BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS:

USING BOWLBY'S GRIEF STAGES TO ANALYZE BOOKS FOR

PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful husband and best friend, Robert. His continued love and support throughout this process is what has allowed its completion. You have my deepest gratitude and unending admiration. I love you!

To my beautiful daughter, Kayli Rose, who has truly shown me the joys of life and the true innocence of a child. I love you baby girl.

Also, this thesis is dedicated to my wonderful aunt and uncle, Mary Kay and Shaun, who have raised me to be the person I am today. You have been with me every step of the way, through good times and bad. Thank you for all the unconditional love, guidance, and support that you have always given me, helping me to succeed and instilling in me the confidence that I am capable of doing anything I put my mind to.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table   Page

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The death of a parent has a profound psychological impact on a child. Feelings of loss, disappointment, failure and grief are normal and natural reactions to this tragic human experience. Bereavement, the response we have to grief and loss, is familiar to most of us and little has changed over time with regard to the emotions exhibited in response to the pain of loss. Among the many types of loss a child might experience, death would qualify as an extreme example. Along with the experience of immediate devastation at the time of loss, there is the continuing agonizing experience of separation, as well as the subsequent struggle to understand what exactly has occurred in an aftermath of unanswered questions (Reece, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

When dying, death and bereavement topics are broached in contemporary American society, the usual reaction is denial and avoidance. For example, phrases used to describe death, such as 'eternally sleeping' or 'passed away,' reflect this distancing from death, this softening of its finality. "Teachers and parents alike describe feeling uncomfortable when discussing death with children, reflecting wider problems of society in acknowledging issues surrounding bereavement. Recent empirical work demonstrates bereaved children's need to talk" (Lowton & Higginson, 2003, p. 737). When it comes to

children, we as professionals and parents must not avoid this issue, but address it directly. "To deny a child a reasonable interpretation of the events he hears about as they happen is to deprive him of parental insight and reassurance when he needs it most. We cannot live in a make-believe world where unpleasantness does not exist. The need to learn how to meet deprivation comes early in life, and the calm assured facing of it can help the child grow in understanding at the same time his experience is widening" (Jackson, 1965, p.12).

Purpose of the Study

On a daily basis, many children experience the pain, isolation, and distress in progressing through the grieving process after experiencing the death of a loved one. Given the research on the detrimental effects of unhealthy grieving on children, it is important for professionals, parents and extended family to provide support for these children. "The death of a loved one can be one of the most severe traumas one may encounter and the sense of loss and grief which follows is a natural and important part of life. Running away from grief postpones sorrow; clinging to grief prolongs pain; however neither leads to healing. Loss of parents, grandparents, siblings and significant others through death is a particularly stressful experience for children" (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001, p. 418). Much of the research in this area has indicated that bereaved children and adolescents are a vulnerable population. It has been indicated that these children are at increased risk for developing psychological and behavioral dysfunctions as well as social difficulties both during and shortly after the bereavement process and also in later adulthood (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001). Therefore, it is extremely important that parents and

professionals make a continuous effort to understand the bereavement process in an attempt to provide help for children.

Explaining death to children can be a very difficult task. There are various methods for approaching the topic of death with children and attempting to explain its definition and the sense of loss and grief that surround it. Some methods include discussion with the child, letting the child ask questions and directing the conversation, as well as using books to illustrate the topic and promote discussion. The latter of these is termed bibliotherapy, the use of books to assist in working with an individual to process through a feeling. Using bibliotherapy to help children through the grieving process can be a beneficial tool in opening discussion, progressing through grief stages and providing hope and determination for the future.

Individuals who are using or want to use bibliotherapy to help a child work through their grief may be concerned about where to start. The first step is to choose appropriate books for the child's cognitive and developmental level of understanding. Any book chosen to be used in explaining death to a child or used to help a child work through their grief should be read and re-read by the adult intending to use it. The book's tone should match the mood or theme of the story and should also use proper terminology that is accurate and honest. Death should be referred to as such and the words "die," "dead," "funeral," "burial," etc. should be used instead of euphemisms that could become confusing to the child. The child's age and developmental level must also be taken into consideration when making a literary selection to ensure the understanding of concepts presented. The last thing a parent or professional would want to do is present information that is too sophisticated for the child to understand. A good rule of thumb is to present

materials below the identified cognitive ability rather than taking the chance of confusing or scaring the child with materials he is unable to comprehend. For this thesis ten children's books about death and bereavement will be read, and their content analyzed as to their appropriateness for preschool children.

Significance of the Study

Children in today's society have far fewer experiences with death than children in the past century due to the advancements in healthcare and the development and acceptance of funeral homes. The lack of familiarity with death leads children to a lack of understanding death, lack of conversation surrounding death, and feelings of confusion and discomfort when the death experience occurs. Death remains a taboo subject, spoken about in whispers through euphemisms instead of honesty and truth. Parents try to shield their children from death experiences in their attempt to protect them. However, the question then becomes what are parents trying to protect their children from? Protecting children from the reality of death by telling a child that "Grandma went to sleep" or "Uncle John went away" does not protect them, but rather causes harm, fear, and false hopes that will ultimately be crushed when Grandma doesn't wake up and Uncle John doesn't return from wherever he went. Parents must be honest with their children in developmentally appropriate ways so they can gain a growing understanding and acceptance of death over time. However, this can be a huge challenge to parents if they are uncomfortable with the subject of death, are unsure of how to approach the subject of death with their children, or are attempting to deal with their own grief (Charkow, 1998). Fortunately, there are a number of books that address the issues of death both for parents and children. There are books for adults providing direction for talking with children

4

about death, as well as fiction and non-fiction books that can assist in explaining to children death and the grief response.

Death is a difficult subject for many parents to talk about with their children. It is important that professionals and parents capitalize on teachable moments, utilize literary materials, and discuss the facts with their children at developmentally appropriate levels. It is important to remember three questions upon which to guide our interactions with children regarding death and dying:

- What does the child need to know?
- What does the child want to know?
- What can the child understand?

To answer these questions parents sometimes look to books which are designed to explain death to children. When using books for this purpose, it is important to choose stories that are developmentally appropriate and which relate the information to children in an understandable way.

Research Questions

Because of the psychological impact of loss on a child, and because of the influence of the use of bibliotherapy in helping a child through the process of grief, it is reasonable to try to determine the appropriateness of the messages children receive from the books they read. This study will examine ten books that deal with death and are designed for preschool children. These books will be ones that are readily available, that are targeted to preschool children, and that address, in varying degrees, Bowlby's four stages of grief:

- numbness
- yearning and searching
- disorganization
- reorganization

The books will be analyzed and rated as to whether or not they are developmentally appropriate for preschool children and whether or not Bowlby's stages are appropriately addressed with regard to preschool children. Research questions for this study are:

Research Question 1:   Is the language used in the books developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children?

Research Question 2:   Are the ideas presented conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children?

Research Question 3:   Do the books address Bowlby's first stage of grief (numbness)?

Research Question 4: Do the books address Bowlby's second stage of grief (yearning and searching)?

Research Question 5: Do the books address Bowlby's third stage of grief (disorganization)?

Research Question 6: Do the books address Bowlby's fourth stage of grief (reorganization)?

Limitations

The sample to be used for this content analysis consists of 10 preschool-aged children's books referencing the topics of death and grief. While there are numerous books discussing these topics for preschool-aged children, analyzing all of these resources was not possible. Because of time constraints and availability of books for the study, one limitation is that the sample of books is small. Books were chosen based on availability and popularity. While representative, the sample did not include every book available for preschool-aged children referencing death and grief.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Because this study deals with the young child's understanding of death and the use of books to explain death to children, several areas will be covered in the chapter. Developmental theories will be examined, as it is important to know how children think and process information. Specific theories about children's understanding of death will be examined, as well as historical perspectives of death related literature, and information about the benefits of bibliotherapy for children.

