

On Sale: August 16, 2022
Original Hardcover, eBook



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“Ultimately, this is a book about truth, courage, empathy, and respect for children who must learn to live with loss and their parents who must guide them.”

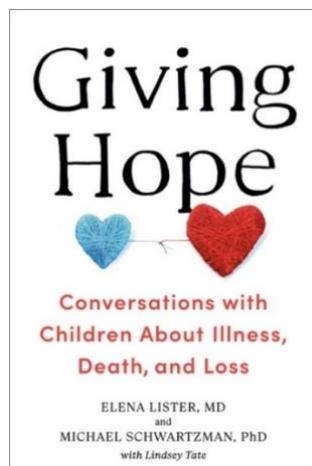
—Steve Leder, bestselling author of *The Beauty of What Remains*

GIVING HOPE

Conversations with Children About Illness, Death, and Loss

Elena Lister, MD, and Michael Schwartzman, PhD

For lots of kids today, the world is a sad and scary place. They’ve had to live with the fear and death toll of COVID. They’ve heard terrifying news of school shootings—[23 incidents](#) just this year—and seen heartbreaking photos of children killed in the war in Ukraine. They may have lost a friend to suicide, [the second-leading cause of death among teens](#), or they may be dealing with a terminal illness or recent loss in their family. Based on an analysis from [The New York Life Foundation](#), an estimated one in 14 children in the US—nearly five million kids—will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18. And too often, parents and other caring adults only make kids feel worse—and all alone—by avoiding talking about life’s sad and scary realities.



In **GIVING HOPE: *Conversations with Children About Illness, Death, and Loss*** (Avery/Penguin Random House; on-sale August 16, 2022) **Elena Lister, MD, and Michael Schwartzman, PhD**, reach out to help parents make even the most unbearable experiences more bearable for their kids—and themselves—by sharing their feelings and staying openhearted together. Dr. Lister, a psychiatrist who lost a young daughter to leukemia, met her co-author, Dr. Schwartzman, eight years ago when she was called to be a grief consultant at the school where he serves as the consulting psychologist. Drawing on their decades of professional experience and driven by their personal dedication, **GIVING HOPE** offers all adults a compassionate and

practical guide to turn to in those dreaded, distressing moments when they need to talk with children entrusted to their care about matters of death.

“We believe it’s in children’s best interest to learn about death from their parents early on in their lives,” Drs. Lister and Schwartzman stress. “You will build a lifetime of connection and trust in each other, and your child can grow from your conversations, moving forward with greater compassion, more empathy and the capacity to know and manage feelings.”

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While speaking directly to parents, **GIVING HOPE** is also a valuable resource for extended family members, mentors and coaches to youngsters, and classroom teachers. According to a national survey conducted by New York Life, nearly 70 percent of teachers currently have at least one student in their class or classes who has lost a parent, guardian, sibling, or close friend in the past year. Grief takes a toll on kids in school. As observed by their teachers, students who have suffered the death of a loved one tend to have difficulty concentrating, decreased interest in class participation and completing assignments, and increased absenteeism, among other troubling issues.

Providing all caretakers with research insights, relatable stories, specific examples, sample conversations, and actionable steps, **GIVING HOPE** is a reliable guide and trusted companion for life's most difficult conversations and challenging times. In each chapter, Elena Lister and Michael Schwartzman discuss the best strategies and practices for approaching painful topics with kids, and, as part of their larger mission, want to share that guidance with parents, relatives, mentors, and teachers everywhere. Specifically, the authors offer expert and reassuring advice on:

- How to best help children with their emotional responses to media reports of death, whether due to COVID-19, current warfare, police violence, domestic terrorism, notable suicides, or natural disasters.
- Seizing everyday opportunities to talk about death with your child, starting as young as four, through reading books and watching movies together, exploring nature, and more. Reality: Kids are curious about death and pick up clues from the media and the world around them.
- Explaining the facts of death to children in a way that's easy to grasp and not frightening. Having a general understanding of death—its universality, its irreversibility, its finality, and its causality—will prepare kids to cope with a specific loss later in life.
- Why a parent's natural instinct to protect a child from upsetting news, such as a loved one's terminal illness, can have unintended harmful consequences. Children can sense when something sad or scary is happening with the adults in their lives and will worry less if you tell them what it is. They'll feel relief in being able to ask questions and express their anxieties.
- The importance of recognizing and facing your own feelings about mortality and loss before talking to your child—plus, specific guidance on how, when, where, and what to tell your child when a loved one is diagnosed with a terminal illness, has a fatal heart attack, is killed in a tragic accident, or commits suicide.

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- Keeping an open mind about a child's reaction to loss, which may be different from your own or from what you expect. For instance, a typically calm and collected child may burst into tears, while his sensitive sibling may cover her ears or ignore you. Remember: Everyone's grief is unique, and all feelings and reactions are okay. Avoid disapproval.
- How to support your child after the death of someone close, with advice on whether your child should attend the funeral; suggestions for creating mourning rituals together, such as setting up an online memorial page for your loved one; and encouragement for maintaining routines to help children feel like their world is more stable, even if you feel like your own world has fallen apart.

Reinforcing honesty and empathy throughout, **GIVING HOPE** shows how accepting the reality of death and embracing grief together can make a child more resilient, strengthen your bond, and bring a renewed appreciation for life.