

## Use of Bibliotherapy in Bereaved Parents Whose Child Died of Cancer

by Hüseyin Çaksen, MD, PhD

*Divisions of Pediatric Neurology and Genetics and Behavioral-Developmental Pediatrics,  
Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, Necmettin Erbakan University, Meram,  
Konya, Türkiye*

**Corresponding Author: Hüseyin Çaksen (E-mail: huseyincaksen@hotmail.com)**

**(Received: 12 March, 2025; Revised: 18 March, 2025; Accepted: 19 March, 2025)**

**Abstract** In this article, we discuss the use of bibliotherapy in bereaved parents whose children died of cancer to attract attention to the importance of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy, a form of psychotherapy, involves using any text to improve physical, mental, social, spiritual, and/or religious health, through reading, discussing, and facilitating a greater understanding. Bibliotherapy may benefit patients with problems of living such as dealing with life crises and transitions, parents, and children, parenting, coping with illness and disability, death and dying, lifestyle modification, sexuality, and coping with feelings. Bibliotherapy is as old as human history. Texts in the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are also included in the notion of bibliotherapy. When appropriate books or texts are selected, bibliotherapy, an ancient treatment method, can be beneficial for bereaved parents. “Letter of Condolence on the Death of a Child” written by Nursi, is a suitable option for bereaved parents whose child has died. (*Thai Cancer J 2025;45:48-51*)

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy, bereavement, parent, child, cancer

---

### Introduction

Despite the overall decrease in mortality, approximately 1,600 children and adolescents still die of cancer each year in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The death of a child is devastating and provokes intense grief reactions in bereaved parents. After a child's death, parents are more likely to have significant psychiatric sequelae, increased risks of cardiac morbidity, poorer health-related quality of life, and even increased mortality compared to non-bereaved parents.<sup>2</sup>

Biblio- is a combining form occurring in loanwords from Greek (bibliography). On this model, biblio- is used in the formation of compound words with the meaning “book”

(bibliophile), and sometimes with the meaning “Bible” (bibliolatry, in the model of idolatry).<sup>3</sup> Bibliotherapy (also referred to as book therapy or reading therapy) uses reading materials to help solve personal problems or for psychiatric therapy. It is guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading.<sup>4</sup> Bibliotherapy, a form of psychotherapy, involves using any text to improve physical, mental, social, spiritual and/or religious health, through reading, discussing, and facilitating a greater understanding. However, most physicians do not know about bibliotherapy, and it is rarely used in clinical practices. Herein, we discuss the use of bibliotherapy in bereaved parents whose child died of cancer to attract attention to the importance of bibliotherapy.

### **Use of bibliotherapy in bereaved parents**

Chong et al.<sup>5</sup> examined the clinical experiences of bereaved parents whose children with life-limiting illnesses including cancer had died. The seven subthemes uncovered were as follows: (1) honesty and clarity, (2) empathy, (3) interdisciplinary communication, (4) inconveniences in hospital, (5) home palliative care, (6) financial burden of illness and (7) psychosocial and spiritual support.<sup>5</sup> Spirituality and spiritual care provide bereaved parents with necessary support and enhanced coping to allow them to better deal with this devastating experience. Spirituality and spiritual care instill hope, assisted in the search for meaning and purpose, and guide parents to develop continuing bonds with their child.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of bibliotherapy is not new. Bibliotherapy, as an adjunct to treating medical and psychological problems, has a long history in the library science literature.<sup>7</sup> Considering the booklet sent down by Allah to Adam (Alayhi As-Salam), the first man and the first prophet, it is clear that bibliotherapy is as old as human history. The Egyptian King Ramses II (1303 before Christ-1213 before Christ) inscribed “House of Healing for the Soul” over the entrance to his library, and lived to be ninety. However, the word “bibliotherapy” was only coined in an Atlantic Monthly article from 1916. Texts in the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are also included in the notion of bibliotherapy.<sup>8</sup> Especially the texts of the Bible and the Quran have been widely used for healing purposes in many parts of the world for centuries. Allah says “We send down (stage by stage) in the Quran that which is healing and mercy to those who believe.”<sup>9</sup>

Bibliotherapy may benefit patients with problems of living, such as dealing with life crises and transitions, parents, and children, parenting, coping with illness and disability, death and dying, lifestyle modification, sexuality, and coping with feelings.<sup>7</sup> “Letter of Condolence

on the Death of a Child” written by Nursi, which gives solace, comfort, peace and relief to many bereaved parents, is widely used for psychosocial and spiritual support to bereaved parents in our country. An online version of the letter is available free of charge from the following link, <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.202.97>.<sup>10</sup> The book entitled “The Bereaved Parent” was also helpful in 92.5% parents whose infant died.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that culturally sensitive psychosocial, emotional, spiritual, and religious support should be provided to bereaved parents whose child has died of cancer. When appropriate books or texts are selected, bibliotherapy, a very old treatment method, can be beneficial for bereaved parents. However, comprehensive, randomized and controlled studies should be conducted on the use of bibliotherapy in bereaved parents.

## References

1. Cancer in Children and Adolescents. National Cancer Institute. (Updated August 27, 2024). (Accessed February 26, 2025 at <https://www.cancer.gov/types/childhood-cancers/child-adolescent-cancers-fact-sheet>)
2. McNeil MJ, Kiefer A, Woods C, et al. "You are not alone": Connecting through a bereaved parent mentor program for parents whose child died of cancer. *Cancer Med* 2022;11:3332-41.
3. Bibliotherapy. From Collins English dictionary. 2025. (Accessed February 26, 2025 at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bibliotherapy>)
4. Bibliotherapy. From Merriam-Webster dictionary. 2025. (Accessed February 26, 2025 at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bibliotherapy>)
5. Chong L, Khalid F, Abdullah A. Compassionate healthcare for parents of children with life-limiting illnesses: a qualitative study. *Indian J Palliat Care* 2022;28:266-71.
6. Petersen CL. Spiritual care: Minimizing the vulnerability of parents whose children with cancer face the end of life. *J Pediatr Oncol Nurs* 2020;37:105-15.
7. Anstett RE, Poole SR. Bibliotherapy: an adjunct to care of patients with problems of living. *J Fam Pract* 1983;17:845-53.

8. Palmieri B. Sadie P. Delaney: our lady of bibliotherapy. In: Journal of the History of Ideas. Blog. (Updated March 21, 2016). (Accessed February 26, 2025 at <https://jhiblog.org/2016/03/21/sadie-p-delaney-our-lady-of-bibliotherapy>)
9. Surah Al-Isra. Surah 17; Ayat 82. The Noble Quran. 2025. (Accessed February 26, 2025 at <https://quran.com/17>)
10. Nursi BS. From the Risale-i Nur Collection. The Letters. The Seventeenth Letter. Istanbul: Söz. (Updated March 1, 2012). (Accessed February 26, 2025 at <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.202.97>)
11. Mahan CK, Schreiner RL, Green M. Bibliotherapy: a tool to help parents mourn their infant's death. Health Soc Work 1983;8:126-32.