

REVIEWS



FACING GRIEF: BEREAVEMENT AND THE YOUNG ADULT

Susan Wallbank. Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1991. £6.95 pb.*

WHEN PARENTS DIE

Rebecca Abrams. London: Letts, 1992. £7.95 pb.*

Susan Wallbank is well placed to write about all kinds of bereavements, having been a counsellor for 15 years with Cruse. 'Facing Grief' aims to give young people an understanding of what happens when someone close to them dies, how to deal with the grief and all the matters surrounding the death. Writing in layman's terms, she gives a good deal of practical information about funerals, seeing the body, how grief affects the bereaved and their families and the difficulties that can be encountered.

Each close relationship is covered separately, including parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends. As a 'young adult' may be anything between 18 and 28 years old, the book also deals with the death of a partner and that of a child, the loss of a baby at birth and before, through miscarriage or abortion.

The relationships, and how they may change throughout life and affect the grieving process, are described convincingly. Young people are often at odds with their parents when one of them dies; in marriage, a couple may have been going through a bad patch; parents may not have been good at parenting, which can make their death even harder to cope with; and young people may have to look after the parent left behind, their brothers and sisters, or their own children.

Though the book makes it clear that we all have our own way of grieving, it is a pity that the dangers of unexpressed and repressed grief are not mentioned. However, this is an excellent reference book for bereaved young people and indeed people of all ages interested in this area. It would be most useful for teenagers to read this book before they ever have to face any major bereavements.

Rebecca Abrams' book is a much more detailed and specific account of grief, providing a personal insight into young people's grief for parents.

It opens with her own story, the death of her father when she was 18 and her stepfather two years later, conveying clearly the shock and horror of a young adult who loses a parent unexpectedly and at too young an age to cope with it. After this moving account, the next chapter, dealing very generally with funerals, seems a little disappointing. However the author continues to bring in her own experiences throughout the book in an open and honest way with which many bereaved young people will identify.

She demonstrates an insight into grief and its effects gleaned not only from her own experiences, but also from talking to professionals who deal with bereavement all the time, as well as many other people whose parents have died. Initially, as she begins to bring in these other experiences, there is a confusing proliferation of new names but this device works better as the book progresses.

Rebecca Abrams emphasises the pro-

blems which unexpressed or repressed grief can produce and the ways in which it can affect a young person, explaining convincingly that feelings ignored at the time will come back to claim attention later.

This is a very literate and intelligent book which will help young adults before bereavement and after. It is an intense read—not for picking off the shelf and dipping into—written for an educated reader who needs to understand the many feelings that can arise if parents die when childhood is barely over.

FRANCES IVE
PR consultant and writer

* Available from Cruse—Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR.

MEGGIE'S MAGIC

Anna Dean. London: Viking Books, 1993. £8.99 hb.

'Maggie's Magic' is a very touching, child-centred account of death, written through the eyes and feelings of Maggie's younger sister who feels she has lost not only a sister but her best friend. The reader is led into the secret place they shared, to which they would escape when they were in trouble. It was a place to share secrets, dreams and anxieties, filled with magic. But Maggie's sister finds that it is the 'inside kind of magic' that prevails, and she is filled with hope and exhilaration as she runs to tell her parents that Maggie's magic did not die.

Maggie's death is summarised in a simple, bold sentence at the beginning of the book, providing a good introduction to the story. Her parents' feelings and reactions are clearly defined, and also the younger sister's sensitivity to their needs as well as to her own. The text conveys the love and friendship within the family and the need to perpetuate the situation: Maggie is still a very real person. The contrasting illustrations, from those showing the loneliness and sadness at the beginning, to the delightful images of the magic, are both sensitive and appropriate. The reader, progressing through the book is able to feel and share the joy through the warmth and excitement of the pictures.

'Maggie's Magic' is about the celebration and salvation of life, hope and happiness, strength and courage, and complete lives continuing. It is about holding on and recognising that, although the physical presence is taken away when people die—their fun, laughter, games and mischief—the magic remains and can be felt. It reflects a very healthy and happy attitude, balanced with caring and concern.

As a New Zealander myself, this story reminds me of my own childhood and the positive approach to death I grew up with. I would thoroughly recommend it to bereaved families and to schools, and would definitely use it in our own hospital school.

BARBARA ANDREWS
Acting Headteacher
Royal Free Hospital School,
London

MATTIE AND GRANDPA

Roberto Piumini. London, UK: Puffin Books, 1993. £2.99 pb.