Developmental Theory

Helping children through bereavement begins with an understanding of grief theories and the grieving process. Grief is a normal yet complex phenomenon that has been broadly explained through descriptive and process theories. Descriptive theories depict the grief process in a basic and descriptive way, but fail to explain why or how grief responses occur. Process theories provide a model for the psychological mechanisms underlying grief and investigate the purposes behind these mechanisms. In looking at theories related to the grieving process, the theories of Piaget and Bowlby profoundly apply.

Piaget's Cognitive Development Viewpoint

Swiss psychologist, philosopher and logician, Jean Piaget, developed his theory of intellect formation that was based on the extensive study of children. Piaget refers to the

intellect as a system of operations drawn from external object actions. Piaget's "genetic epistemology" concentrated on the development of knowledge in human organisms. In his studies, Piaget saw the child as constantly creating and recreating his own model of reality, thus achieving mental growth by integrating simpler concepts into higher level concepts at each stage. In a timetable established by nature for the development of a child's abilities, he argued for and traced four stages in that development. Thus, Piaget's "genetic epistemology" or the study of the development of knowledge was born (Piaget, 1965; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

The concept of cognitive structure is central to Piaget's theory. Cognitive structures, or schemas, are patterns of physical or mental action that underlie specific acts of intelligence and relate to specific stages of child development. During his studies, a researcher would pose problems for children and then observe how the child would come to a solution. From this, Piaget determined they pass through four stages of cognitive development. He first describes the child in the first two years of life as being in the sensorimotor stage. In this stage the individual is mainly concerned with mastering his/her own innate physical reflexes and applying them to pleasurable or interesting actions. During the sensorimotor stage the child also develops object permanence. This refers to the realization that people and objects do not disappear just because the child cannot see them. However, during this stage the child also has limitations because of the lack of language (Piaget, 1965; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

The second stage is what Piaget refers to as the preoperational stage, and it lasts roughly from age two to age six or seven. During this stage the child learns to manipulate his environment symbolically through inner representations, or thoughts

about the external world. He also learns to represent objects by words and to manipulate the words mentally, just as he did with objects before. During this stage the child is also what is referred to as egocentric. This describes the child only seeing one viewpoint and thinks that everyone should think the same way. For example, if a child covers his eyes and can't see you anymore, he thinks you can't see him anymore (Piaget, 1965).

The third stage is what is referred to as the concrete operational stage and lasts usually from age seven to age eleven or twelve. Here the child is at the beginning of logic in the thought process. The child gradually becomes less egocentric and begins to think in more concrete terms. In this stage children are very literal and cannot think abstractly (Piaget, 1965).

The fourth and final stage of Piaget's theory is that of formal operations. This stage begins at age twelve and extends into adulthood. It is characterized by an orderliness of thinking and a mastering of logical thought. During this stage the child begins to understand concepts and ideas on a more of an adult level and can communicate with a wide range of people on many levels (Piaget, 1965).

Also vital to the formation of Piaget's theory was the idea that cognitive structures change through processes of adaptation: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation refers to the changing in the cognitive structure to make sense of the surrounding environment. With Piaget's cognitive development being a constant effort to adapt to the surrounding environment through assimilation and accommodation, to some degree his theory is similar in nature to those of Bruner and Vygotsky.

Cognition is the term that psychologists use to describe the activity of knowing and understanding the processes used to acquire knowledge to solve problems. Cognitive

development refers to the changes that occur in the mental abilities of children over the course of their development. In looking at Piaget's theory we can see his description of the process of human development in his invariant developmental sequence. Piaget explains the stages of intellectual growth that represent qualitatively different levels of growth. The idea is that this sequence is a series of developmental stages that occur in one particular order because each stage or developmental sequence is a prerequisite for the next. The description of the process of human development shows that all children progress through the stages in precisely the same order and, as Piaget argued, no stage can be skipped because each stage builds upon the previous stage, not allowing for any mis-sequence. Thus, we see the process of human cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Piaget's theory has had profound influence on the understanding of cognitive development and the processes of family and child development. Piaget saw children as active elements in their own cognitive development, always forming knowledge and adjusting their intellectual structures to better understand the world around them. Piaget's theory also offered contributions on showing the strength of children actively interacting with the environment around them. As well, the description of the way children think has proved to be very helpful for people working with children and parents. And finally, his research sparked the pursuit of much additional research into the cognitive development of children. Piaget's concept of developmental stages in cognitive development caused a re-assessment of older ideas of child learning and education. According to Piaget, if the development of certain thought processes was on a genetically determined time table, reinforcement was not sufficient to teach concepts. This

emphasizes the idea that the child's mental development would have to be at the proper stage in order to assimilate new concepts. Therefore, at this point the teacher became a guide to the child's own discovery of the world, rather than a transmitter of knowledge (Piaget, 1965; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Using Piaget's Theory to Explain Death to Children

"In helping children with the problem of death, we need to have some understanding of what death means to children of different ages" (Reed, 1970, p. 18). Piaget's theory of cognitive development helps explain a child's understanding of the grieving process. Researchers have studied children's development in forming concepts of death in numerous ways. "The vast majority of psychological studies on the subject of death have pertained to one of three areas: the emotional, clinical/treatment, and cognitive development" (Hoffman & Strauss, 1985, p. 469). Many researchers have studied how a child acquires sub-concepts in understanding death as well as how and when they form these acquisitions of ideas about death in terms of their development. Particularly these studies have focused on the development of the understanding of irreversibility, non-functionality and universality. "Irreversibility is an understanding that once a living thing dies, its physical body cannot become alive again. Non-functionality is the understanding that all life functions cease at death. Universality refers to the understanding that all living things die" (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001, p. 418). From this research we can better understand Piaget's theory of cognitive development in relation to the concept of death.

Maria Nagy examined the understanding of death among 378 Hungarian children. She identified three developmental stages for children and their perceptual understanding

of death that followed Piaget's theory revealing "cognitive developmental level was related to death awareness" (O'Halloran & Altmaier, 1996, p. 259). In Nagy's first stage (0-5 years), which can be compared to Piaget's preoperational stage, the child cannot understand or recognize that death is irreversible. In this stage there is no definitive death and death is not seen as final. Often children under the age of five know death involves separations, but believe the dead are still alive in their coffins (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001, p. 418).

In Nagy's second stage (5-9 years), death is personified and perceived as a contingency. In this stage that "corresponds to Piaget's concrete operational stage, the child may see death as final for others, particularly for older people, but not for themselves" (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001, p. 419). The personification of death refers to the acceptance of the existence and finality of death; however, in this stage, death is not perceived as universal and is looked at as separate and specific to the person or entity that has died.

