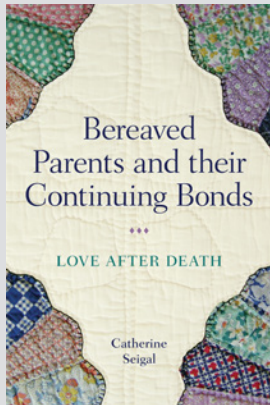


# Book Reviews



## Bereaved parents and their continuing bonds

Catherine Seigal

London: Jessica Kingsley  
2017  
144pp  
978-1785923265

When my son Tim died, despite being a psychotherapist, I needed help with the depth of my grief and so went to bereavement counselling. It was of limited use, however, because the counsellors likened Tim's death to the loss of a parent. But the death of a child is unlike any other other loss and bites into your soul like nothing else. I therefore approached this book with trepidation. Yet throughout, Catherine writes with respect for the utterly altered landscape and dislocation from the world that bereaved parents so often feel. I soon realised this book held a rare combination of experience and humility, empathy and wisdom.

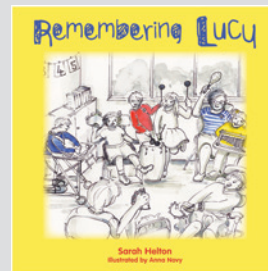
Catherine worked as a counsellor at a children's hospital. In this remarkable book she has distilled her work with bereaved parents and created a profound gift for anyone who has lost a child. She does not offer a theoretical map of the grieving process, neither does she offer advice, she simply allows the depth of the experience to speak to our hearts and minds about what is hard to articulate in any other way. As she points out, grief for a child who has died is not even a journey as this implies a direction and destination, and for many parents there is neither. Catherine goes right to the heart of the matter, writing about the love that is greater than death, and how it is in this love we find the continued bond with our dead children.

Yet this book is not only for parents, it is also a resource for counsellors. Catherine describes the therapeutic benefit of groups as well as counselling. She also has a chapter on what can interfere with the continuing bond after death. I would perhaps have liked more on the dynamics within a family when a child dies as the pains of such a profound loss are often lived out within the family system as a whole. Maybe Catherine can write another. Yet I would certainly recommend that this book be placed on the reading list for bereavement counselling courses. I for one will be

recommending it to parents struggling with a profundity beyond words, because this book speaks to that profundity. ■

## Anne Geraghty

Author of 'Death, the Last God: A Modern Book of the Dead'



## Remembering Lucy: a story about loss and grief in a school

Author: Sarah Helton.  
Illustrator: Anna Navy

London: Jessica Kingsley  
2017  
32pp  
978 1 78592 273 2

This is a picture book for using with children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) to address loss and grief in a school setting. It complements Helton's 'A special kind of grief' which was reviewed in the Spring 2018 edition of *Bereavement Care*.

The text is very simple (and in an easy to read font for us dyslexics), and goes through Joe's day and routine at school. He mentions friends who are away from school because of illness, the need to go to hospital, and then return back to school. Sadly his friend Lucy was ill, and then died. Joe reflects on the different ways they remembered Lucy in school with activities and shared memories, what he did when he was sad and how eventually he can remember Lucy smiling.

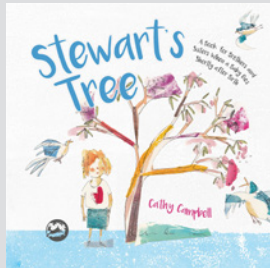
The illustrations are simple with splashes of bright primary colours. They are authentic to scenes in a SEND school setting and the kind of activities that would go on, even showing the different kinds of wheelchairs that the pupils are using. This is something you do not often get in picture books. I particularly liked an abstract sunset when the text mentions when people died.

At the back are seven pages of advice and guidance on using the book, and some suggestions on how to engage with individuals or the class. Helton advises that the book should be used regularly in schools as part of their death and bereavement curriculum to familiarise children with the ideas, and especially when a pupil dies. Her passion

is to ensure that all children have access to support when experiencing death, and this is a very useful resource for use in schools and by carers. ■

### Janet Dowling

Cruse Bereavement Care Volunteer



### Stewart's Tree

Written and illustrated by  
Cathy Campbell

London: Jessica Kingsley  
2018  
978-1785923999

This is an attractively illustrated book for very young children, three years and older, which deals with the painful and sensitive situation of the death of a baby brother or sister just after birth. There is very little literature available aimed specifically at young children who are bereaved in this way so in that respect it is a very welcome addition.

As with all books for this age group, there are more pictures than words, and adults reading the book to small children need to be able to extrapolate and wonder with the child about what is going on based on visual or verbal clues; 'What's happening here?', 'Do you remember when we were in the hospital?' and so on. Although there is a short section at the back with edited extracts from a Sands (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity) publication, I could imagine grieving parents, stunned by grief as they often are, might overlook that; it might have been better to put that information at the beginning.

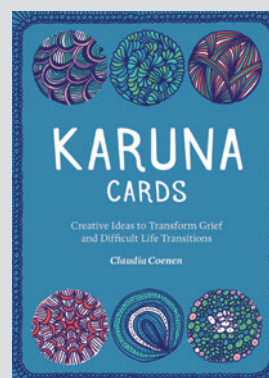
Quite a lot of space is devoted to the often misunderstood idea of 'losing' the baby and this is good. I think other unhelpful but commonly used expressions could have been incorporated however - 'going to sleep' being the obvious example. Children at three or four cannot understand the permanency of death and this isn't really addressed either which is a shame. I really liked the idea of a cot as a spaceship and the illustration is lovely; that seems an inspired choice. Equally good is the description of how Stewart wasn't strong enough to live outside of Mummy's tummy which avoids later worries the surviving sibling may have of being ill or catching something. Explaining death through the loss of senses is usually helpful for young children and this is done well, as is the message he will never be forgotten. The 'd' word is used once, which is helpful, but perhaps could have been used more often

or in other forms - 'died' and so on. The link to confusion about what happens is implied well (Why are all these cards arriving? Why are people bringing soup?) but I feel could have been made more explicit.

Indeed the most obvious absence is the lack of reference to any feelings, either from the parents or relatives or from the child's point of view and I think this is a real drawback. The illustrations could really have been used well here to show the range of feelings but they are rather neutral or ambiguous. Small children really need to be helped with giving words to the feelings they will observe in others and feel in themselves. Neither is there a reference to a funeral or where his body is now. In that respect the book might need to be complemented with other publications. ■

### Judy Debenham

Candle Child Bereavement Service, St Christopher's Hospice



### Karuna Cards: creative ideas to transform grief and difficult life transitions

Author: Claudia Coenen  
Illustrator: Kate McHale

London: Jessica Kingsley  
2017  
Pages: 52 cards in a box  
978-1-78592-780-5

The Karuna Cards are a set of 52 prompt cards for exploring thoughts and feelings about grief and other difficulties in life. 'Karuna' is a Sanskrit word that my online Yogapedia dictionary tells me is normally translated into English as 'compassion' – but an action-based kind of compassion rather than the pity or sadness associated with the English word. It's the action based aspect that is emphasised in the use of these cards.

Developed by a certified grief counsellor in the USA, each card focuses on one aspect of grief/transitions and suggests different creative ways to respond. The card contents are influenced by both Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Mindfulness. For example, one card instructs the reader to 'Stand straight, gently, with your legs hip width apart' and then gives some breathing exercises, whilst another suggests when in nature to notice what animals appear and listening to the minutiae of nature before writing down personal reflections. A third invites the reader to make a list of what they can do when they are feeling down and to use it as an action list when the time comes, whilst another asks about