



Covenant  
Health  
Palliative Institute

# Childhood Grief: Supporting Children Through Loss

February 12, 2026

**Presented by:** Debbie Rudd - Certified Child Life Specialist.  
Rotary Flames House, Alberta Children's Hospital.

**Facilitator:** Sheila Killoran, Education Lead, Covenant Health Palliative Institute



# Reminders

- This session is being recorded.
- Please do not disclose any personal health information during the session.
- Your microphones are muted. When we invite participation, please unmute yourself if you'd like to speak at that time.
- If you experience technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat.

# Land Acknowledgment



[The Survivors' Flag - NCTR](#)

# Childhood Grief: Supporting Children Through Loss

**Debbie Rudd – Certified Child Life  
Specialist.**

**Rotary Flames House  
Alberta Children's Hospital.**





# Learning Goals

- Recognize children's developmental expressions of grief.
- Apply practical, evidence-informed strategies to support children's emotional well-being and resilience.
- Collaborate effectively with families, educators, and professionals to provide consistent, compassionate care for grieving children.

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# Setting the Stage

**“Although it may be instinctual to want to buffer children from loss and heartache by avoiding stressful circumstances, protecting them does not make the event go away and it may eliminate important opportunities for growth, understanding, and adaptation”**

## Developmental Expressions of Grief



# Age-Related Responses to Grief

**Infants & Toddlers:** Do not understand permanence; feel absence as disruption. Sensitive to routine changes.

**Preschool:** Limited grasp of finality; magical thinking; may believe death is reversible or self-caused.

**Ages 6–8:** Begin to understand permanence and biological aspects; ask blunt questions to make sense of death.

**Ages 9–12:** Fully understand death; curious about body and spirit; wonder about its impact on others.

**Teens:** Understand permanence but may have wishful thoughts; explore meaning of life and death.

**Adults:** Recognize death as permanent, universal, and non-functional; aware of its inevitability and impact.

# Grief Looks Like Behavior



Behavior = communication

Defiance

Withdrawal

Attention difficulties

Physical complaints

Infants: Maintain routine & extra physical touch and affection

Preschool: Consistent routine, Emotional literacy, & Encourage play

School Age: Biological explanations & physical / emotional outlets

Adolescents: Open communication & encourage peer connection





## The 3 W's of Children's Grief



Wonders



Worries



Wishes

# The 7 C's Of Childhood Grief



Children often harbor deep, unspoken worries after a loss:

- **Called:** What is it called?
- **Cause:** Did I cause this to happen?
- **Catch:** Can I catch what the person died from?
- **Cure:** Can I cure it?
- **Care:** Who will take care of me now?
- **Connected:** Will I be able to stay connected to the person who died, family, and friends?
- **Community:** Will my community support and understand me?



## Conversation Prompts

Can you tell me what you have heard...?

That is an excellent question, what do you think...?

This type of illness is hard, do you have any questions about...?

How do you feel when you are with...?

It sounds like you might have questions about...?

If you had a magic wand, what would you wish for right now?

# Break Out Room

Questions to Consider in your Group:

- What resources do you currently have available for supporting children at your facility?
- What would you like to have?
- Has a child ever surprised you with a question about death/dying that you felt you could not answer?