By the time the child reaches the third stage (9 years and above), death is seen as permanent and forever. Death is understood to exist within each of us and by age twelve the child has developed a more realistic, adult-like view of death. This stage corresponds to Piaget's stage of formal operations in which abstract thinking among children is starting to develop. This final stage involves the knowledge that all bodily activities are terminated in death. To these children, death is irreversible, universal and non-functional.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

Another theory that relates to the grieving process is Bowlby's Attachment Theory. Bowlby's theory is a specific process theory that considers the reasoning behind grief in response to death, and the various factors that impact the intensity of the response. According to Bowlby, the meaning of attachment furthers our ability to comprehend grief. Throughout human development, continual attachments to others are formed. Bowlby's Attachment Theory states that attachments develop from the need for security and safety that are acquired through life and are usually directed towards a few specific individuals. The goal of attachment is to form and maintain bonds throughout childhood and adulthood. Bowlby proposed that grief responses are biologically general responses to separation. He also said that behavioral responses that make up the grieving process are pro-survival mechanisms geared towards restoring lost bonds (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby's concentration on the grief response attracted the attention of Colin Parkes, a researcher now well known for his interest in adult bereavement. This magnetism led to the development of research with Bowlby in which the separation response was expanded into four stages of grieving (Parkes, 1970). The first stage is numbness. In this stage, one does not want to believe the death has occurred and to some degree may not. The next stage is yearning and searching. In this stage the child yearns for the presence of the individual again and searches for their existence. In the third stage of the grieving process – disorganization - life seems turned up-side-down and nothing may seem to make sense anymore. The final stage of Bowlby's four stages of grieving is re-organization. In this stage, the realization arises that there comes a point when life

must continue. It is in this stage that the child learns to reassess their new life without the individual and re-organizes the situation (Braithwaite, 1999, p. 1).

Children's Understanding of Death

In order to fully understand how to select books addressing the subject of death, it is important to realize what children actually understand about death. While children under the age of three have little logical understanding of death, they sense the experience and can identify changes in their life environment and ultimately have reactions to those changes. Children between the ages of three and five often view death as a temporary state with the terms "death" and "dead" having little realistic meaning. Magical thinking is present in children this age and the child often sees death as avoidable and reversible. Children may even blame themselves for the death. Children aged six to eight begin to understand that death is final and may attribute that finality or mortality to themselves. These children are interested in the biological facts and physical details of the death, as well as funerals and other death rituals. Children of this age may experience fear and anxiety surrounding death's finality. From age nine to twelve, children have a clearer understanding of death; they can define death and understand the biological implication; they realize that death is inevitable and final. Although they have a cognitive understanding of death, most children this age have had limited experiences with death and coping with their emotions in response to such a loss can be confusing. Adolescents, ages thirteen to eighteen, have an adult understanding of death and may philosophize about death, ultimately searching for death's meaning. Adolescents will experience a myriad of feelings and thoughts in their grief, but may not reveal those reactions to adults, but rather hold them inside (Corr, 2006). Parents and professionals

who have knowledge of a child's developmental understanding of death can more accurately choose books that meet the needs of the child appropriately.

In looking at the use of books to help children understand death, assist them in working through their grief, and help them express their emotions in a healthy way, it is important to reflect upon the tasks of grief work. Corr (2006) cites Worden's four tasks of mourning that apply to bereaved children: accepting the reality of loss; experiencing the pain or emotional aspects of the loss; adjusting to an environment in which the deceased person is missing; and relocating the dead person in one's life and finding ways to memorialize the person. Professionals and parents can use these tasks to guide their bibliotherapy interactions with bereaved children. Helping children to work through their grief and understand their bereavement requires adults to examine themselves and their own experience with and reactions to death. Adults should reflect on their own thoughts and feelings surrounding death, respond to the real needs of the child, communicate effectively, and work cooperatively with other adults and with relevant institutions in American society (Corr, 2006). It is apparent that adults need to not only work with children in their grief, but also to recognize and work through their own thoughts and feelings about death. Death is personal. Helping children understand and work through their bereavement is not only beneficial for the child, but also beneficial to the adult committed to helping the child. Each child's experience with death will affect the adult working with them in some way. It is the responsibility of the adult to recognize their own reactions in order to focus on the child and their needs. Utilizing books to help explain death, grief and bereavement to children can help adults distance their personal feelings and focus on the child.

Several areas need to be understood in order to gain factual knowledge necessary to process the concept of death with children. The first is to assist the child through the process of discovery. The second is to understand the stages of mourning, and the final focus area is coping mechanisms of both children and families (Corr, 2006).

The first step in assisting a child through the bereavement process is to understand the process of discovery for that child. "Death poses one of the first significant intellectual challenges to the young child, a prime stimulus for his subsequent mental growth" (Florian, 1985, p. 133). "One approach toward understanding these mixed feelings is to consider children's bereavement experience as a process rather than as a single discrete event" (Lin, Sandler, Ayers, Wolchik, & Leuecken, 2004, p. 673). In understanding and facilitating the process of discovery, there are three essential elements to doing this successfully. The first is to utilize the subtypes of death education appropriately; the second is to be honest in the approach to the child; and the final element is to become familiar and understand the stages of mourning. In recognizing and utilizing these three subtypes, one can successfully assist the child through this first stage of mourning, thus allowing the continuation of the bereavement process.

There are several ways to inform children about death. It is important to facilitate this learning in a way that is easily understood, relative to the child, and in a manner that permits the child to develop his own realities of what death is. Therefore, it is important to utilize the three subtypes of education in completing this process: formal education; informal education; teachable moments.

Formal education refers to an organized explanation of the basic elements and theories of the death experience (Corr, 2006). While this may seem like the most

rationale and logical way to explain death, often this may be difficult for children of a young age to comprehend. Many times children need more of an informal education.

Informal education refers to learning from one's own willingness to accept other opinions regarding reality (Corr, 2006). This form of education is very objective in its meaning and often can confuse a child and inhibit their ability to form their own understanding of death. Media plays an extreme role in the informal education of children. By the sixth grade, the average child witnesses 8,000 acts of violence, primarily deaths on television (Witt lecture, 2011). However, entertainment programs in today's media tend to distort portrayals of death via use of selectivity and fantasization. To speak of fantasized death in the media means that death is frequently present in the entertainment media, but often in unrealistic ways. For example, in the children's cartoon "Roadrunner", death is often depicted as an unrealistic phenomenon that does not involve finality. In the cartoon, Wiley Coyote constantly enacts events that backfire on him and in reality would cause death, yet Wiley Coyote never dies. This can cause much confusion for a child trying to understand the finality of death.

The concept of the "teachable moment" is the third, and what many educators say is the most, influential subtype. Teachable moments when referring to death education are the moments of experience that can be used in the explanation of death (Corr, 2006). An example of a teachable moment entails an event such as a child coming upon a dead bird in the woods. While most would simply look at the bird, tell the child to leave it alone, and pass by, this is an ideal opportunity to teach the child about death. By allowing the child to ask questions, investigate and maybe even bury the dead bird, the adult can facilitate learning and use this opportunity to introduce the process of death.

Other good examples of life events that can be used as teachable moments are near death experiences, car accidents, drownings or fires, and attempts or thoughts of suicide. By facilitating death education using these life events, a child can learn through teachable moments.

The next element in aiding the successful process of discovery for children is for the individual to be honest with the child. Too often when informing children of and about death, the tendency is to buffer the situation by telling the child things, as previously stated, like the dead individual "went on vacation" or is "sleeping." However, telling children things like this can be extremely detrimental in terms of developing their understanding of death. By telling the child "lies", confusion is being facilitated in lieu of comprehension. In these examples, the child often later realizes or learns that the individual is actually dead, a definitive fate, and in turn the child may become anxious to go on vacation and terrified to go to sleep for fear of dying. The best alternative when speaking with a child about death is honesty. You can utilize concepts such as teachable moments and provide the child with the ability to form his own perceptions of death. Death must be a reality in order for the child to fully understand (Corr, 2006; Parkes, 1970; Bowlby, 1969).

