

# TOUGH TOPICS

*Inspiring Conversations in Difficult Times*

Kindergarten  
through  
Grade 2

## Adoption

### Gaston

By Kelly DiPuccio, Illus. by Christian Robinson  
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2014. 40p.

Gaston is a bulldog puppy who doesn't look quite right in his poodle pack, but learns that love is what makes a family.

### Home at Last

By Vera B. Williams,  
Illus. by Chris Raschka and Vera B. Williams  
HarperCollins, 2016. 32p.

Lester is happy when he is adopted by Daddy Albert and Daddy Rich, however at night he finds he cannot fall asleep because he is alone and wonders when he will feel truly at "home."

### Just Right Family: An Adoption Story

By Silvia Lopez, Illus. by Ziyue Chen  
Albert Whitman & Company, 2018. 32p.

Meili thinks that getting a puppy would be better than a little sister. The whole family prepares for the new baby to arrive, and when she does, she's just right—like their family.

### A Most Unusual Day

By Sydra Mallery, Illus. by E.B. Goodale  
Greenwillow Books, 2018. 40p.

Everything is just a bit off for Caroline as she anxiously makes her way through an important day, the day her new adopted sister arrives.

## Anxiety and Depression

### The Color Thief: A Family's Story of Depression

By Andrew & Polly Peters, Illus. by Karin Littlewood  
Albert Whitman, 2015. 24p.

A child describes the black and white world his father experiences when he falls

into depression and the color that returns gradually as he undergoes counseling.

### Emily's Blue Period

By Cathleen Daly, Illus. by Lisa Brown  
Roaring Brook Press, 2014. 56p.

Emily struggles with the depression and sadness she feels after her parents separate, making a connection between this difficult moment in her life and Picasso's Blue Period.

### I Used to Be Afraid

By Laura Vaccaro Seeger  
Roaring Books Press, 2015. 40p.

A little girl describes all the things she used to be afraid of, but is not anymore. A relatable look at the fears young children have and how to face them.

### Me and My Fear

By Francesca Sanna  
Flying Eye Books, 2018. 40p.

Fear follows us everywhere. Sometimes it grows so big it gets in the way of everyday things. When we share our feelings, they grow smaller and more manageable.

## Body Image/Self Esteem

### Giraffe Problems

By Jory John, Illus. by Lane Smith  
Random House Books for Young Readers, 2018. 42p.

Giraffe doesn't feel good about his neck. It's too long, too bendy, too patterned, and everyone stares at it. Then he meets an admiring turtle who shows him how great differences can be.

### My Hair is a Garden

By Cozbi A. Cabrera  
Albert Whitman and Company, 2018. 32p.

After being teased by her classmates about her unruly hair, a young girl learns that

the best way to care for her hair and keep it beautiful and healthy is to treat it like a garden.

### One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo

By Lauren Mayeno Illus. by Robert Liu-Trujillo  
Blood Orange Press, 2016. 31p.

Danny is determined to create the perfect purple princess costume for himself with Mama's help and despite the criticism of doubters.

### Wild About Us!

By Karen Beaumont, Illus. by Janet Stevens  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. 32p.

Told by Warty Warthog, all the animals in the zoo look different or have unique things about themselves in this celebration of individualism.

## Bullying

### Eddie the Bully

By Henry Cole  
Little Bee Books, 2016. 32p.

This young bully gets a second chance at making friends when the new student Carla shows him some kindness.

### Lila and the Crow

By Gabrielle Grimmard  
Annick Press, 2016. 32p.

Lila has just moved to a new town where she is teased about the color of her hair and skin. An encounter with a crow helps her to embrace her true self.

## I Walk with Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness

By Kerascoët  
Schwartz & Wade, 2018. 40p.

Troubled after seeing a classmate being bullied, a young girl takes simple but courageous action in this inspiring, wordless picture book.

## Red

By Jan De Kinder, Tr. by Laura Watkinson  
Eerdmans, 2015. 32p.

A girl and her friends laugh when a classmate blushes on the playground. When one student takes the teasing and bullying too far, the girl must make a critical decision.

## Super Manny Stands Up

By Kelly DiPucchio, Illus. by Stephanie Graegin  
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2017. 40p.

Every day, Manny battles imaginary hordes of giants, cloud monsters and zombie bears. When he's faced with a bully in the school cafeteria, will he have the courage to do what he knows is right?