Eight-year-old Mattie stands with his family at his dying grandfather's bedside.

All seem to be visibly preoccupied in their sadness except Mattie, who is distracted by a fly. As if in a dream, Mattie hears his grandfather speak only to him. Opening the bedroom door softly, Mattie and grandfather leave the room together and set out on a magical adventure.

In the course of their journey, Mattie begins to notice that grandfather is growing smaller. By the time their journey has ended, grandfather has disappeared completely. But for Mattie, what remains of grandfather is his voice which he hears inside himself, and of course the memory of a special relationship.

For most of us, but perhaps more so for young children, the fear of losing a loved one through death can be felt to be so unbearable that it becomes unthinkable. It is no wonder that Mattie is distracted as his grandfather lies dying. Perhaps having to grasp the fact that death means 'gone forever' is too bewildering and too painful. But Mattie tries to work this out in his mind. The journey in this story symbolises the process by which he gradually gathers into himself his uniquely intimate experiences with his grandfather. These are the warm, tender memories which go on living inside a person and do not disappear.

This is the most poignant aspect of the book. Yet having read it to my ten-year-old, I was struck by his comment that Mattie did not seem to be very upset. I felt this was important to bear in mind if wishing to use Mattie's story to help bereaved children think and talk about their feelings. While the process of grieving can be positive and even creative, as Mattie experienced with Grandpa, there is also the reality to face, the missing and the longing for the loved one. These are the emotions which bring the tears and the sadness, and these feelings too are part of the journey.

ANNETTE MENDELSON
Child and Adolescent
Psychotherapist
Royal Free Hospital, London

CHILDREN AND BEREAVEMENT: A VIDEO TRAINING PACKAGE

Sue Smith and Sr. Margaret Pennells. Northampton, UK. Northamptonshire Social Services, 1991. £120 + p&p. Hire: £20 + p&p per week.

This package contains two videos and a short manual. One video, 'That Morning I Went to School . . .' (12½ min.), is of children talking about their experiences after the death of a parent. The other, 'Childhood Grief' (19 min.), is a more didactic account of childhood bereavement, meant for professionals, and illustrated with the same children talking about their experience of death and grief. The package won the *Social Work Today* award for education and training in 1991.

The makers of these videos are no strangers to *Bereavement Care* and have given us a good account of their bereavement groups for children¹. I was disappointed therefore not to see longer sequences focusing on the content and process of the group meetings, and in particular, not to hear the leaders' ways of dealing with the children's questions.

Similarly, although the first video could be profitably used to stimulate class or group discussion about bereavement among children, the absence of any information about the children, (ages, how long they had been bereaved, how the parent had died, even, sometimes, who had died) lessened its usefulness. The first boy filmed could not be understood at all, and I found the dissolving of facial images, one into the other, disconcerting. Nevertheless, the impact on the viewer of several children talking about how they hated not

being told what was going on, is very powerful.

I found the second video less useful and prefer the written account of the groups referred to above¹. It repeats many of the sequences of children talking seen in the first video and does not adequately deal with the developmental process of the understanding of the concepts of death in children. The points the children make about testing and bullying at school ('the teacher is nice to you 'cos you've lost your mum and then you get teased for being the teacher's pet') and the nice tribute to the usefulness of the group in the final sequence by a teenage girl, are moving. The price is too high.

DORA BLACK
Consultant Child Psychiatrist

Reference

1. Kitchener* S, Pennells M. A bereavement group for children. *Bereavement Care* 1990; 9, 30-31.
* Now Smith.

ALL ABOUT ME: A BOARD GAME
Barnardo's, 1992. £27.02 inc. p&p.
Available from Barnardo's Library,
Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford,
Essex IG6 1QG.

This board game was developed by Barnardo's for use in a therapeutic setting with young people who have experienced or are experiencing bereavement or other internal conflict.

It consists of a colourful, decorative board, divided into squares, with four playing pieces and a dice. Each player moves along the squares to a throw of the dice. A worksheet is included which can be photocopied and given to each player to record basic details about themselves, such as name, age, etc. The main component of the game is a pack of 112 cards with statements printed on them

which each player picks up as they take their turn, and they then respond to the statements. It is intended that the child and therapist play the game together, thus establishing an atmosphere of trust through sharing. This encourages the child, through play, to explore feelings and events which had previously been too painful for open discussion.

We used the game with children of mixed abilities and ages ranging from five to 16 years: some children attended special schools and others, mainstream ones.