The final step in assisting a child through the process of discovery is to recognize and understand the stages of mourning. For a child, this process can be critical to their effectual movement through the stages of bereavement. These stages were outlined by Therese Rando, a leading expert on complicated mourning, and were utilized in the recovery of the Columbine high school massacre of Littleton, Colorado (Reece, 2001). The first task is to recognize the loss. In this stage the child acknowledges the death and

attempts to understand it. The second task is the reaction to separation. In this stage the child experiences pain and feels and expresses all reactions to death. The next task is to re-collect and re-experience the deceased and the relationship. Here the child reviews and remembers realistically, and revives and re-experiences feelings for the deceased. The fourth task is to relinquish old attachments. In this stage, the child releases and works through the attachment and releases and revives the old world. The fifth task is for the child to re-adjust. At this point, it is important for the child to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old. Also, the child reconciles old beliefs with new experiences, develops a new relationship with the deceased, adopts new patterns and structures in life, and forms a new identity. In the final task of the stages of mourning, the child forms new attachments, develops new relationships and learns to cultivate a new life (Reece, 2001).

By understanding and utilizing these stages of mourning in the process of discovery in collaboration with death education and honesty, one can assist the child in moving on in their bereavement and the subsequent grieving process. It is through the grieving process that the child will obtain the ability to work through his emotions and achieve positive coping skills for working through death.

In attempting to help children through the experience of death, one must understand the grieving process. By itself, grief at the time of death is a healthy response and is related to the loss of the loved one and one's own particular loss relating to that person. Grief is individual and subjective and needs to be addressed on a personal level with each case individually assessed. The process of grief is multifaceted, with the bereaved individuals experiencing major physical, emotional and cognitive changes. It

has been suggested that grief is a state in which the individual has lost something or someone of personal value and when faced with this loss, the most powerful forms of attachment behavior are displayed in an attempt to reinstate the relationship. In a handbook developed on grief counseling, the grief therapist, J. W. Worden (1991), describes these forms of behavior under four general categories: emotional response; physical sensations; altered cognitions; and behaviors.

Grief is fundamentally an emotional response to loss, the expression of which can include sadness, sorrow, fatigue, depression, relief, shock, anger, guilt and anxiety. Grief behaviors often have similarities to responses found in people suffering from depression. While grief and depression share a number of similar aspects including sleep and appetite disturbances, and intense sadness, these behaviors are only present for a short time in grief reaction. However, intense feelings of loneliness and isolation, following the death of a loved one, can become so overwhelming that the individual may withdraw from social contact, thus isolating themselves from support (Corr, 2006). This reaction following the loss of a loved one is not abnormal and usually disperses after the first year of bereavement. Anger is also a response associated with grief behaviors. The anger may be directed at the deceased for leaving the bereaved, or may be a reaction from the feeling that the bereaved did not prevent the death from occurring. In either reaction, if the anger is not addressed, there is a risk that the anger can be turned inward or directed at others by attributing blame (Corr, 2006).

Grief also elicits physical symptoms such as tight feelings in the throat and chest, oversensitivity to noise, breathlessness, muscular weakness, and/or lack of energy. These sensations are considered to be a normal component of grief, however, occasionally

physical health may be seriously impaired, and there is growing evidence that recently-bereaved individuals are more vulnerable to illness (Corr, 2006).

Often in the early stages of mourning new thought patterns occur, but dissipate over time. Persistent thoughts can lead to depression or anxiety. Disbelief is often the initial cognitive reaction to death, and although this response is usually temporary, if not addressed it can persist and lead to denial or refusal by the bereaved to accept the death. Other cognitive responses include: feelings of confusion; difficulty organizing thoughts; preoccupation with the deceased; a sense of presence of the deceased; feelings that the deceased is still around; and auditory or visual hallucinations. Many find these experiences comforting and assign spiritual or metaphysical explanations to loss, thus helping the bereaved cope with loss (Corr, 2006, p.260).

While there are numerous behaviors associated with the grief process, they generally subside over time. The most commonly reported behaviors include disturbances in sleep, altered appetite, over-eating or under-eating, absent mindedness, social withdrawal, dreams of the deceased, avoidance behavior (this refers to the bereaved going to great lengths to avoid any reminders of the deceased), restlessness, breathlessness, the sensation to search or call out for the deceased and crying - a response that is often believed to relieve emotional stress (Worden, 1991).

The intensity and emotional response to loss vary among individuals according to the importance attributed to the loss, the circumstances of the death, and the availability and utilization of support groups (Worden, 1991). The length and nature of the grief process varies depending on the nature of the relationship and the degree of attachment to the deceased. The mode of death also impacts the degree of grief experienced. This

refers to whether the death was natural, accidental (sudden), suicidal or homicidal. Sudden or accidental deaths are likely to have the greatest impact on the grief process (Worden, 1991).

"Data from 1997 (Social Security Administration) indicated that approximately four percent of children younger than eighteen in the United States had experienced the death of a parent. Recent reviews have summarized literature that finds elevated levels of mental health and adaptation problems among bereaved children" (Sandler, I.N., Ayers, T.S., Wolchik, S.A., Tein, J., Kwok, O., Haine, R.A., Twohey-Jacobs, J., Suter, J., Lin, K., Padgett-Jones, S., Weyer, J., Cole, E., Kriege, G., & Griffin, W.A., 2003, p. 587). "The study of bereavement in adults has provided a rich context for research and practice. Studies on the grieving process have contributed to our understanding of the identification of psychological risk factors and created foundation for the development and evaluation of adult intervention programs" (Thompson & Payne, 2000, p. 74). However, child bereavement frequently differs from adults. "Overall, in spite of some inconsistency, the available survey data suggests that experiencing family disruption as a child is associated with lowered psychological well-being in adulthood" (Amato, 1991, p. 543). It is common that when a child is confronted with grief and does not have any previous experience from which to draw, the ability to cope with the feelings of rage, loneliness, disbelief, and guilt can be quite difficult. Therefore, children often feel that things will never get better and often express those feelings through behaviors rather than emotions. In the early preschool years in particular, when children are still developing facility with language, it is common to "act out" or misbehave when they aren't able to explain themselves verbally (Amato, 1991). While working with children through the

grief process, it is important to assist them in accepting the reality that their loved one has died. In addition, the children should be carefully questioned and encouraged to work through the emotions of anger, guilt, anxiety and helplessness. Support should be provided for the legitimacy of their feelings, along with reassurance that what they are experiencing is normal. Also, encouraging involvement in a support group for bereaved children is advisable. Often support groups can offer children a connection or a sense of peer support by being with individuals who have more in common with them than adults and who are experiencing the same emotions and sensations.

It has already been established that childhood loss of a parent has profound psychological impacts that can threaten social and emotional development. As well, existing evidence suggests that bereaved children are a vulnerable population that is at increased risk for social impairment and/or psychopathology during both the immediate period following a death, as well as extending into adulthood. For example, children's experiences with uncontrollable life events, such as death and separation from a parent increase a child's future expectations of uncontrollability, and increase the risk of anxiety (Grover, Golda & Ialongo, 2005). Recent research has focused on understanding the role of specific situational factors in a child's adjustment to the death of a parent. Victoria Raveis, Karolynn Siegal and Daniel Karus (1999) focused on children's psychological distress following the death of a parent from cancer. These factors can be generalized into three primary domains - background characteristics, factors associated with the parent's death, and attributes of the family environment.

According to Raveis et al. (1999), age and gender of the child have a profound influence on their adaptability. Younger children, particularly those under the age of five

and those in early adolescence, display vulnerabilities to the poor adjustment to parental death. Regarding gender, some research suggests that girls are more vulnerable than boys, whereas others have suggested that boys have a more problematic adjustment; and yet others report no gender differences (Raveis et al., 1999). Other background characteristics that have been suggested to influence the child's adjustment to parental death include birth order, family size, and the age of siblings (Raveis et al., 1999).

