

Primary school recommendations:

- to respond to the schools perceived training needs ;
- to prepare and circulate a help sheet of information;
- to establish a central resource bank.

Secondary school recommendations:

- to continue to respond to the training needs;
- to establish a resource centre from which schools can obtain material or seek help;
- to establish specialist help and support for schools having problems in this area.

It has not been possible as yet to resource all these recommendations. However, training courses on bereavement for teachers did take place in Humberside, and a help sheet was drawn up, giving a summary of the findings of the study, brief advice, and a contacts and book list, and

distributed to all schools in the county.

The author would like to gratefully acknowledge the help of Corrine Ludford of Bridlington School and co-researcher, Janis Hostad of Dove House Hospice, Hull, who inspired the primary study. He has also published a handbook for teachers, *Coping with Bereavement* (Cardiff, UK: Cardiff Academic Press, 1997) and is now training as an educational psychologist.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

The Reading Branch of Cruse Bereavement Care is looking for reports of feelings of euphoria – elation and a sense of well-being – following a death. The feelings may or may not be prolonged, may occur at any stage of bereavement, may perhaps be seen as incongruous or having a religious significance.

If you have encountered reactions of 'emotional excitement', we would be grateful if you would contact us. When we have added your instances to those from our branch of Cruse, we shall prepare a questionnaire for you in order to construct a general, more detailed picture. We should be pleased to receive data from any source, eg clients, friends and personal experiences. Of course, data will be entirely confidential and no names will be required.

JOAN WASON

Reading Cruse Bereavement Care
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R E V I E W S

RESOURCE PACKS

THE GRIEF GAME

Yvonne Searly, Isabelle Strong.
London, UK: Jessica Kingsley, 1996.
Game and booklet: £38.18.

DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT

Judith Green. Leicester, UK: Youth Work Press, 1995. Booklets and cards: £14.99.

FACING UP

St Catherine's Hospice. Preston, Lancs, UK, 1992. Video and package: £30.00.

LIFE GOES ON

St Margaret's Somerset Hospice. Taunton, Somerset, UK, 1995. Two videos: £58.75 each, £88.20 for both.

GRIEF, BEREAVEMENT AND CHANGE

Penny Casdagli, Francis Gobey.
Cambridge, UK: Daniels Publishing, 1994. Package: £39.95.

There comes a time for most of us, no matter how extensive our experience, when we need ideas and inspiration in our work. The five, quite different items here will, between them, be a valuable source of both these things for bereavement workers for many years to come.

The simplest, apparently, is *The Grief Game*, a therapeutic tool designed by clinical psychologists to help children and adolescents (six to 16 is the recommended age range) come to terms with bereavement. Anyone familiar with the *All about Me* game (Ilford, Essex, UK: Barnardos, 1992) will have some idea what this one is like. There is an attractive board with a start point, and shapes on which players can land, some of which lead to the turning over of a card to do with thoughts, wishes and dreams, or feelings or memories or facts. Each

card carries a question, for example: 'If you had a wish for your special person, what would it be? Does the pain of losing someone ever go away? Did the special person ever hug you?' They are not all emotion-laden – one asks how tall the special person was, another that the player find out what the other players are good at. Together they provide a wide range of topics for discussion using, in the words of the authors, an integrated psychotherapy model which incorporates systemic, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic and psychodynamic orientations. There is a brief but useful accompanying booklet. Highly recommended for therapists; others should approach with caution.

Dealing with Bereavement is for youth workers and others, helping them enable young people to express and explore their feelings on this subject. There are two booklets to set the scene and give suggestions for group work, and a set of cards to facilitate discussion, encourage role play and allow an exercise to be played out.

The introductory booklet covers much of the theory, with particular reference to adolescence. It provides a good start for someone coming fresh to the topic and the sections on religious beliefs and resources are most welcome. The second booklet contains a set of 10 exercises, or activities, which youth workers can carry out. The author is careful to spell out the limitations of what she is offering, but I would have welcomed a clearer indication of the need to debrief at the end of a session, and some suggestions on how this might be done. That apart, this could be a valuable resource for teachers in secondary

schools, as well as youth workers.

