

# Talking About Death and Difficult Subjects Reading Activity

## Talking About Death and Difficult Subjects Reading Activity

Children are often curious about understanding the death of a pet or family member. You can read your child an age appropriate book or the story below about the death of a father when a child is a preschooler or early elementary student. When children lose a young parent to death, they can become very fearful that they may lose other significant family members at a young age. It is critical that we reassure our children when they hear about a friend or family member.



The story below is written by Michele McDevitt, a GenParenting guest blogger, who sadly has significant experiences working with grief and young family members. After reading the story, you can answer the comprehension questions and submit a comment to [GenParenting.com](http://GenParenting.com).

# I Have a Dad; He's Just in Heaven

By Michele McDevitt

Hi! My name is Alex. And I have a secret. When I was three years old, my dad died. At first, I was too young to understand what happened to my dad. I would ask my mom when he was going to come home from work and she would tell me, "Your dad was very sick. So his body died and his spirit is in heaven."

I would also ask my grandma when my dad would come back and she would respond, "Your dad is in heaven. That means that you will not see him again, but he lives in your heart, your mind, and your body each day of your life." When my grandma reassures me, I feel my dad's presence in my life that fills a big empty space in my heart.

Sometimes my grandparents bug me about how I am feeling because they are worried that I may be feeling sad about my dad. At those times, my grandparents may talk too much about my dad to try and help me. Although these talks may hurt, it helps to remember that my dad loves me. My grandpas are also good to me and cheer me on at my soccer and basketball games.

When my dad first died, my mom used to cry all the time. She missed my dad so much. I worried about her. I would tell my grandma that my mom was sad and my grandma would cry too. She said she also missed my dad a lot. To help her remember good times, my grandma would tell me something funny that my dad had said or did. She would

also tell me that it helps to count our blessings and be thankful for all of the good things in our lives.

I feel bad because I can't remember much about my dad anymore. I don't remember very well what he looked like. I do remember my dad in the hospital and how he looked so tired and sick. My grandma says not to worry as she shares a wonderful picture of my dad holding me when I was a baby.

Although I have a lot of friends at school, some kids are mean and will say, "You're weird. You have no dad! Hahaha!"

When other kids tease me about never seeing my dad, I just say that my dad is on an important trip. Sometimes I yell, "I have a dad; he's just in heaven!"

I hope I make a friend who also lost his dad. Sometimes, I feel lonely. Dad doesn't visit me in my dreams very much. He used to visit me in my dreams all the time! Dad would take me flying with him all over the world. He told me he would always be with me and watch over me—even if I couldn't feel it! Dad said he was in my heart and I would never be alone.

My dad's friends talk to me about their happy memories about my dad. I like to talk to them about the coolest new video games, super hero movies and stuff like that. Although my grandpas are nice, they are not that cool.

I have learned that my dad is with me all the time, although he cannot play ball with me, take me to a

sports game, or read to me. Sometimes, I still cry myself to sleep. At those times, I can feel my dad's arms around me and I know somehow, I'll be alright.

Ask the following questions after reading the story or another book on death:

Do you know anyone who has died? Describe your memories of that person.

What would you like to do to remember the happy times with that person?

What can I tell you about death?

Do you have any classmates that have lost a parent, grandparent, relative, or friend?

What did you do for this friend in class? What have they shared about their grief or experiences?

If you have attended a memorial service or funeral, what are your memories of this event and the person who died?

What else would you like to learn about death and dying?

If an animal or person died, draw a picture about a happy memory and talk about that memory?

Would you like to do something else to remember that person (i.e. plant a tree, go to a special place, sing a song, read a story, look at photo albums)?

Listed below are relevant California Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy that support early elementary learners:

Kindergarten: With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

Grade 1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

Grade 2: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g. what moment in a story an illustration depicts).

Kindergarten: With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

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