Overall, the staff and pupils using the game liked its design, but the children found it difficult to understand, in as much as there was no obvious winner and nothing to be won or gained during play. However many children enjoyed the game purely on the basis that they received a period of one-to-one attention from an adult, and for them this was reward enough for playing.

The highly-decorative board proved a distraction for some of the more emotionally disturbed children, and they became engrossed in making up stories and 'fighting with' the animals depicted on the board, losing concentration in the game itself. Some of the concepts depicted on the cards were not understood by several children, whose underlying learning difficulties include abnormal perceptions of the world around them. The particular difficulties included 'invisibility', and statements such as 'if I were a flower I would be a . . .' The children were unable to imagine such situations.

The game requires thorough planning, and so is difficult to play on an ad hoc basis. Cards can be organised in such a way as to ensure the child picks up those which are specific to the concerns surrounding their need for therapy. It needs

to be co-ordinated by a skilled therapist who is able to interpret the child's answers and also to act on, and follow up, the responses given. In one school the game was adapted and used as part of a general health education project, entitled 'Myself', played in a group situation, using only cards depicting basic statements such as 'my favourite television programme is . . .' This encouraged the development of turn-taking skills and made the children think about the preferences which made them different from their peers.

Overall, staff who viewed the game welcomed it as a tool which therapists could use to encourage children to talk about the difficulties in their lives, but stressed the importance of thorough planning, allowing time for expanding into further discussion, and the need for experienced staff to co-ordinate the game.

RUTH OUZIA
SIAN HOOBAN
Specialist Paediatric Sisters for
Special Needs Children

NEW FROM CRUSE

**Supporting Bereaved Children
and Families**

A training pack with

- Video featuring Dr. Dora Black
- Comprehensive manual

Good value at £17.95 + £2.75 p&p
(Prices outside UK on request)

Cruse—Bereavement Care
126 Sheen Road, Richmond
Surrey TW9 1UR, UK
Tel: 081-940 4818 Fax: 081-940 7638

FACING GRIEF

by Susan Wallbank
from The Lutterworth Press

Aimed at the 18-28 age group, **Facing Grief** deals frankly, sensibly and compassionately with the effects of bereavement on young adults. From the practical aspects to the distressing and confusing feelings aroused, especially at this time in a young person's life, this will prove a useful guide both for the bereaved and those who work with them.

The author has been a counsellor for over fifteen years, joining CRUSE in 1978. She is a member of the British Association for Counselling.

Price: £6.95

To order your copy, please send a cheque for **£6.95 plus £1.00 p&p** to **The Lutterworth Press, PO Box 60, Cambridge CB1 2NT, enclosing your name and address. Tel 0223 350865**

JOHN'S BOOK

Jill Fuller

John was ten when his father died. Suddenly he has to face great loss and the responsibility of helping his mother. Jill Fuller, from her own first-hand experience, addresses the problems of bereaved children with compassion and understanding. In a fictionalised account, aimed particularly at children from 8 to 12, she deals with the funeral itself, coping with anger, facing one's friends and starting life again with renewed hope.

Publication: May 1993 96 pages hardback £9.95 net

ALL ROYALTIES TO CRUSE

To: The Lutterworth Press, P.O. Box 60, Cambridge, CB1 2NT (0223-350865)

ORDER FORM

Please send copies of **John's Book** to:

Name:

Address:

. Postcode:

Cheque attached for (£10.95 per copy including postage)

Please debit Visa/Access/Switch/Connect card (surcharge £3.00)

Card: Expiry date:

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S TRAUMA CLINIC

Dr Dora Black, Consultant Child Psychiatrist and Co-editor of *Bereavement Care*, has been awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to study services for children who have been acutely psychologically traumatised as a result of either mass or personal disaster.

She plans to travel around the USA looking at children's trauma clinics and will be setting up a National Trauma Clinic for children at the Royal Free Hospital, London.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

A lecture given by Dr Dora Black recently on childhood grief gave me great insight.

Several months ago, as a new counsellor, I was asked if I would counsel a child of nine years who had lost his grandfather. The grandfather had been something of a father-figure to this little boy. I did some reading on the subject and nervously went along for my first visit.

He told me his 'grandad' had died of stomach cancer and that he kept having visions of how he had looked with all the tubes attached. As we were coming to the end of the session my mind was racing as to how I could help this little boy.

