

Hi Rochelle,

I'm happy to speak with you but am cc'ing to group because this question comes up increasingly with trainers.

In anticipation of death of parent, it's important for the therapist to work with the dying parent and/or caregiver to address the following with the child:

All the following needs to be done in a developmentally appropriate way, and with realistic consideration of timing of the death, i.e., is the death definite, imminent, etc.

- 1) Explore with the parent/family how they want to tell the child (most don't want to tell them; want to protect the child as long as possible; believe that the child doesn't know, etc.). It's helpful to share that typically children know or suspect more than adults think, and it is important to be honest with them but as long as there is realistic hope for recovery, not to be premature in taking this away either. Plan for a joint session (meeting) with the child to have this conversation with the dying parent as well as the future caregiver (surviving parent or other adult ) present if feasible.

- 2) Prior to meeting with the child, explore with the parent/caregiver their personal, the child's and family's faith traditions and beliefs re: death, mourning, etc., often this is helpful in preparing for conversation with the child

- 3) Preparing for the meeting with the child –plan for enough time, what you will say, how you want the dying parent and other caregiver to respond. It helps to practice this with them, i.e., tell them what you will be sharing with the child and what you would like them to say in response to the child's questions or expressions of (likely upset) emotions; reassure them that it is okay to cry a little, but the goal is to support the child, express love and that the child will be okay.

- 4) Having the meeting with the child: validate that the child has probably noticed, suspected or known that the parent has been sick, and probably has some questions, this meeting is to answer the child's questions and let the child know that it is okay to talk about it, what is going to happen, and the difficult feelings.

- 5) Mostly it is following the child's lead during the meeting while

gently guiding the family to address the topic of the parent's impending death, what to expect (to the degree that this is predictable), and helping the child express feelings. Allow for variability in expression—some kids have relatively few questions, some have many.

6) Have a clear plan and answers for common concerns/questions:  
[SEP][L]a) who will take care of the child after the parent's death, [SEP][L]b) when is this expected to occur: [SEP][L]c) will parent suffer? Who will help them when they die? What will it be like? [SEP][L]d) what would happen if the new caregiver also became ill (who would take care of me then?) [SEP][L]e) Will I have to move? [SEP][L]f) Is this my fault?  
[SEP][L]g) Do you love me? [SEP][L]h) What should I tell other kids about how/why you died? (stigma, etc. about parental death/cause of death) [SEP][L]i) Be prepared for the conversation to continue beyond this one meeting.

7) As always, the child has a radar for the parent, so if the parent and caregiver are coping okay and modeling resiliency, the child will take their cues from them. That's [SEP][L] why it is so helpful to have initial session(s) with adults first, to figure out how they want this to go and what they want to say to the child. Focusing on the overarching message (I love you, I want you to be okay) is usually helpful to the parent and the child.

Several resources are available at [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org) but I think the way you talk about it is more important than having any specific resources.

Kind regards,

Judy

Judith A. Cohen, M.D.

Professor of Psychiatry

How terribly sad! I will let those with more expertise in traumatic grief respond. I assume the therapist has reviewed the CTG web and there is a plan for who will step in to serve in the caregiving role after her mother's passing - it would be important to include that person in therapy now if possible. I am glad the family already has support from you and their therapist!

Warmest regards,  
Esther

Other trainers/supervisors:

Hi Rochelle,

you may have a lot of these resources already, but NCTSN has some good, free CTG books in PDF form here:

<http://nctsn.org/trauma-types/traumatic-grief/parents-caregivers>

The book Rosie Remembers Mommy: Forever in Her Heart, sounds like it would be the best match for this client given her age.

The case has an interesting twist given that mom is still alive, so not a typical CTG case or protocol at this point. I would think that preparing for the inevitable goodbye would be helpful. It actually seems helpful that you could do some preservation of positive memories with mom's participation while she is still alive. If mom could participate in this in some way, letters to the daughter, a scrapbook, co-planning a ritual that client can carry out to remember mom on special days etc. that might be helpful going forward.

-David Hong

In preparation there are some books that we find very useful to create meaning around death and prepare children (as opposed to avoid the topic which is so common in this scenarios):

- *The Invisible Strings* (my personal favorite to help children -and adults- to create a mental representation of attachment bonds). It could be use for loss, separation, even starting daycare/school

<https://www.amazon.com/Invisible-String-Patrice->

[Karst/dp/0875167349/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1516213784&sr=1-2&keywords=when+dinosaurs+die](https://www.amazon.com/When-Dinosaurs-Die-Understanding-Families/dp/0875167349/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1516213784&sr=1-2&keywords=when+dinosaurs+die)

- *When dinosaurs die: A guide to understand death.* (this book explains a variety of causes of death, different ages, goes over different cultural traditions on loss and mourning, and feelings around death).

[https://www.amazon.com/When-Dinosaurs-Die-Understanding-Families/dp/0316119555/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1516213784&sr=1-1&keywords=when+dinosaurs+die](https://www.amazon.com/When-Dinosaurs-Die-Understanding-Families/dp/0316119555/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1516213784&sr=1-1&keywords=when+dinosaurs+die)

- *I miss you: A first look at death.*

This book helps boys and girls understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have following a loved one's death.

[https://www.amazon.com/Miss-You-First-Look-Death/dp/0764117645/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_14\\_img\\_2?encoding=UTF8&pd\\_rd\\_i=0764117645&pd\\_rd\\_r=T2EBPHHX811T9FCZ90H6&pd\\_rd\\_w=G9kwP&pd\\_rd\\_wg=XdK6p&psc=1&refRID=T2EBPHHX811T9FCZ90H6](https://www.amazon.com/Miss-You-First-Look-Death/dp/0764117645/ref=pd_bxgy_14_img_2?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=0764117645&pd_rd_r=T2EBPHHX811T9FCZ90H6&pd_rd_w=G9kwP&pd_rd_wg=XdK6p&psc=1&refRID=T2EBPHHX811T9FCZ90H6)

Hope it helps.

All best,

Alejandra Trujillo, LMFT

TF-CBT Lead

FL/NV Youth & Family Center

San Fernando Valley Community Mental Health Center, Inc.

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Here are some additional resources recommended by my go-to grief counselor.

They should google Compassion Books for a great set of titles that deal with children/teens and illness/loss.

[www.compassionbooks.com](http://www.compassionbooks.com)

Otherwise, these are Dougy Center recommended programs in South Carolina:

1. Palmetto Richland Cancer Center-Columbia, SC
2. Good Grieving: Helping Children and Teens, Columbia, SC
3. Jamies Tree House-Clinton, SC

[www.sccancercenter.org](http://www.sccancercenter.org)

4. OMH Hospice of Euothills-Seneca, SC
5. Hospice and Community Care-Rock Hill, SC

[www.hospicecommunitycare.org](http://www.hospicecommunitycare.org)

Hope these are helpful.

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