Until now, the review of literature has focused on the developmental factors in the process of bereavement, ". . . however, various factors determine a person's reaction to the loss of a love object and contribute to his ability to master the task of mourning: the individual's mental capacities for dealing with the loss, depending on his age-appropriate development and personality makeup; whom he has lost, i.e. the role of the lost object and the relationship it played in his life; and the impact of the circumstances of the loss as well as those proceeding and following it" (Furman, 1974, p. 119). Also according to Raveis et al. (1999), another set of factors that have been found to influence the child's adjustment to the loss of a parent are the circumstances surrounding the death. When the death is sudden and unexpected, and there is no opportunity to prepare the child for death, subsequent adjustment for the child can be problematic. However, even when the death is anticipated, the child's adjustment can still be affected post-death. The stressors associated with a fatal illness such as the progression of the illness and treatment, alterations in lifestyle, the absence or withdrawal of the ill parent from family functions and household economic changes can adversely affect the child in the pre-death period (Holland, 2004). These effects can continue into the post-death period, thus negating the benefits of the forewarned death. Less attention has been focused on the events

24

surrounding the death and the burial rituals of the deceased. However, there has been some evidence that children's experiences during this period can effect their post-death adjustment. These include the circumstances in which the child was prepared for the funeral; whether the child was involved in the wake or funeral process; and whether the child was permitted to view the parent's body. Children need to grieve. This can be particularly relevant at the funeral, which coincides with the time the family is likely to be in throes of initial shock after death. It is easy to overlook the child's needs. The literature is generally supportive of the view that young people have a choice of whether or not to attend the funeral (Holland, 2004).

The final group of factors that relate to the bereaved child's adjustment are attributes of the family environment. The degree in which the surviving parent handles their own distress and adjustment to the death can greatly alter the child's adjustment. Also, the quality of care and the degree in which the child's basic physical and emotional support needs are met by the surviving parent can affect the adjustment of the bereaved child. Inconsistencies in the environment or unpredictability in daily routines can also affect the child's adjustment. Finally, family communication patterns about the parent's death can affect adjustment for the child. Failure to communicate adequately about the loss and the circumstances of the death can result in acting-out behavior by the child or guilt related to beliefs about coping or not being able to prevent the death (Holland, 2004).

Understanding the concept of coping is the final step in assisting a child through the grieving process. Coping refers to the effort to master, reduce or tolerate the demands created by stress. It focuses on the process of managing a situation the best way possible.

When coping is ineffective, the level of stress is high, but when coping is effective, the level of stress tends to be low (Lazarus, 1999). In coping with a loss we are uniquely the same and uniquely different. Coping with any challenge in life, including death, is a learned behavior. Coping essentially means adjustment to the situation and would include environmental and internal demands. Coping is how a person specifically handles stressful or emotionally charged demands (Lazarus, 1976). The individual's attitudes about death and dying are closely connected to the individual's encounter with death, the individual's experience with death, and the individual's cultural background. However, coping with death typically includes family members and friends. It is important to be around people who are emotionally supportive to alleviate stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In a professional document distributed by the Robertson Bereavement Center of Medina, Ohio, a list of suggestions is offered to help with coping as a family. The document states that "communication is the key to coping and growing as a family through grief. It is important to be together to talk, cry, rage, or even sit in silence. At the same time there should be respect for each member's way of handling his or her grief. Some family members will grieve privately, others openly, and others in a combination of these two styles. In many ways each family member must grieve alone" (Coping as a Family, n.d., para.1). Suggestions are to continue to give attention and time to the present family member and surviving family members. Also suggested is to try to be sensitive to each other's feelings. Feelings are often difficult to verbalize. Listen to what is meant as well as to what is said. Finally, another important suggestion is to respect the life stages of various family members; an adolescent might gravitate towards peers in coping with grief. Everyone has a unique way of grieving, which can at times be

at cross-purposes among family members. Accept each person's method of coping

(Coping as a Family, n.d.).

Bibliotherapy: A Resource for Children in Understanding Death

The general definition of bibliotherapy is the "use of reading material to help

people solve problems" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). There are three stages involved in the

process of bibliotherapy:

- Identification - the child identifies with a book character and events in the
  story, either fictitious or real

- Catharsis - the child becomes emotionally involved in the story and is able
  to release pent-up emotions under safe conditions, often through
  discussion or art work

- Insight-the child, after catharsis and with the help of an adult, becomes
  aware of his problems that might also be addressed through possible
  solutions to the book character's problems (McIntyre, n.d.).

The important aspect of bibliotherapy is that there is an adult available to work through

the material with the child and facilitate their level of understanding. Bibliotherapy in

grief work is defined as "the use of any kind of literature by a skilled adult or other

interested person in an effort to normalize a child's grief reactions to loss, support

constructive coping, reduce feelings of isolation, and reinforce creativity and problem

solving" (Berns, 2004, p. 321). Berns also identified the following list of ways that

children can benefit from bibliotherapy:

- To gain some distance from their own affect, focus outside themselves,
  and express thoughts, ideas, and feelings;
- To lessen feelings of isolation and increase a sense of companionship;
- To identify similarities and differences in relation to the story's characters;

- To gain insight into their own life situation, and develop creative and critical thinking;
- To validate their thoughts and feelings;
- To develop empathy with others when bibliotherapy is used in group format.

A few additional factors for professionals to consider when suggesting books to parents or others working with children include the following: How old is the child? Who died and what was the relationship? How did the person die? How was the child told about the death? Does the child have a support system? Does the child have siblings? Does the child have any special interests or talents? (Berns, 2004).

Parents and professionals can use bibliotherapy with children to help them work through their bereavement by following a simple process: identify the child's needs and possible emotions connected to their situation; select resources appropriate for the child and their situation; present the material in a way that is supportive; and facilitate a follow-up activity, conversation, and/or emotional exploration of the materials that were shared to bring the process to a therapeutic end. Without the follow-up step, the process is just reading without any therapeutic benefit for the child (Berns, 2004). This process can be used by professional therapists and also utilized by parents or other adults who are involved with the child.

Historical Perspectives of Death-Related Literature

Currently, there are hundreds of children's books on the subjects of death and dying, however, this was not always the case. The first stories for children which discussed death were actually not written for children, but were written for adults by the brothers' Grimm (Johnson, 2004). Many of these stories are very well-known today and have been tamed by Walt Disney, but the theme of death still exists. In the story of *Snow*

White, the queen wants to kill Snow White, but ultimately meets her own demise;

Cinderella starts with the death of her father; in *Hansel and Gretel* the witch tries to kill

Hansel and Gretel, but instead they shove her in the oven and kill her. Many of these

stories used death to scare children into behaving and were not geared toward explaining

death in a healthy, supportive manner.

World War II brought about the reality and horrors of death through newsreels.

This led parents who were better educated to want more education for their children

concerning death, although many people continued to speak in whispers of the subject.

Books began to become available for children that included the subject of death and

dying. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* was at the top of the book charts in 1952;

Charlotte's Web was published this same year and captured the hearts of children and

adults everywhere. At this time, the subject of death was moving from being seen as a

punishment to being accepted as a life process (Johnson, 2004).

The subject of death continued to grow and become a more prominent area of

study and discussion during the 1960's. The country was in the midst of the Vietnam

War, and death was once again an unavoidable subject for discussion. Support groups

were forming and more books dealing with loss, death and grief were being published,

such as *The Secret Garden; Meet the Austins;* and *Anne and the Sand Dobbies.* In 1969,

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross released her landmark book *On Death and Dying*, bringing death

education to the forefront of society. This newfound fascination with death emerged in

full force in the 1970s with the publication of many, many books for children about grief

and death (Johnson, 2004). This lessened somewhat in the 1980s, but death in children's

literature continues to appear in works of fiction, non-fiction, and workbooks used in

homes, support groups, schools and therapeutic interventions throughout the country.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As stated in Chapter I, children experience bereavement in a variety of ways. The age of the child and the circumstances surrounding the death of a loved one have a major influence in how the child will react and respond to grief. The purpose of this study was to examine books that are designed to explain death to young children and analyze whether or not these books deal appropriately with Bowlby's four stages of grief. These are: numbness, yearning and searching, disorganization, and reorganization. To accomplish these research goals, a content analysis of ten books designed for preschool children was conducted. What follows is an explanation of content analysis is reviewed, the sampling method is explained, and the method of measurement is discussed, including clarification of the checklist that was developed to be used by the raters.

