

Ollie the Octopus:
Loss & Bereavement Activity Book
Dr Karen Treisman, Illustrated by Sarah Peacock
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Reviewed by Ruth Taylor

Written by clinical psychologist Dr Karen Treisman as part of her Therapeutic Treasures Collection, *Ollie the Octopus - Loss & Bereavement Activity Book* is aimed at five- to ten-year olds to read and complete alongside an adult. This adult may be a parent or another close family member, or indeed a professional who holds a safe and supportive relationship with the child.

It introduces some of the more common experiences of death through the central child-friendly character of Ollie the Octopus and his friends, looking at the loss of a parent through illness, as well as the loss of a sibling through an accident and the loss of a grandparent through old age. The book then aims to provide ideas and strategies for supporting children as they navigate their individual ways through a bereavement.

Around a quarter (and a main strength of the book) – kept separate at the end, but crucially to be read first – is a dedicated guide for adults. This feels particularly well considered for adults who are supporting a child in a non-professional capacity. It is a guide, both in how to use the book but also in how to talk to children about death. The guide is both thorough and clear.

The book begins with Ollie's story, his loss and subsequently trying to make sense of it with the support of his father and his friends. I read the story with two different hats on – my professional one – and my mother-of-two (aged five & eight) one. My five-year-old would likely find the initial story too long to read in one sitting (it's around 40 A4 pages in length without any mini chapters); older children would probably manage more easily with that aspect. The story of Ollie is available separately as a stand-alone text which some children and adults may prefer.

There then follows sixty different activities for children to carry out. Many of these would be completed in partnership with an adult, but some (for example a word search or drawing a picture) can comfortably be accomplished by the child whenever they wish. A

number of the activities are varied in style but similar in intent – this is acknowledged in the book as it allows children to pick and choose which activities suit them best. The book's intention is not to complete all sixty activities, although some gentle repetition may help a child to consolidate understanding. The majority of the activities would require a good 15-30 minutes each to complete. Consideration has been given to the significant difference between five- and ten-year-old's cognitive understanding and, as such, some of the activities are pitched at the upper end of the age-range whilst others at the younger end. I like that if I were completing this with my own children, there are activities that would appeal to each of them – as well as some overlap in what they would likely engage with.

In many ways, the book is visually appealing: colourful and with an easy-to-read font that is likely to appeal to its younger audience. Sarah Peacock's illustrations are delightful and well-suited to the target age group. The main practical downfall is that it is physically quite big, not dissimilar to a textbook. This could be off-putting to some children. However, mindful of the book's size and how it might present to a child, permission is granted to photocopy individual pages within the workbook for personal use.

Undoubtedly the way in which the book is used will vary, depending upon whether in a personal or professional setting - as well as the age of the child. The activity book is accessible in both scenarios and Treisman has created something that can be of use to individual families or professionals alike.

Ruth Taylor
Person-Centered Counsellor, PGDIP, MBACP
Edinburgh, Scotland
r_j_squire@hotmail.com