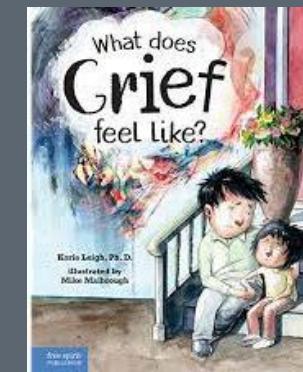
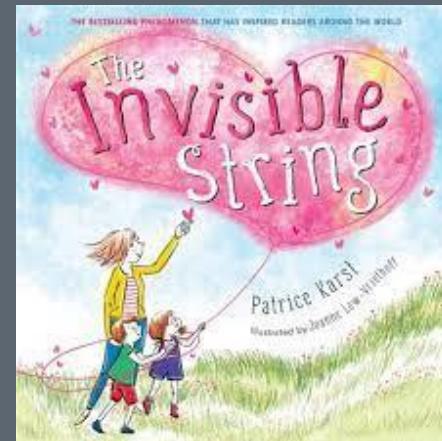
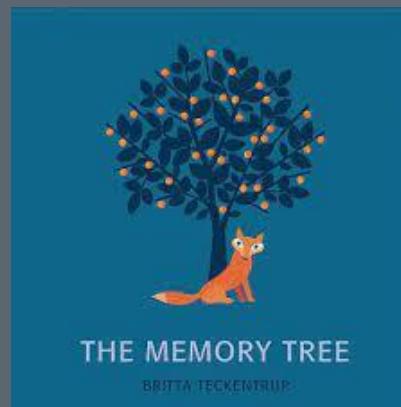
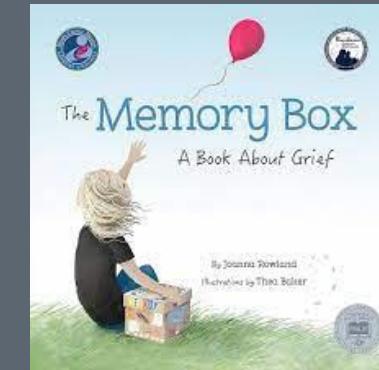
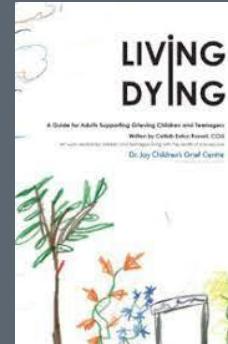
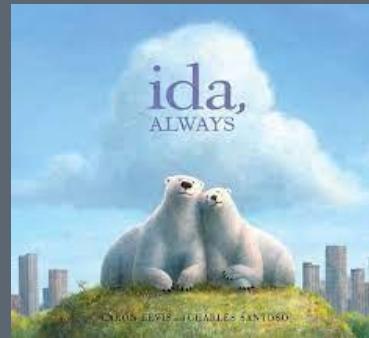
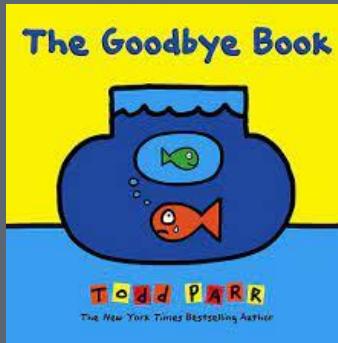
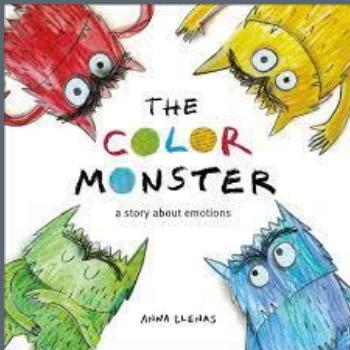


# Discussion and Questions



- What were some learnings from the groups?
- Questions for me?