Very often when a death occurs, preschool children may be somewhat ignored as family members process their own grief. There are many ways family members can help children cope with their grief and manage Bowlby's stages appropriately. It is sometimes believed that because preschool children don't have a realistic view of death, it isn't worthwhile to discuss it with them at any length. Even though preschool children do not experience the death of a loved one in the more mature way that older children or adolescents do, they do in fact experience grief and distress that is often difficult to

process. Rather than ignore the preschool child who has lost a loved one, caring family members need to have appropriate means at their disposal to explain and discuss the death with the child. As shown in the review of the literature, bibliotherapy can be an effective method for helping children deal with their grief. Using books and stories to help children better understand and cope with the death of a loved one can be very beneficial. It is important, however, that those books be developmentally appropriate and address the issue of death and grief in ways that are helpful and don't compound the difficulty for the child.

For this thesis, children's books that deal with the death of a loved one were analyzed to determine whether or not they are developmentally appropriate for preschoolers. When developing the measurement tool for analysis, Bowlby's four stages of grief for children was used. Each book was analyzed to determine whether or not it addresses one or more of Bowlby's stages of grief appropriately and effectively. The research questions for this study were:

> Research Question 1: Is the language used in the books developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children?

> Research Question 2: Are the ideas presented conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children?

> Research Question 3: Do the books address Bowlby's first stage of grief (numbness)?

> Research Question 4: Do the books address Bowlby's second stage of grief (yearning and searching)?

> Research Question 5: Do the books address Bowlby's third stage of grief (disorganization)?

> Research Question 6: Do the books address Bowlby's fourth stage of grief (reorganization)?

Content Analysis

In order to most accurately answer the research questions posed above, a content analysis was conducted to determine if books geared towards preschool children accurately and appropriately address their needs in reflection to the processing of grief. Content analysis is defined as "a method of studying and analyzing communications in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure variables" (Kerlinger, 1973). Sources that easily expose themselves to content analysis include forms of writing, ie. letters and diaries, television programs, music lyrics and books. Content analysis is a method of observation, but rather than observing the individuals engaged in some behavior, the researcher observes the communications that individuals have produced and asks questions of them instead (Kerlinger, 1973).

Description of the Sample

For the purpose of this thesis, ten books were chosen for analysis. The books chosen were targeted specifically to preschool aged children and dealt with some aspect of the death of a loved one. While there are several books available for children that deal with this topic, there are a limited number available for preschool children. As a first step in the analysis of this rather narrow field of children's literature, ten books were selected for this study; however, the books chosen were a fair representation of children's books that deal with grief, and they were chosen based on ready availability and their appropriateness for preschool children. The ten books that were used for this study are:

- *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages* by Leo Buscaglia (1982). This book focuses on the life process of a leaf from life on a tree to dying and falling off in the fall.

- *Everett Anderson's Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton and Ann Grifalconi (1988). This book is about a child whose father dies which causes the child to experience emotional upheaval.

- *Always and Forever* by Alan Durant and Debi Gliori (2004). This book is about a family of animals. One of the animals is sick for a long time and goes off into the woods to die.

- *The Goodbye Boat* by Mary Joslin (1999). This book uses a book uses a boat sailing off to the sea metaphor for death.

- *Goodbye, Mousie* by Robie Harris and Jan Ormeord (2004). This book is about a little boy whose pet mouse dies and how he adjusts to the death.

- *Jasper's Day* by Marjorie Blain Parker (2004). This book is about a dog who is going to have to be put to sleep and how the family gives him a special last day.

- *The Saddest Time* by Norma Simon (1986). This books focuses on 3 individual stories about the process of losing family members.

- *Badger's Parting Gifts* by Susan Varley (1984). This book was about a badger who dies and the things he left behind for his friends.

- *Saying Goodbye to Daddy* by Judith Vigna (1991). This is about the death of child's father and how she learns to keep him in her memory.

- *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* by Judith Viorst (1971). This book is about a boy whose cat dies and he has to think about ten good things about the cat..

Raters

The raters for this study are two professors of family and child development and one master's level student (the primary researcher). All have extensive backgrounds and

experience with family and child development, and all are well versed in developmentally appropriate practices for young children. All ratings were completed individually, with no collaboration or discussion among the raters. Raters completed rating sheets for all ten books and then returned the rating sheets to the primary researcher, who then coded and analyzed the data.

Method of Analysis

In order to determine whether or not the research questions were addressed by the books, a simple rating method was developed, using a metric rating of + 1 or - 1 to indicate the presence or absence of developmentally appropriate language, conceptually truthful ideas, and the addressing of the stages of grief, as indicated in the research questions. Books were rated using the following research questions:

- Is the language used in the book developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children?
- Are the ideas presented conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children?
- Do the books address Bowlby's first stage of grief (numbness)?
- Do the books address Bowlby's second stage of grief (yearning and searching)?
- Do the books address Bowlby's third stage of grief (disorganization)?
- Do the books address Bowlby's fourth stage of grief (reorganization)?

A rating sheet was developed for each book (see Figure 1), with space for indicating the score for each research question and space for comments about the book. After reading each book, raters assigned a score of plus 1 for each research question if the answer to the question was positive, or a minus 1 for each research question if the answer to the question was negative. They also added any comments they had about the book in a separate area on the rating sheet. An overall score for each was determined by adding up all 6 scores. Because three raters evaluated each book, each book had three overall

scores. Those three overall scores were averaged to determine a final overall score for

each book.

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages (Book Title)

Research Question	Rating (+1 if present; -1 if absent)
Is the language used in the book developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children?	
Are the ideas presented conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children?	
Does the book address Bowlby's first stage of grief (numbness)?	
Does the book address Bowlby's second stage of grief (yearning and searching)?	
Does the book address Bowlby's third stage of grief (disorganization)?	
Does the book address Bowlby's fourth stage of grief (reorganization)?	
Comments about the book:	Overall score for the book:

Figure 1 – Sample rating sheet

Since this type of analysis is best understood in context, rater comments were

important in determining whether or not the book is appropriate and beneficial for the

target audience. A score of plus 6 would definitely indicate that the book is appropriate

for young children. However, a score of plus 3 could also indicate that the book is appropriate, depending on which questions receive plus scores. A book that is deemed developmentally appropriate and conceptually truthful but only addresses the first of Bowlby's stages could be beneficial for young children, particularly when taking into account that the adult reading the book to the child will naturally talk with the child about his or her feelings and encourage questions. Thus, the book could be a starting point for moving through the other stages of grief. Also, it is possible that the book could receive a score of plus 1 for conceptually truthful ideas presented, but receive a minus 1 for not using developmentally appropriate language, thus making it inappropriate for young children.

In Chapter IV results of the content analysis will be detailed and a summary of the developmental appropriateness of each book will be discussed.

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CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter addresses the results of the study in terms of findings and discussion for each research question, and additional findings which resulted from the gathering of data. Findings for research questions include tables intended to facilitate the reader's understanding.