## Body Safety

### I Said No! A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private, 3rd ed.

By Kimberly and Zack King, Illus. by Sue Ramá  
Boulden Publishing, 2016. 38p.

Zack and his mom have a conversation about proper and improper touching, and different ways to handle "red flag" situations. Open-ended questions for discussion make this a versatile resource.

### Miles is the Boss of His Body

By Samantha Kurtzman-Counter and Abbie Schiller  
The Mother Company, 2014. 32p.

On his 6th birthday, Miles' family respects his personal boundaries when he decides that he has had enough pinching, hugging and tickling.

### Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept

By Jayneen Sanders, Illus. by Craig Smith  
Educate2Empower Publishing, 2015. 32p.

Alfred got along with Lord Henry really well until one day Lord Henry began to tickle him in a way that made him uncomfortable. Alfred learns that some secrets should never be kept.

## Divorce/Single Parent

### I Love You More Than...

By Taye Diggs, Illus. by Shane W. Evans  
Feiwel & Friends, 2018. 32p.

Portraying the separation of a child from a parent, the story reinforces the message of love and reassurance.

### Monday, Wednesday, and Every Other Weekend

By Karen Stanton  
Feiwel & Friends, 2014. 40p.

Traveling between his mother's house and his father's house causes confusion for Henry Cooper and his dog, Pomegranate. Which is "home"?

### Walk With Me

By Jairo Buitrago, Illus. by Rafael Yockteng  
House of Anansi Press, 2017. 35p.

Although her father no longer lives at her home, a little girl moves about her day encouraged by his enduring presence.

### Weekends with Max and His Dad

By Linda Urban, Illus. by Katie Kath  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. 150p.

Third-grader Max adapts to his parents' recent divorce. During their visits, Max and his loving and humorous father play spies, work on homework, sing, and eat lots of pizza together.

## Grief

### Blue

By Laura Vaccaro Seeger  
Roaring Brook Press, 2018. 40p.

This story celebrates the bond of friendship between a boy and his dog, and sensitively portrays the difficult emotions of dealing with the dog's death.

### Death is Stupid

By Anastasia Higginbotham  
The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2016. 64p.

In a candid look at death, this book acknowledges the anger, fear and confusion that we all feel when confronted with the fragility of life.

### The Pond

By Nicola Davies, Illus. by Cathy Fisher  
Graffeg, 2017. 32p.

Told from the perspective of a young boy

dealing with the loss of his father, this story communicates the experience of grief in a touching and loving manner while centering on the evolution of a small pond.

### The Rabbit Listened

By Cori Doerrfeld  
Dial Books, 2018. 40p.

A young boy deals with loss by talking to all of the stuffed animals in his house. Each of the animals tries to "fix" the problem for him, but in the end, the rabbit just listens, and helps the boy most of all.

### A Stone for Sascha

By Aaron Becker  
Candlewick, 2018. 48p.

A beloved family dog passes away and through a stone of grief cast by a little girl, travels through the cosmos to time immortal.

### Where Do They Go?

By Julia Alvarez, Illus. by Sabra Field  
Triangle Square, 2016. 20p.

In poetic form, this book provides answers to many tough questions children have about death.

## Home Situation Change

### Far Apart, Close in Heart: Being a Family When a Loved One is Incarcerated

By Becky Birtha, Illus. by Maja Kastelic  
Albert Whitman & Company, 2017. 32p.

With a diverse cast of characters, the story validates the complex emotions of children who have a parent in jail, ultimately sharing the message of parental love.

### Mabel and Sam at Home

By Linda Urban, Illus. by Hadley Hooper  
Chronicle Books, 2018. 60p.

This book celebrates imaginative play as two children adjust to a move to a new home. The collection of three stories follows the children as they explore their new home through imagination and play.

### Still a Family: A Story about Homelessness

By Brenda Reeves Sturgis, Illus. by Jo-Shin Lee  
Albert Whitman and Company, 2017. 32p.

Even though they are separated into different homeless shelters, a girl and her parents maintain their loving bond.

## Yard Sale

By Eve Bunting, Illus. by Lauren Castillo  
Candlewick, 2015. 32p.

With her family downsizing from a house to a small apartment, a young girl reminisces about the items she is saying goodbye to at their yard sale.

## Illness (Catastrophic)

### Cancer Hates Kisses

By Jessica Reid Sliwerski, Illus. by Mika Song  
Dial Books for Young Readers, 2017. 40p.

A child sees her Mama fight cancer like a superhero, and joins in the fight with kisses, hugs and love.

