

REVIEWS



WHEN DISASTER STRIKES:

A handbook for the caring professions

by Beverley Raphael, Published by Basic Books Inc. (New York) and Hutchinson Education (London, Melbourne, and Auckland) 1986. Price £19.95.

As Professor Raphael writes, "Most people act as though disaster could not happen to them" despite recurring evidence of the possibility. In the past two to three years such evidence has included a wide spectrum of 'natural', and 'man-made' disasters widely reported throughout the world. The need for an authoritative compilation of what is known about the responses to disasters of people, families, and communities, as well as how to intervene constructively in the aftermath of a disaster, has become urgent. This book goes a long way to meet this need.

The book is in two parts: Part I with seven chapters on the nature and experience of disaster and Part II with five chapters on caring for the victims of disaster. It is difficult to fault this book. It is written in a style which mixes academic description of available research—extremely well referenced and tabulated—with systematic categorisations and conclusions drawn by the author, together with a large number of extremely moving personal descriptions of their experience by victims of all categories; survivors, injured, bereaved, rescuers, helpers and others.

To me the first part is the more impressive. It includes reference to the major studies of disaster—at least those known in the Western World. It describes systematically the kinds of disasters encountered, warnings and responses in the anticipation of disaster, the impact and aftermath, the effects on the survivors of being surrounded by death, the various ways loss and grief may be experienced and expressed, and the effects of dislocation of dwelling or community and relocation to a different or new community. There is finally a chapter on the differential effects on children, the old, and the family. What is particularly useful is the way the author frequently alludes to popular myths about particular responses or expectations of people in disasters, and offers evidence which often conflicts with such myths.

Part II is written with the same mixture of thoroughness and personal description. The five chapters addressed are: the problems of mental health and adjustment, the relationship between victims and helpers and the needs of each, psycho-social care, community and political dynamics, and an epilogue which includes a warning. Although the second part has all the merits of the first part, it suffers somewhat from the problem facing any book which attempts to give instruction on care or treatment. That is, the most important things cannot be learnt from books.

Although there are the same moving case examples, I would have welcomed a few more detailed case examples of the subtle processes occurring in the relationship between helper and victim. Professor Raphael points out the potential dangers,

particularly of hospital care, and gives a chilling example of how the response of a hospital culture can undermine a survivor's need to maintain his independence, and thus his self respect. I would have welcomed a little more on this theme. Although she gives strong and detailed reasons for working with the families of the survivors and providing consultation to whole communities, she does not explicitly suggest working with the families as a prophylactic against the dangers of the helper supporting more the weaknesses than the strengths in the victim.

My other reservation of this part of the book is possibly also a compliment to the psychiatric services in Australia. Professor Raphael is quick to recommend that certain specific post-traumatic syndromes should be referred for specialist psychiatric care. As a psychiatrist in this country I would be rather humble about the chances of the mental health services providing a good or better intervention in such situations than the various voluntary workers specialising in bereavement.

Some readers may find the very thoroughness of the book to be slightly daunting. It is sometimes a little difficult to relate to the diagrams and tables, and because the author is so meticulous there is some repetition. However as a tardy reader I found the book to be enjoyable and stimulating, so do not be put off. The lucidity of the writing, mixed with compassion and without sentimentality, overcome any difficulties one may have with the academic style.

It is a must for all those concerned with the social and interpersonal effects of disasters.

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GRIEF, DYING AND DEATH: Clinical Interventions for Caregivers.

Theresa A. Rando, Research Press Co., Illinois, USA, 1984. \$26.50.

£16.50 from Parthenon Publishers, Casterton Hall, Carnforth, Lancs. LA6 2LA.

The author begins with a discussion of personal as well as social-cultural attitudes toward death and mortality. She asks readers to examine the many ways in which early experience with death have influenced our lives. She also asks us to reflect upon our cultural, ethnic and religious attitudes toward dying and bereaved people and how our responses to the dying or bereaved may be affected by those attitudes.

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss grief and the factors that influence grief reactions. The author emphasises the individuality of grief and discusses various social, psychological and physiological factors that, in combination, contribute to the uniqueness of people's responses to loss. Chapter 4 examines variants in the grief process which result in unresolved grief, and includes many of the symptoms and behaviours indicative of incomplete grief work. This leads into discussion of the psycho-

logical and social factors that predispose mourners to unresolved grief, determinants for the outcome of bereavement, and the morbidity and mortality of bereaved people.

