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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4hp294s3>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 47(0)

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Publication Date

2025

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Peer reviewed

Once Upon a Goodbye: Exploring How Animated Films Spark Child-Caregiver Conversations About Death

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Abstract

Animated films can provide a context for caregivers and children to discuss death, potentially furthering children's understanding of this concept (Bridgewater et al., 2021). However, white caregivers in the United States tend to shield their children from this topic (Rosengren et al., 2014). The purpose of the study was to delve into the dynamics of child-caregiver discussions about death. We recruited 29 children (ages 4-6) and their caregivers and observed their discussion about a death depicted in an animated film. We found that most families (92.6%) discussed death, and often mentioned affective topics (e.g., sadness; 81.5%), but some mentioned biological (33.3%) or spiritual topics (11.1%). Children's age or caregivers' reports of shielding were not linked to the content or frequency of these discussions. This study highlights how media can serve as a context for the development of spiritual and biological concepts.