For this thesis, a sampling of ten children's books that deal with the death of a loved one were analyzed to determine whether or not they were developmentally appropriate for preschoolers. The measurement tool used for analysis was based on Bowlby's four stages of grief for children. Each book was analyzed to determine whether or not it addressed one or more of Bowlby's stages of grief appropriately and effectively, as well as whether or not the book used developmentally appropriate language for pre-school aged children and whether the ideas presented were conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children.

For the purpose of this thesis, ten books were chosen that were targeted specifically to preschool children and that dealt with some aspect of the death of a loved one. In order to most accurately answer the research questions, a content analysis was conducted to determine if the books which were recommended for preschool children did, in fact, accurately and appropriately addressed their needs in regard to the processing of grief. In discussion of these findings, a reminder is offered that while there

are many books available for preschool children on the topic, this sampling is a small

representation. Any interpretations should be made with this limitation in mind.

Research questions are

> Research Question 1:   Is the language used in the book developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children?
>
> Research Question 2:   Are the ideas presented conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children?
>
> Research Question 3:   Do the books address Bowlby's first stage of grief (numbness)?
>
> Research Question 4: Do the books address Bowlby's second stage of grief (yearning and searching)?
>
> Research Question 5: Do the books address Bowlby's third stage of grief (disorganization)?
>
> Research Question 6: Do the books address Bowlby's fourth stage of grief (reorganization)?

Findings

Analysis of each book is detailed below. Of the ten books analyzed, seven

achieved positive average scores from the raters of more than 3 points, one book received

an average positive score of 2, and two books received negative average scores. Tables

below show raters' scoring for each book.

Table 1. The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 2	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 3	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 4	- 1	- 1	+ 1
Question 5	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 6	- 1	- 1	+ 1
Total Score	- 6	- 6	- 4
Average Score for Book - 5.3			

As indicated in Table 1, on questions 1, 2, 3, and 5, which dealt with developmentally appropriate language for preschoolers, conceptually truthful and appropriate ideas, and the first and third stages of grief, all raters found the book lacking. One rater gave a positive rating to the book for questions 4 and 6. Overall average rating for this book was in the minus range at -5.3. Comments about the book from raters indicated the book was written in a somewhat abstract manner which wasn't appropriate for preschool children, particularly younger preschool children. Death is presented as indirect and philosophical. Illustrations in this book were primarily of trees and leaves; without actual people in the illustrations, it would most likely be difficult for preschoolers to relate to the book. Raters indicated that the book would be more appropriate for older school-aged children.

Table 2. Everett Anderson's Goodbye

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 2	- 1	+ 1	- 1
Question 3	- 1	+ 1	- 1
Question 4	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 5	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 6	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 2	+ 6	+ 2
Average Score for Book + 3.3			

As indicated in Table 2, on questions 1, 4, 5 and 6, which dealt with developmentally appropriate language for preschoolers and the second, third and fourth stages of grief, all raters were in agreement and gave positive scores. For questions 2 and 3 which dealt with conceptually truthful and appropriate ideas and the first stage of grief, two raters gave negative scores. Overall average score for this book was 3.3. Comments from raters indicated that this would be a good book to use with preschoolers if other books and a good amount of discussion was used to help explain the book. Some stages were not clearly presented in the book, although raters felt the second and third stages were presented well. Stage four was addressed, but very minimally. Raters believed that this would be an appropriate book for a preschooler who had passed the first of Bowlby's

stages of grief. Language used in the book was easy for preschoolers to understand; there was some rhyming that is appealing to preschoolers.

Table 3. Always and Forever

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	- 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 2	+ 1	+ 1	- 1
Question 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 4	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 5	+1	+1	+ 1
Question 6	+1	+1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 4	+ 6	+ 4
Average Score for Book + 4.6			

As indicated in Table 3, for questions 3, 4, 5 and 6, which dealt with the four stages of grief, all raters were in agreement and rated the book positively. For question 1 which dealt with developmentally appropriate language for preschoolers, rater #1 gave a negative rating to the book. For question 2 which dealt with conceptually truthful and appropriate ideas, rater #3 gave a negative rating. Overall average score for this book was + 4.6. Comments from raters indicated that this was a particularly appropriate book for preschoolers. It dealt very well with the family of characters and how they dealt with the death as a group. The book dealt particularly well with Bowlby's fourth stage of

grief, re-organization. The characters communicated well with one another about the

death of their friend.   Sentences were short and words were easy for preschoolers to

understand. The family interactions in the book were particularly effective.

Table 4. The Goodbye Boat

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 2	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 3	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 4	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 5	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 6	- 1	- 1	- 1
Total Score	- 4	- 4	- 4
Average Score for Book - 4			

As indicated in Table 4, other than question 1, which dealt with developmentally

appropriate language for preschoolers, and was give a positive rating by all raters, all

other questions were rated as negatively by all raters. Overall average score for this book

was a – 4. Comments from raters indicated that all raters felt this book was much too

abstract for preschoolers. While preschoolers appreciate simple language the language in

this book was very minimal, and preschoolers would not understand. This book didn't

address any of Bowlby's stages of grief. Of particular concern to the raters was the fact

that the book offered false ideas about death, and there was no clear explanation or closure.

Table 5. Goodbye, Mousie

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 4	+ 1	- 1	+ 1
Question 5	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 6	+ 1	- 1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 6	+ 2	+ 6
Average Score for Book + 4.6			

As indicated in Table 5, for questions 1, 2, 3 and 5, which dealt with developmentally appropriate language for preschoolers, conceptually truthful ideas, and the first and third stages of grief, all raters gave positive ratings. Rater #2 gave a negative rating for questions 4 and 6 which dealt with the second and fourth stages of grief. Overall score for this book was + 4.6. All raters believed this was a beneficial book for preschoolers. Raters felt that the parent in the book gave appropriate and realistic responses to the child. This book offered some closure to the child who came to some acceptance at the end of the story and began to plan for the future. Language used was appropriate and

understandable for preschoolers. The book dealt effectively with helping the child deal

with emotions. One rater felt that the book coddled the child somewhat but overall all

raters believe the book was beneficial for preschoolers.

Table 6. Jasper's Day

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 2	+ 1	+ 1	- 1
Question 3	+ 1	+ 1	- 1
Question 4	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 5	+ 1	+ 1	- 1
Question 6	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 4	+ 4	- 2
Average Score for Book + 2			

As indicated in Table 6, the only question that received all negative scores was the

question 1, which dealt with developmentally appropriate language for preschoolers.

Questions 4 and 6 which dealt with the second and fourth stages of grief received all

positive scores from raters. For questions 2, 3 and 5 which dealt with conceptually

truthful ideas and the first and third stages of grief, received negative scores from rater

#3. The average score for this book was + 2. All raters felt this book would be excellent

for older children but was somewhat advanced for preschoolers. Language was fairly

complex and detailed which would be difficult for preschoolers to understand. Raters felt

this book dealt very effectively with the idea of long-term illness and losing a beloved

member of the family. For an older child who has lost a pet this book would be very

beneficial.

Table 7. The Saddest Time

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	- 1	- 1	+ 1
Question 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 4	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 5	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 6	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 4	+ 4	+ 6
Average Score for Book + 4.6			

As indicated in Table 7, other than question 1 which dealt with developmentally

appropriate language for preschoolers and received negative scores from two raters, all

other questions received all positive ratings. Average score for this book was + 4.6.

Even though the average score for this book was high, two of the raters felt the language

used and stories told were more appropriate for older children. One positive aspect of

this book was the information for parents presented at this beginning of each story to

guide parents in discussion with the child. Because there were three separate stories in

the book, parents could choose one that would be most appropriate for their child's

situation. All three stories presented conceptually truthful ideas to children.   Raters

agreed that all four of Bowlby's stages of grief were addressed effectively.

