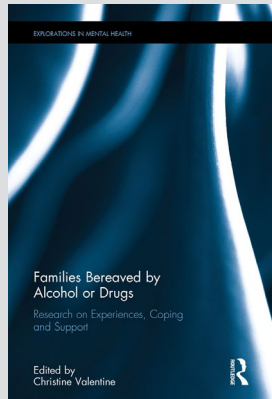


# Book Reviews



## Families bereaved by alcohol or drugs: research on experiences, coping and support

Edited by Christine Valentine

London: Routledge  
2018  
978-1-138-94708-5

This book is the result of a major project which investigated the experiences of people bereaved in a way which leaves many feeling stigmatised and vulnerable, but because it employed a qualitative methodology, their voices are heard in its detailed extracts. The second stage used focus groups made up of a wide variety of practitioners in health, social care and the criminal justice system who play a role following a drug or alcohol-related death. The results were developed into five key messages to guide good practice in the future.

Part 1 describes how families living with substance use deal with the death; how they feel the stress, the strain, how they cope and the need for support. Each situation is individual and families have to navigate a formal system which is often complex and unsympathetic, depending on the circumstances. Many describe the stigma attached to such a bereavement, because it is seen as self-caused, and reflects blemishes of character or an uncaring family. The public remembrance may induce feelings of shame particularly if the death or the inquest was reported in the media, and the private remembering has all the hallmarks of traumatic loss.

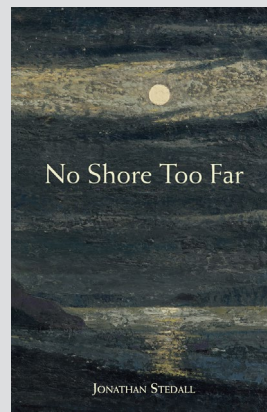
Part 2 refers to the practitioners who provide for the bereaved in such circumstances and how they may be crucial in providing information about further support. Often they are not specialists in either bereavement or addiction but have other public duties and these deaths may be seen to interfere with their work. The key messages are primarily directed to this group:

- Show kindness and compassion
- Language is important
- Every bereaved person is an individual
- Everyone can make a contribution
- We need to work together

What I liked about this book is that it very clearly describes the research itself, has much descriptive detail for those people involved in bereavement and addictions and has such important messages for all practitioners. Beforehand, I had a hunch that something would be missing and it was. Since prescribed drugs have the potential to do similar damage to bereaved families, maybe that will be the next agenda for research. ■

## Diane Hammersley

Chartered Counselling Psychologist



## No shore too far

Jonathan Stedall

Stroud, Glos: Hawthorn Press  
2017  
144 pages  
978 1 907359 81 1  
Hardback: £12

Stedall was a documentary film maker at the BBC and he has brought his breadth of vision into play in this book of poems - 'meditations on death, bereavement and hope' - written after the death of his wife from cancer. They range from the very personal moments between husband and wife as they face the inevitable, and then soar into the cosmos on a search for 'what does life mean?' He has some of the poems available on his website [www.jonathanstedall.co.uk](http://www.jonathanstedall.co.uk) and I was interested to see that a couple of the ones I had picked out have also been selected for that page.

'Marmalade' was for me the most poignant - the memories of making marmalade that are relived each time a jar is opened.

*But now there's only one jar left,  
and that I'll have to keep;  
for stored up there  
is treasure rare  
which helps me not to weep.*