Rando addresses specific issues that arise following the death of a child or spouse, death by suicide, and the grief of children. Bereaved parents are often faced not only with being predeceased by a child but with negative social attitudes, coping with differences in the grief responses of themselves and their partners, and having to continue functioning in the role of a parent while at the same time having to grieve and relinquish that role. The author indicates that, in age-appropriate ways, grieving children go through the same processes and have the same needs as adults. She goes on to discuss the issues that may inhibit children's grief and the effects of childhood bereavement. Social stigma, shame, investigations, unfinished business, heightened anger, fear of self-destruction, and self-blame are but a few of the possible burdens placed on people bereaved by suicide. It is important that counsellors be aware of the intensity of feelings that may set the grief reactions of "those bereaved by suicide apart from "normal" grief reactions. Rando ends each section of this chapter with specific recommendations for working with people bereaved in the manner discussed.

The second half of the book looks at: the dying patient's reactions and coping mechanisms, care of the dying, dying children, and the families of the dying. Much of this portion would be useful to members of the medical and other caring professions. However, bereavement counsellors would benefit from an understanding of what the deceased and their families may have experienced prior to the death since these experiences have implications for mourners.

The final chapter addresses the personal needs of caregivers, including ethical and emotional concerns as well as strategies for stress management. As Rando points out, an awareness of the literature and research on death and dying, along with increased self-understanding and skills, will help reduce stress and anxiety in helpers; her book goes a long way to meet these needs. It is an excellent source of information, of counselling interventions and challenging exercises for self-awareness. While it may be somewhat clinical and heavy-going for some, I feel most readers, professionally trained or not, would find the book useful.

LYN FRANCHINO, PhD

MEMORIALS. An Anthology of Poetry & Prose suitable for funerals, memorial services and private reading. Ed. June Benn. Pub. 1986 by Ravette Ltd., Horsham, Sussex. £7.95.

I found *Memorials* a pleasure to read. It contains many of my favourite poems and others new to me which I like enough to copy out. The anthology is a comprehensive one. I cannot imagine anyone reading it and not discovering several poems which express truly and vividly their own personal feelings on loss. In itself I believe this is a consolation—to find how one feels oneself expressed so well and so memorably by a poet.

The selection gives consideration to those with religious faith and to those with none.

URSULA BOWLBY

COT DEATH. Coping with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Jacquelynne Luben.

Pub. Thorsons, Northampton, 1986. £5.99. ISBN 0-7725-1255-4.

WHEN A BABY SUDDENLY DIES. Cot Death—the impact and effects. Janet Deveson Lord.

Pub. Hill of Content Publishing Company, 86 Bourke Street, Australia, 1987. Aust. \$15.95 paperback. (UK price not stated). ISBN 0-85572 162 6.

These two books are a useful addition to the support and counselling literature available for those who would wish to help SIDS families more effectively.

Both are written by mothers who themselves had cot deaths but who have clearly felt that sufficient time has passed for them to be able to see the situation confronting other parents (and professionals in their turn) more objectively. Each book has a slightly different perspective, and for this reason they complement each other, though there is inevitably some degree of overlap.

Jacquelynne Luben's book aims to be "for laymen", yet professionals will have cause to be grateful that she takes the trouble to consider that they, too, have feelings of sadness and guilt, that they too—like "laymen", (in other words, like the rest of the community) may not find it easy to approach the recently bereaved, and may have to overcome these feelings.

This book gains, too, from being more than a simple account of her own experience. Throughout she quotes accounts from other parents to expand our understanding of differing reactions which can occur and the way in which circumstances will modify parents' ability to surmount a sad and unexpected event in their lives. To help them, in turn, to comprehend the points of view of the professionals with whom they may come in contact (General Practitioners, Health Visitors, Paediatricians, Clergy), she includes professional views by means of reported conversations.

A small point of criticism: the author rightly raises the issue of medication in the recently bereaved—is it desirable or necessary?—but I must admit to a slight unease with the use of the word "drugs" when writing for parents. This word can be misunderstood, and "medication" may be better.