Facing Up is a video about a young man who is killed while riding a motor bike, with a set of notes, worksheets and information sheets for teachers. The declared purpose is to challenge young people in their mid-teens with the implications of bereavement. The 25-minute video is well made, and should certainly set the scene effectively. The materials are devised for a session each week for six or seven weeks. There is factual information, a section on emotions and finally a move to bring in other losses, including moving house, divorce and other separations.

The background of the video, and to some extent the package, is Christian and children of other faiths, or those who have none, may find it hard to identify with what is portrayed. However, teachers do not have to follow the package as though it were a cook book. Of all the approaches reviewed here, this is the most school-like, in that there are many suggestions for discussions and a lot of questions to put to children. It is well worth looking at, although some of the material may need to be adapted.

The training video, *Life Goes on*, from St Margaret's hospice comes in a 15 and a 30-minute version. Both contain the same basic material: an account by four girls aged between 14 and about 20 of the death of a parent and how they have, or have not, coped. With admirable candour they talk of their immediate responses, the way their school or college behaved, the part played by friends and counsellors. They articulate their regrets and give example upon example of ways in which they have come to terms with

their loss. Both contain the same stories, but the longer version has more detail and if only one could be bought, this is the one to go for. There appears to be no accompanying literature which is a shame since many of the ideas expressed, even in the longer version, could bear discussion. Although called training videos, either could be used with a youth group to illustrate points, although there is far too much material to show either of them all at once.

The Neti-Neti Theatre Company was founded in 1987 and since then has made a name for itself by producing theatre for young people which is, in their words, challenging and accessible. Having seen two of their performances, I can vouch for that, and would add that when they have dealt with death, they have reached deep emotional levels as well. Their pack, *Grief, Bereavement and Change*, consists of detailed notes for five workshops for young people, with sections on further reading and contact addresses. A video, *Grief**, is available separately from Neti-Neti and may be used with the pack.

There is an enormous range of ideas and of topics touched upon, with the underlying aim of opening up issues and making it safe to talk about them. The workshops are designed to run over five weeks but there is more than enough material in each to extend over a longer period. The authors are careful in their background discussion to emphasise the need to be aware of the structure of group work, the need, for example, to warm up first and to debrief at the end.

The contents of the workshops are in many ways different from the other

material reviewed here; the authors are drama specialists rather than teachers and it shows. Some of them would, I suspect, require a group leader with rather more charisma than many teachers can muster to pull them off and the pack may be more suitable for a youth group than a conventional school. I wonder, to give just one example, at the use of a warming-up exercise which consists of everyone tucking in their arms and running around the room without bumping into anyone else.

Having said that, there is much here that could be used in any setting. As with the other packages, it will be necessary to select with care, but if you are looking for something well out of the ordinary, then this is the one for you.

Richard Lansdown
Consultant Psychologist

* Casdagli P, Khosru S. Grief. London, UK: Neti-Neti Theatre Co. Reviewed in *Bereavement Care* 1995; 14 (3): 35.

BOOKS

'YOU'LL GET OVER IT'

Virginia Ironside. London, UK: Hamish Hamilton, 1996. £6.99

The attachments which most of us make to our parents in childhood provide us with the security which eventually enables us to survive and indeed to flourish, without them; but this is not always the case. After the death of her father, Virginia Ironside found herself overwhelmed by emotions which were totally unexpected. They led her into a detailed study of the literature on bereavement and a journey of self-exploration of which this book should be regarded as the first fruits, for there is surely more to come.

An intelligent and incisive writer, the author makes mincemeat of some of our comfortable and comforting theories about bereavement. She dismisses Henry Scott Holland's popular poem 'Death is Nothing at All' with a resounding 'bollocks' and dismisses many (but not all) bereavement counsellors as 'bereavement vultures, the emotional coffin riders who only get off on being associated with someone special.'

