

Book review

Luna's Red Hat

An illustrated storybook to help children cope with loss and suicide

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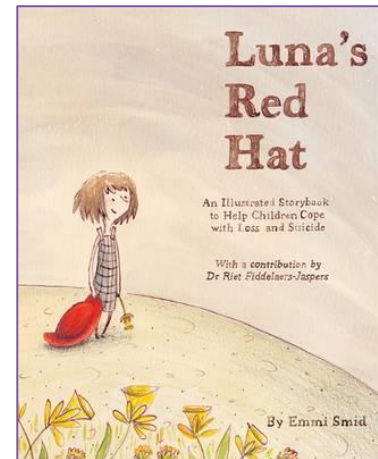
Author: Emmi Smid

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Publisher: Jessica Kingsley, UK

ISBN: 9781849056298

Audience: For Youth



Summary: A beautiful book, designed to be read with children who have experienced the loss of a loved one by suicide

It's really encouraging to see a picture book aimed at helping children who have experienced the loss of a family member or loved one from a suicide. There aren't a lot of story books out there for this particular audience. The beauty of this book is the conversations it can inspire while reading it with a child.

The book is designed to be read with children aged over six years and would be suitable for children up to the age of eight.

The story follows a young girl called Luna, who is having a picnic in the park with her dad and little brother. She's wearing her mum's red hat. Luna's mum took her own life a year ago and she's struggling to understand why. Luna worries the suicide was somehow her fault but her dad provides some thoughtful answers for her difficult questions.

The picnic ends with the family laughing and recalling positive memories of mum. The final picture shows them sitting under a tree, dad with his arms around the children as they watch the sun go down.

As an adult reader, my heart breaks for them but the picture suggests that life goes on. The family are learning to accept their loss. As a person bereaved by suicide myself, I know there is pain behind this narrative of acceptance and that realistically, difficult times still lie ahead.

The children in the story will forever miss their mother – just as real children bereaved by the loss of a parent do. But I find the message of hope heartening. And I am glad there are picture books like this that can share this message with all ages.

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Beautiful illustrations add to story

The illustrations are lovely – complete with visual details that offer opportunities to talk about the text and how Luna is feeling. For example, at the start of the story when Luna is not happy, a red and black cloud of scribbled lines appears above her head, denoting the difficult tangle of emotions she is experiencing. Words slant unevenly down the page.

The page before this shows Luna swept up on a huge dark wave against a red sky. Words tumble down the watery slope: “Today was not the day for liking things”.

As the story peaks and Luna’s pain and questioning subsides, the pictures become gentle and joyful. The beauty of the park they are picnicking in can be seen. The grass is green and flowers are blooming. Luna remembers happy times with her mum.

Sense of hope important

It’s important to instill hope after a traumatic loss. This book can help parents and caregivers to communicate the message of hope to young (and not so young) readers.

The last two pages of the book are a guide for parents. The short information section includes how children understand death, how to tell your child about a death by suicide, and how to answer questions children may have.

The advice given is worth repeating – be honest and straightforward, adjusting your words to suit the age of the child involved. Allow children to ask questions, even if they are hard to answer. And a last piece of advice for adults, which puts the emphasis back on self-care and respecting the grieving process:

“Make sure to look after yourself as well, and create a network of support around you. This will show your child that they do not need to look after you, and that they are allowed to focus on their own grief.”

Reviewed by Virginia Brooks, Programme Design & Delivery Specialist at the Mental Health Foundation

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