In general however this is a helpful, clear and accurate book with useful appendices of information. There is a check-list for G.P.'s from the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (here an accurate distinction is made between night sedatives, "anxiolytics" and anti-depressants) and a list of practical "Do's and Don't's" for helping bereaved parents contributed by the Compassionate Friends organisation; suggestions for parents about symptoms in babies requiring medical advice, and addresses of useful organisations, literature and audiovisual resources in the UK, North America, South Africa and the Antipodes. These greatly extend its usefulness. Lady Limerick's foreword helpfully describes the work of the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths.

Although Janet Deveson Lord's book similarly uses many quotations from parents (including recollections of her own experience following the "cot death" of her own first baby), hers is a book which perhaps speaks more directly to professionals. In addition it specifically tackles the tasks confronting, for example, the "Emergency Responders" in a useful and sensitive way. The tasks of the clergy and Funeral Directors too, are considered.

This book takes a logical, organised approach to the subject, more "academic" perhaps than the first text, and less directly anecdotal. It is particularly insightful in explaining the mismatch between patients' expectations of their medical attendants and what the doctor can actually offer in these circumstances. In the case of Cot Death, parents expect their doctor to "fix it"; "tell them it's not true"; "take away the pain". The doctor can do none of these in this situation.

What doctors can do, is sensitively considered in some detail, and possible likely responses of the doctor—including understanding his/her own anger and helplessness—could be read to good effect by most professionals.

Much of the sensible advice is also relevant to helping other bereaved people.

Mrs. Deveson Lord's experience of and with support, research and working with professionals and parents, derives not only from her own loss, but also from years spent in association with the Australian Sudden Infant Death Research Foundation in Melbourne where she trained eventually as a counsellor, acted as a facilitator of training for other parent/supporters and became involved in the education of health professionals.

As with Jacquelynne Luben's book, her personal understanding is used constructively as a backcloth to the sensible advice given, not allowing personal anecdote to overwhelm the whole.

Both books avoid a sense of unresolved grief: both will enable parents and professionals alike to move forward constructively and positively—

Mrs. Lord quotes an anonymous poet—
*For some, gates are for closing.
For others, gates are for opening . . .
For all people they allow time to pause
and take bearings.*

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COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES:

The Letter and the Empty Chair (Video) 1987. Dr. Lyn Franchino.
Available from Concord Films Council, 201 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, Suffolk. £45 (£10 to hire) + carr. & VAT.

Dr. Lyn Franchino has worked with Cruse as counsellor and trainer for several years. She has written an admirable comprehensive Training Manual for bereavement counselling. As a back-up she is now producing a series of short videos for various stages of counsellor training.

This video illustrates two techniques for counsellors to use with clients who are 'stuck' in their grief. The aim is to enable the bereaved to resolve their unfinished business with the 'significant other' who has died and to let go and say good-bye.

In the first cameo, THE LETTER, a daughter is helped to verbalise her unexpressed ambivalent feelings by writing a letter to her recently departed mother. She then reads out the letter to the counsellor—a most evocative self-disclosure, very realistically role-played—describing her inability to communicate with her mother especially at the times when her marriage was a living hell and when her mother became ill. The process of committing to paper and sharing with the counsellor her regrets and her anger acts cathartically, and the client recognises that she was too reluctant to ask for help previously.

The second part, THE EMPTY CHAIR, illustrates the technique described by Worden in 'Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy'. At a critical moment in counselling, the counsellor vacates her chair, and enables the client to talk to the empty chair as if her mother was occupying it. The daughter struggles with the counsellor's help to relive the past and put into words her feelings about her relationship with her mother. At times she weeps freely and the counsellor says little but is an important reassuring and enabling presence. Subsequently the client occupies the empty chair and imagines herself being the mother responding to her daughter's monologue. When the unsaid words have been voiced from both sides, the daughter is able to say goodbye to her mother.

These grief-resolving methods are illustrated with beautiful clarity. On video they look deceptively simple. Like all techniques they need to be incorporated into the worker's own personal style of counselling and used with discretion. They are valuable tools for experienced counsellors wanting to extend their range of responses.

NICHOLAS TYNDALL
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Sweep things
under the rug



More things
swept under!



The hump gets
bigger - - - -



Until, in the end,
you trip over it!
(and you may need
someone to help you
get up again)

From 'Grieving', A Handbook for Those Who Care by Ruth Bright. MMB Music Inc. Missouri. 1986. Reproduced with permission.