### The Remember Balloons

By Jessie Oliveros, Illus. by Dana Wulfekotte  
Simon & Schuster, 2018. 48p.

Through metaphor, this sensitive picture book explains memory loss associated with aging and diseases such as Alzheimer's.

## Immigration

### Carmela Full of Wishes

By Matt de la Pena, Illus. by Christian Robinson  
G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2018. 40p.

Carmela has lots of wishes on her birthday, but her most important wish is for her father to get his immigration papers so he can come home.

### Dreamers

By Yuyi Morales  
Neal Porter Books, 2018. 40p.

The author illustrates the story of how she and her son arrived in the United States as immigrants, showing her appreciation for the part the public library played in their transformation and the making of a new home.

### The Journey

By Francesca Sanna  
Nobrow Press, 2016. 48p.

"Last year our lives changed forever" .... so begins one family's heartbreaking journey as refugees. This is one family's story, and yet it is also a universal story of leaving, losing, and ultimately hoping for a better future.

## A Piece of Home

By Jeri Watts; Illus. by Hyewon Yum  
Candlewick Press, 2016. 32p.

Hee Jun and his family are slowly adjusting to their new home in America but it is difficult when everything is different and new. Learning that a Rose of Sharon is the same as a Korean mugunghwa blossom ties their two lives together and helps to make things just a little bit easier.

## Natural Disaster

### Flood

By Alvaro F. Villa  
Capstone, 2013. 32p.

This wordless picture book shows the devastation caused by a natural disaster, as well as the resilience and hopefulness of a family whose home has been destroyed.

### Hurricane Heroes in Texas (Magic Tree House Series)

By Mary Pope Osborne; Illus. by AG Ford  
Random House Books for Young Readers, 2018. 112p.

Jack and Annie are transported back in time to the 1900 hurricane in Galveston, Texas where wind, rain and flooding threaten the city.

### Two Bobbies: A True Story of Hurricane Katrina, Friendship, and Survival

By Kirby Larson and Mary Nethery, Illus. by Jean Cassels  
Bloomsbury, 2013. 32p.

The story of a dog and a cat left behind during the evacuation of New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city. The amazing friendship of the two animals provides a hopeful perspective to a devastating natural disaster.

## Resilience

### After the Fall

By Dan Santat  
Roaring Brook, 2017. 40p.

Humpty Dumpty's traumatic fall from the wall won't stop him from pursuing his passion although he must find a way to conquer his fears.

## The Breaking News

By Sarah Lynne Reul  
Roaring Brook, 2018. 48p.

When bad news leaves her parents scared and worried, a little girl finds that small acts of kindness can help in a big way.

## The Invisible Boy

By Trudy Ludwig, Illus. by Patrice Barton.  
Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2013. 40p.

A shy young boy who feels invisible uses art and drawing to keep from feeling lonely, until a new student to class befriends him.

## What Do You Do With a Problem?

By Kobi Yamada, Illus. by Mae Besom  
Compendium Books, 2016. 40p.

A child has a problem and is afraid to confront it; when he finally does, he learns it is not exactly what was expected.

## Trauma/Violence/War

### The Day War Came

By Nicola Davies, Illus. by Rebecca Cobb  
Candlewick, in association with Help Refugees, 2018. 32p.

The war that comes to a young girl's town not only leaves it in rubble, it leaves her trying to find a place and people that war hasn't reached - both physically and emotionally.

### The Forgiveness Garden

By Laura Thompson, Illus. by Christy Hale  
Feiwel and Friends, 2012. 32p.

Two children, weary of generations of fighting and violence between their villages, take a courageous step toward peace by building a garden together. Inspired by the Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut, Lebanon.

# Resources for Adults

## Books

### Building Resilience in Students Impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences: A Whole-Staff Approach

By Victoria E. Romero, Ricky Robertson, and Amber Warner  
Corwin, 2018. 248p.

Covering topics including poverty, divorce, neglect, homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence and parent incarceration, this workbook style resource for K-12 educators shows how the school community

can work together to assist children impacted by these issues.

### Tender Topics: Picture Books About Childhood Challenges

By Dorothy Stoltz, Elaine Czarnecki, and Buff Kahn  
Huron Street Press/ALA, 2013. 176 p.

Grouped by topics such as life lessons, divorce, and trauma, this listing of more than 300 picture books with annotations are recommended to get adults and children talking about the subjects.