# Resources

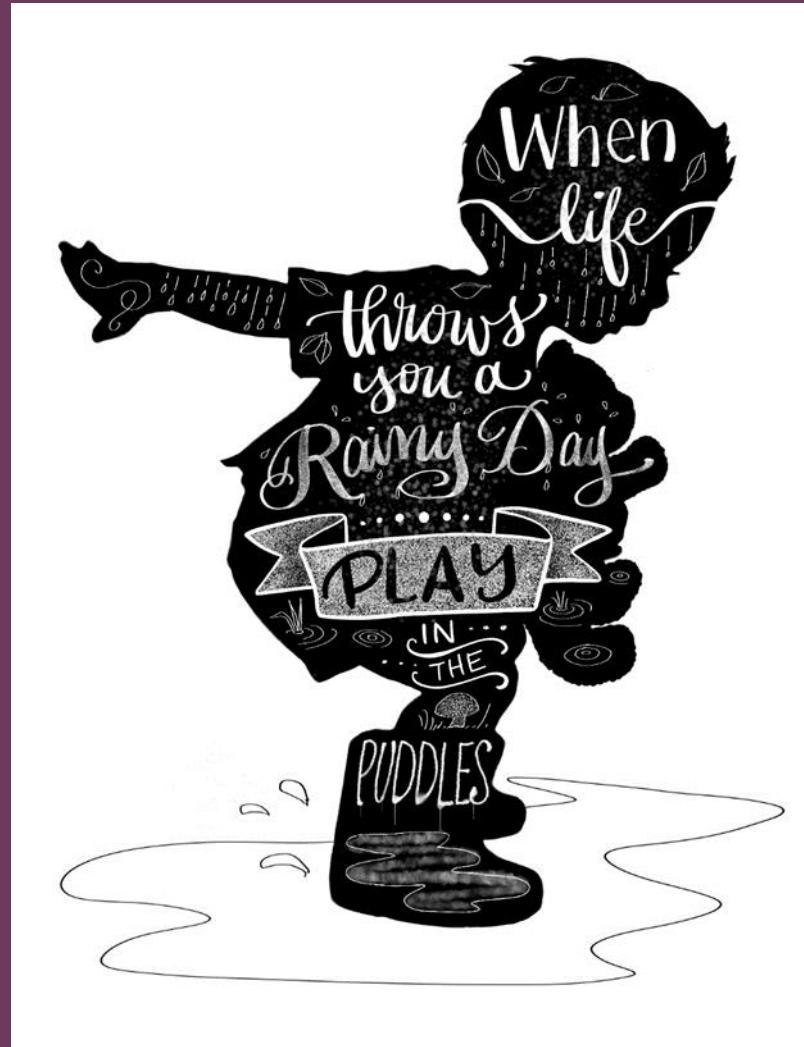


- Online resources:

Children's Grief Centre - [www.hospicecalgary.ca](http://www.hospicecalgary.ca)

Dougy Centre - <https://www.dougy.org>

Upopolis - <http://www.upopolis.com>



Thank you!

# Evaluation



<https://redcap.albertahealthservices.ca/surveys/?s=XCMFFKHWTA8M77WX>

# Upcoming Session

## **Session #5: Guided Imagery and Music Approaches for Palliative and Grief Care**

**Date:** March 12, 2026

**Presenter:** Sheila Killoran, MA, MTA, FAMI, Certified Music Therapist, Education Lead, Covenant Health

# Thank You!

## Stay Connected

- Visit [Palliative Institute | Covenant Health](http://covenanthealth.ca) (covenanthealth.ca) to access all our tools and resources.
- Contact us at: [Palliative.Institute@covenanthealth.ca](mailto:Palliative.Institute@covenanthealth.ca)



# Children's Grief Resources

**Compiled at the Psychosocial Spiritual Alberta COP Meeting February 12, 2026**

## **Books:**

Recommended by Debbie Rudd, Certified Child Life Specialist, Children's Hospice and Palliative Support Team, Alberta Children's Hospital, Calgary, AB

[The Color Monster: A Story About Emotions, by Anna Llenas](#)

[The Goodbye Book, by Todd Parr](#)

[Ida, Always By Caron Levis](#)

[Living Dying, A Guide for Adults Supporting Grieving Children and Teenagers, by Ceilidh Russell](#)

[The Invisible String, by Patrice Karst](#)

[The Memory Box, a book about grief, by Joanna Rowland](#)

[The Memory Tree, by Britta Teckentrup](#)

[What Does Grief feel like? By Korie Leigh](#)

## Other Recommendations:

[Have You Filled A Bucket Today?, by Carol McCloud](#)

[When Dinosaurs Die by Laurie Krasny Brown](#)

[One Wave At A Time, by Holly Thompson](#)

## Activity Books:

[After a Death: An Activity Book For Children](#)

[How I Feel – A Coloring Book for Grieving Children](#)

## Teens:

[Reconstruction Grief Journal for Teens](#)

[Healing A Teen's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas, by Alan Wolfelt](#)

## Sacred Storytelling Technique

## **Tactile objects:**

Heart Tree / Stuffy Hearts or Crochet hearts- given to both patient and to family

Grief Bereavement bears – Patients and siblings get the same bear

**Websites:**

[The Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families | Portland, OR](#)

[Rainbows for All Children | Grief Support for Youth](#)

[Homepage - Pilgrims Hospice](#) (Edmonton)

[Welcome to Hospice Calgary - www.hospicecalgary.ca](#) (Calgary)

**For questions:**

Covenant Palliative Institute

Sheila Killoran, Education Lead

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[Watch Past Session Recordings](#)