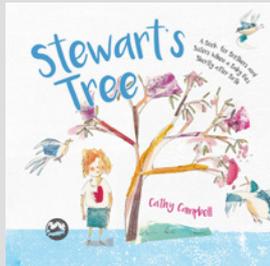


is to ensure that all children have access to support when experiencing death, and this is a very useful resource for use in schools and by carers. ■

Janet Dowling

Cruse Bereavement Care Volunteer



Stewart's Tree

Written and illustrated by
Cathy Campbell

London: Jessica Kingsley
2018
978-1785923999

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

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

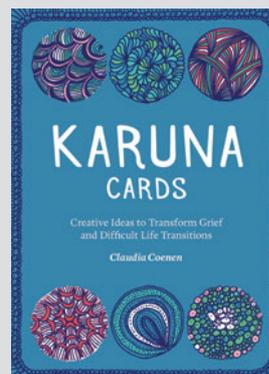
Quite a lot of space is devoted to the often misunderstood idea of 'losing' the baby and this is good. I think other unhelpful but commonly used expressions could have been incorporated however - 'going to sleep' being the obvious example. Children at three or four cannot understand the permanency of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

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

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

Judy Debenham

Candle Child Bereavement Service, St Christopher's Hospice



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

Author: Claudia Coenen
Illustrator: Kate McHale

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

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

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

different aspects of anger. Generally it's about creative ways to reflect on the world using both emotional and sensory states.

The author advocates having a journal and using it to respond to different cards either by journaling, writing, drawing, or creating collages to reflect on the experience. Only one of the cards specifically mentions the loss of a person, the remaining cards could be used generically for any kind of loss or transition in life. If you are not used to eliciting creative responses to grief it may seem strange but the value of the cards is that they are grounded in a theoretical framework that supports the client and promotes the creative process. There are no rules to using them- just some guidance and you deploy as you feel appropriate, and if you don't like what is on one card- take another!

I set myself the task of using one a day for a week and took one at random to respond to. I had great fun, and also found I was reflecting on things quite deeply. For a client who is willing to explore issues in a creative way, these cards used in a session or as homework would be very valuable. If it suits the client's way of developing coping strategies they may be inspired to invest in a set themselves. I was put in mind of Jane Moss' 'Writing in bereavement' (published in 2012 by Jessica Kingsley) and I think that the two would complement each other when working personally, with clients or with a group. ■

Janet Dowling

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