We decided that whenever he got this 'bad picture' in his mind, he would replace it with any 'nice picture' he could remember about his grandad. He chose the

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCE

Widowed Persons Service Conference, 20th Year Celebration. 16-18 October 1993. San Diego, California. Details from American Association of Retired Persons, 601 E Street, NW, Washington DC 20049.

CARING FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN

A useful new booklet from Cruse explains how children grieve and how adults can help. For parents and professionals.
£1.50 + £1 p&p from Cruse—Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR.

thought of rolling down a hill. He then asked if he could invent a mental picture. Grandad had been quite a character and his invented thought was of him playing football with an ice-cream.

He also found that his mind wandered when he was at school, so we decided to combat this by pretending he could use a rubber to rub out the bad pictures, starting in one corner and eventually making them disappear completely.

On the second visit he said that he felt better about his thoughts, and on the third, showed me a photograph collection of grandad that he had compiled. He seemed happier for having shared it with me.

There were only three counselling sessions, because the family moved, but I hope I helped him in the short time we had.

JENNY MASON
Boston, Lincs.

BEREAVEMENT CARE

Editors

Colin Murray Parkes
MD DPM FRCPSych
Dora Black
MB ChB DPM FRCPSych

Advisory Editors

Ofra Ayalon PhD
Tom Lundin MD PhD
Beverley Raphael AM DPM (ANZCP)
FRANZCP FRCPSych
Lars Weisæth MD PhD FNPS

Managing Editor

Patricia Scowen MA SRN HV

Co-ordinating Editor

Rosie Dalzell BSc CertEd

Published by Cruse—Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR, UK. Tel: 081-940 4818 Fax: 081-940 7638

(Editorial office and advertisements: as above)

Bereavement Care is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be lent, resold, reproduced in part or in entirety, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's consent.

The editors welcome advertisements and inserts, but do not necessarily associate themselves with the views of advertisers or books advertised.

PALLIATIVE CARE ETHICS

The Challenge for Professionals Towards 2000

A multidisciplinary conference for all professionals concerned with Palliative Care

BERKSHIRE COLLEGE OF NURSING & MIDWIFERY
AFFILIATED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

6 SEPTEMBER 1993 Chair - Professor Downie, Moral Philosophy
Glasgow University
7 SEPTEMBER 1993 Chair - Mrs J Webber, Chief Nurse Advisor
Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund

VENUE: UNIVERSITY OF READING

OTHER KEY SPEAKERS INCLUDE

Dr Robert Dunlop St Christopher's Hospice	Dr Adrian Tookman Edenhall Marie Curie Centre
Mr Greg Morgan Swansea University	Mr Jonathan Montgomery Southampton University
Ms Jean Robinson	Ms Sue Hann Community Health Council

Conference Fee	£100.00 for two days
Conference Fee and one nights accommodation	£130.00

To include lunch, dinner and all morning and afternoon refreshments.
Free car parking on site.

P G E A Approved

For further details and a booking form, please contact:

Mrs Chris Sherwood - Conference secretary
Berkshire College of Nursing & Midwifery, Wexham Park Hospital, Slough,
SL2 4HL Tel: (0753)-634345

"CALL FOR PAPERS"

Fourth
International Conference on
Grief and Bereavement in
Contemporary Society

Stockholm 12-16 June 1994



Main themes:

- Children's Grief Reactions
- Loss and Effects on Mental Health
- Death in a Changing World
- Traumatic Bereavement
- Helping the Helpers
- Responsibilities of Society

Deadline for submission of abstracts is 1st October 1993

Send for the Second Announcement with Abstract Form from the organiser.

The Swedish National Association for Mental Health (Sfph)
Box 45 246, S-104 30 Stockholm, Sweden
Fax No. 46-8 791 75 63

Bereavement Care Journal—Subscription Rate 1993

U.K.: Individual Subscribers (i.e. paid for by individual subscriber for personal use) £10.00. Libraries and organisations (e.g. paid for by organisations and/or for multiple readership): £18.00. Cruse Branches: £7.50. Postage included.

Overseas Rate: Europe. Individual Subscribers (as defined above) £13.00. Libraries and Organisations (as defined above) £19.00.

Countries Outside Europe: Individual Subscribers (as defined above) £18.00. Libraries and Institutions (as defined above) £25.00. All prices inclusive of air mail. Kindly remit by sterling draft payable in London.

Bereavement Care Journal is published three times a year in Spring, Summer and Winter. Payment may be made by cheque, money order or credit card (Mastercard, Eurocard, Visa, Access). Some back numbers available at £3.00 plus 35p postage (inland).