Table 8. Badger's Parting Gifts

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 2	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 3	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 4	-1	- 1	- 1
Question 5	- 1	- 1	- 1
Question 6	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Total Score	- 4	- 4	- 4
Average Score for Book - 4			

As indicated in Table 8, the only question that received positive ratings was question 6

which dealt with the fourth stage of grief. All other questions received negative ratings.

The average score for this book was – 4. Comments form the raters indicated that the

language used was above the level of preschoolers, ideas were not clearly presented, and

the book was too abstract for preschoolers. Raters believed that this book would confuse

young children, rather than helping them understand. Ideas presented were not truthful and most of Bowlby's stages were not addressed.

Table 9. Saying Goodbye to Daddy

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	+ 1	- 1	+ 1
Question 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 4	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 5	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 6	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 6	+ 4	+ 6
Average Score for Book + 5.3			

As indicated in Table 9, other than one negative rating for question 1 which dealt with developmentally appropriate language for preschoolers, this book received all positive ratings. The average score for this book was +5.3; this was the second highest rating of all ten books. All raters found this book to be very appropriate for young children and highly recommended it. The book was well organized, truthful, and thoughtful in its explanations. This book used appropriate words to explain what was happening such as "casket", "hearse" and "die", and the story was told with love.   One rater called this book "almost perfect."

Table 10. The Tenth Good Thing About Barney

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Question 1	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 2	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 3	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 4	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 5	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Question 6	+ 1	+ 1	+ 1
Total Score	+ 6	+ 6	+ 6
Average Score for Book + 6			

As indicated in Table 10, this book received the highest score of all the books in the

sample. All raters gave positive scores for all questions. All raters highly recommended

this book for preschoolers. While the raters felt the book dealt somewhat lightly with the

actual death, they felt the aftermath of death was dealt with very effectively. All of

Bowlby's stages were addressed in the book, and it offered very realistic ideas to help a

child deal with the death of a pet. One rater felt that the discussions between parent and

child were very realistic and was a good story to help prepare a child for the death of a

loved one.

Data from this chapter are discussed and conclusions are offered in the following chapter. Chapter V also offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Statement of the Problem

As stated in Chapter I, the death of a loved one can have a profound impact on a child. In order to help a child cope during the grief process caregivers can use a variety of methods, including bibliotherapy – the use of reading materials to help with problems. When using bibliotherapy with preschoolers, it is important to choose books that are developmentally appropriate for the child and the situation.

For this master's thesis, ten books about death and bereavement were chosen for analysis. These books were especially written for young children and deal with the topic in a variety of ways. Bowlby's stages of grief for children – numbness, yearning and searching, disorganization, and re-organization - were used when developing the evaluation tool for this thesis. Research questions are:

Research Question 1: Is the language used in the books developmentally appropriate for preschool-aged children?

Research Question 2: Are the ideas presented conceptually truthful and appropriate for preschool-aged children?

Research Question 3: Do the books address Bowlby's first stage of grief (numbness)?

Research Question 4: Do the books address Bowlby's second stage of grief (yearning and searching)?

Research Question 5: Do the books address Bowlby's third stage of grief (disorganization)?

Research Question 6: Do the books address Bowlby's fourth stage of grief (reorganization)?

Discussion of the Findings

Findings from this study indicate that six of the books were found to be appropriate for preschool children when discussing death and bereavement. Those six books had scores ranging from + 3.3 to + 6. Listed below are the books in order from highest to lowest scores.

- The Tenth Good Thing About Barney + 6
- Saying Goodbye to Daddy + 5.3
- The Saddest Time + 4.6 (tie)
- Goodbye, Mousie + 4.6 (tie)
- Always and Forever + 4.6 (tie)
- Everett Anderson's Goodbye + 3.3
- Jasper's Day + 2
- Badger's Parting Gifts - 4 (tie)
- The Goodbye Boat - 4 (tie)
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf - 5.3

Jasper's Day, while only having an overall score of + 2, was determined by the raters to be an excellent book for older children with a story told in very thoughtful and compassionate manner. Even though it was above the preschool level it was highly

recommended by the raters for older children *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* and *Saying Goodbye to Daddy* received the highest scores and were found by the raters to deal particularly effectively with bereavement and were very appropriate for preschool children. Two of the books – *The Goodbye Boat* and *Badger's Parting Gifts* – were of concern because they presented false ideas about death. The raters believed this would be confusing to young children and cause more harm than good. The book with the lowest score, *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages*, was not recommended for preschoolers because of the vagueness and abstract nature of the book, but the book was deemed to be appropriate for older children. The three books that received negative ratings would not be recommended for preschoolers because they were too abstract and did not address the stages of grief in an understandable way for preschoolers.

Implications

The results of this study indicate that caregivers who are seeking books to help explain death to young children would be well served to choose any of the six books with scores of + 3.3 and +6. Approaching the selection of books in an analytical way such as this makes it more likely that parents will choose books that are most appropriate for their young child. The books in this study with higher scores used language that was appropriate for preschoolers, presented conceptually truthful ideas for preschoolers, and dealt effectively with Bowlby's stages of grief. When choosing these or other books about death and bereavement caregivers should keep in mind the particular situation the child is in and the circumstances surrounding the death. For example, the books

Goodbye, Mousie and *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* dealt particularly well with the death of a beloved pet and are easily understandable for preschool children.

For the child who is dealing with the death of a family member, the books *Saying Goodbye to Daddy* and *Everett Anderson's Goodbye* would be excellent choices to help children deal with their emotional response to the death. These books would also be good springboards to discussion about the aftermath of death and appropriate means of coping.

The book *The Saddest Time* had an introduction to each story to help caregivers facilitate discussion and answer questions their children might have about the situation. Because there were three distinct stories in this book, caregivers would be able to use the story that is most appropriate for the situation.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation to this study was the small sample size. However, the books chosen were ones recommended for preschoolers and were popular choices of caregivers, according to librarians and individuals working in family and child social services. The sample was representative of the books dealing with death and its aftermath that are readily available for young children.

Suggestions for Future Research

Possibilities for future research on this topic would include using a larger sample. Ten books is a small number, and a more extensive sample would make the findings more generalizable. Conducting this analysis using books for older children would be a worthwhile endeavor and would contribute to the literature on helping

children deal with death and the bereavement process. Bowlby's stages of grief were used in developing the research questions for this study; however, there are other researchers (e.g. Worden, Corr) whose work with the bereavement process could be used in future studies on this topic.

Summary

Because death is a traumatic experience for a young child, it is imperative that caregivers make every effort to comfort and help the child through the bereavement process. It is well established that bibliotherapy can be beneficial in helping individuals deal with personal problems. Generally preschool children are very familiar with books and the process of having adults read to them. Wisely chosen books that deal with death and bereavement that are developmentally appropriate for preschool children can comfort and ease the difficulty of the situation for both the child and the caregiver. Obviously books alone cannot completely alleviate the situation for the child. However, books used in conjunction with compassionate discussion and other comfort from caregivers is beneficial in helping the child to understand and cope with the grieving process.

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"Everett Anderson's Goodbye" by Lucille Clifton and Ann Grifalconi (1988)

"Always and Forever" by Alan Durant and Debi Gliori (2004)

"The Goodbye Boat" by Mary Joslin (1999)

"Goodbye, Mousie" by Robie Harris and Jan Prmeord (2004)

"Jasper's Day" by Marjorie Blain Parker (2004)

"The Saddest Time" by Norma Simon (1986)

"Badger's Parting Gifts" by Susan Varley (1984)

"Saying Goodbye to Daddy" by Judith Vigna (1991)