## Articles

### What Makes a Good Picture Book about Loss?

By Thom Barthelmess  
*Horn Book Magazine* 89, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2013): 56-62  
[www.hbook.com/2013/09/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/what-makes-a-good-picture-book-about-loss](http://www.hbook.com/2013/09/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/what-makes-a-good-picture-book-about-loss)

Barthelmess offers solid advice on how librarians can evaluate children's books about death.

### Talking to Cyberbullied Kids—and to Bullies

By Tori Coridiano, PhD  
*School Library Journal*. Accessed October 18, 2018.  
[www.slj.com/?detailStory=talking-to-cyberbullied-kids-and-to-bullies](http://www.slj.com/?detailStory=talking-to-cyberbullied-kids-and-to-bullies).

Article includes links to eight websites on coping with cyberbullying.

### This Is How You Teach Kids About Consent

By the Good Men Project  
*Huffington Post/Life*. Accessed November 28, 2018.  
[www.huffpost.com/entry/this-is-how-you-teach-kids-about-consent\\_b\\_10360296](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/this-is-how-you-teach-kids-about-consent_b_10360296)

A list of parenting action items (geared toward kids ages 1-21), created in the hope of raising a generation of children who have less rape and sexual assault in their lives.

### After #MeToo: Educators Seek Strategies To Teach Students About Consent

By Drew Himmelstein  
*School Library Journal*. Accessed December 27, 2018.  
[www.slj.com/?detailStory=after-metoo-educators-look-for-strategies-to-teach-students-about-consent](http://www.slj.com/?detailStory=after-metoo-educators-look-for-strategies-to-teach-students-about-consent)

With systemic harassment and assault in the news, educators are teaching age appropriate lessons about boundaries, safety, and sexual assault.

### Tender Topics: Exploring Sensitive Issues with Pre-K through First Grade Children

By Sue Mankiw and Janis Strasser  
*Young Children* 68, no. 5 (Mar. 2013): 84-90  
[issuu.com/naeyc/docs/tender\\_topics\\_mankiw2\\_0313](http://issuu.com/naeyc/docs/tender_topics_mankiw2_0313)

A graded, annotated list of books for children about topics such as bullying, death, divorce, tragedy and disaster, with suggestions for how to use books to explore difficult issues with young children.

### Parents Explain the Me Too Movement To Their Kids In Emotional Video

by Alanna Vagianos  
*Huffington Post/ Life*. Accessed December 17, 2018  
[www.huffpost.com/entry/parents-explain-the-me-too-movement-to-their-kids-in-emotional-video\\_n\\_5ac51d16e4b09ef3b24309b4](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/parents-explain-the-me-too-movement-to-their-kids-in-emotional-video_n_5ac51d16e4b09ef3b24309b4)

In this video, three parents discuss the Me Too movement with their children, showing how difficult, but ultimately worthwhile, it can be to talk about sexual assault.

## Websites

### How to Talk to Children about Difficult News and Tragedies

American Psychological Association. Accessed December 15, 2018.  
[www.apa.org/helpcenter/talking-to-children.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/talking-to-children.aspx)

A brief overview of how to proceed after a tragedy, which includes the following downloads and weblinks:

- "Disaster Distress Hotline"—SAMHSA.gov
- "Listen, Protect, Connect—Psychological First Aid for Teacher & Students"—Ready.gov
- "Tips for Talking with and Helping Children and Youth Cope after a Disaster or Traumatic Event—a Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers"—SAMHSA.gov
- "Helpful Hints for School Emergency Management: Psychological First Aid for Students and Teachers: Listen, Protect, Connect—Model & Teach"—U.S. Department of Education
- "Explaining the News to Our Kids"—CommonSenseMedia.org
- "Children & Grief: Guidance and Support Resources"—Scholastic.com
- "The Road to Resilience"—APA.org

### I'm Your Neighbor website

Accessed December 15, 2018.  
[www.imyourneighborbooks.org](http://www.imyourneighborbooks.org)

Resources for teachers and parents to promote using children's literature to connect "new arrivals" to "long term communities".

### Talking about Difficult Topics with Children

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Accessed December 15, 2018.  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/talking-about-difficult-topics](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/talking-about-difficult-topics)

Suggestions for parents about how to open and carry on a discussion about a sensitive topic.

### Teaching Tolerance website

Accessed December 15, 2018  
[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)

A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance has classroom resources like films and lesson plans on topics such as bullying, immigration, equality, and more.