed	Heartbroken	Relieved	Weepy