

Hamilton  
Brookes

Dealing With Grief, Loss And  
Feelings Of Sadness  
**Assembly Structure**

Produced for OxTrail 2024 in association  
with Sobell House Hospice.



## Overview

Two book options provide distinct assembly structures and can be used independent of each other. However, to reinforce the message they can be used as separate, but thematically linked, assemblies.

## Purpose

- Talking about loss is important not only in its acknowledgement of those feelings, but also in the language and space it provides children with which to manage their own experiences.
- Using books as a launch pad for discussion can help children make sense of or articulate their own emotions. It can also offer a non-confrontational, unobtrusive exploration of the theme through the characters' experiences, providing an opportunity for self-reflection.

## For Parents/Carers

- It is important to keep parents and carers informed when tackling tricky, potentially triggering emotions. You may wish to adapt the **Letter Home** and send home prior to this assembly.
- Consider having a conversation with parents or carers, particularly if there has been a recent bereavement, to establish if they're comfortable with their child being part of the assembly.

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## Introduction (3 mins)

- Explain to children that you will be reading a book about loss to help them think and talk about how that feels.
- Acknowledge that some may have experienced the death of a loved one, but that loss isn't always about people dying. We can feel loss when our lives change dramatically, or when people move away.
- We can feel loss for family, friends, pets, and places, and it's important to talk about difficult feelings.

*The Memory Tree* by Britta Teckentrup (published by Hachette) is about a fox that dies and is remembered by all his friends in the forest. It is a gentle look at death in old age.

*Grandad's Island* by Benji Davies (published by Simon & Schuster) tells the story of a little boy saying goodbye to his grandad. It is a more confronting look at the death of a relative and the feelings of loss left behind.

### The Book (5 mins)

#### *The Memory Tree*

- Read the book in full.
- As you read, highlight why the animals are sad, e.g. *because Fox has died, and they loved and will miss him*. Explain that it can feel very hard to carry on when someone we love dies.
- Make a connection between the growth of the tree and the way the animals are keeping Fox alive.

#### *Grandad's Island*

- Read the book in full.
- As you read, highlight how the island makes Syd and Grandad feel, e.g. *happy, carefree, fun*. Look at the pictures of their different experiences on the island and their expressions.
- At the end of the book, ensure children understand that Grandad isn't at home when Syd goes round the next morning because he has died.



### After Reading (5 mins)

#### *The Memory Tree*

- Talk about how the animals' memories of Fox fill them with warmth, happiness and make them smile.
- Highlight that when someone we love dies, they leave a lot of love and happiness behind for everyone who knew them. Explain that when memories are cherished and shared, that life continues to thrive, just like the tree in the book.
- Explain that the tree is created out of the loving memories of Fox. Revisit the end of the book when the tree is "big and strong" and is helping all the animals in the forest in different ways (a bit like how Fox did when he was alive).

#### *Grandad's Island*

- Draw children's attention to the fact that Syd is worried his grandad will be lonely if he stays on the island alone: "But won't you be lonely?" Suggest that sometimes saying goodbye is harder for the ones left behind, who can feel lonely and sad and scared.
- Look together at their goodbye cuddle and explain that Grandad isn't going back to Syd's world because he is going to a new world. Explain that this is a way of thinking about death.
- Look back at how the ship in Grandad's attic is gone when Syd goes back, at how "it was as if it had never been there at all," and encourage children to think about whether it was real or not. Suggest that the trip and the island could have been a way to help Syd understand that his grandad has gone.
- Highlight that Syd is sad to say goodbye to Grandad and that he will miss him, but that Grandad is not sad. Grandad is in a happy, content place – illustrated at the end by the message he sends Syd.
- Remind children that death doesn't have to be scary, sometimes when people are old, they aren't afraid to die.

### Take Away (2 mins)

#### *The Memory Tree*

- Encourage children to think about a happy memory or experience that someone they love has given them. This doesn't have to have been given by someone who has died, it could be a memory of something they did with a friend, sibling, parent, or other family member – just something that makes them smile.

#### *Grandad's Island*

- Encourage children to think about a place that makes them feel really happy and content.