Her own bereavement was complicated by ambivalence and her writings will be of special interest to people who find cloying the usual assumption that the bereaved must have loved the person who died, and that their distress is a reflection of the magnitude of that love. Issues of anger and guilt are mercilessly examined and I like her observation that, 'The exhortation "Never speak ill of the dead" is made, not because God thinks it's bad to be unpleasant about dead people, it's because if you do utter a word of criticism, one of the bereaved relatives will get you round the throat and try to kill you, or worse, that once you open your

mouth to say anything critical about a dead person, you might never stop.'

The main problem with this book is the author's tendency to over-generalise from her own experience and since that was, and remains, a bad one she is inclined to pessimism. Three years after her father's death she assumes that she is speaking for others when she says, 'We still plod on, despite being shaken by the most powerful emotions that we will ever experience'. Other researchers, such as Owen et al² who compared reactions to several types of loss, have found no such tendency and while death of parents can trigger lasting difficulties, most people cope without great distress and would not identify with Ironside's final self-assessment; 'Here I am, I'm still alive. Well, sort of.'

This is not typical grief. It reflects a long-standing problem in her relationship with her father. Maybe the 'numerous friends' who advised her to seek psychiatric help were right; but this does not mean that her problems are remote from those of many of the people who seek help after a bereavement. We need to learn all that we can about such problems and Virginia Ironside's articulate and compelling book is a good place to start.

Colin Murray Patkes
Consultant Psychiatrist

1. Holland HS. Death is Nothing at All. In: A Whitaker. All in the End is Harvest. London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984. Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, UK, TW9 1UR.

2. Owen G, Fulton R, Markusen E. Death at a distance: a study of family survivors. *Omega*, 1982; 13: 191-225.

THE NATURAL DEATH HANDBOOK

Nicholas Alberry et al (eds). London, UK: Virgin Books, 1993. £9.99 pb.

An excellent handbook – a worthwhile accompaniment for any student, volunteer or professional seeking a wider understanding of the field of bereavement and a greater knowledge of dying, death and bereavement. It provides a good introduction to these subjects from various religious and cultural perspectives, including practical care for someone who is dying at home. It describes how to organise a DIY funeral without an undertaker as well as many ways of improving the grieving process for the bereaved.

The section on euthanasia, suicide and spirituality is especially welcome as in my experience as a bereavement counsellor and trainer these are areas which still conjure up all sorts of difficulties and stigmas in peoples' minds. Spirituality is about development of our own conscious awareness of the life and death process, so the dying often feel the need to be more in touch with their own spirituality and this may take the form of a wish to be closer to nature.

Those who would like to take more

responsibility for their own lives and who view death as part of the living process will also find this handbook useful. They may want to contribute in a practical way to their own death experience by preparing a living will, or by planning their own funeral. This summer the final version of *The Dead Citizens' Charter* will be launched. Both publications should help promote public awareness of the rights of the living and of the dead.

Pam Keane
Counsellor/Trainer

WISE BEFORE THE EVENT: Coping with Crises in Schools

William Yule, Anne Gould. London, UK: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1993. £5.00 pb¹.

Recently we have all been shocked by major traumas in some of our schools – the shootings at Dunblane, the stabbing of headteacher Philip Lawrence, the death of a teenager on a school trip to France, the machete attack on nursery school children and their teachers. Those involved were not all from inner city, 'problem' schools, and increasingly all schools need to acknowledge that crises can affect them too, that the attitude, 'it couldn't happen here', is neither realistic nor helpful. Indeed, the events which hit the headlines are just a minority of the traumas affecting many schools – accidental death, stabbings, teenage suicides – and each such event has widespread effects on the school staff, pupils, parents and on the community.

Wise before the Event highlights the issues faced by schools caught up in crises involving death and injury. The authors draw on work with survivors of disasters such as the capsizing of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, the sinking of the Jupiter cruise ship, the Hillsborough disaster, and road traffic accidents (including one on a school journey). Case studies are described clearly and poignantly, illustrating the complicated interactions and after effects, both short and long term, on pupils and teachers. A particularly useful section gives the range of symptoms which indicate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The important message is that

schools can and should consider what they can do to ensure that when touched by any form of crisis or loss, they are in the best position possible to support their community. Who needs to be contacted? How should it be done? What support systems are available and which need to be mobilised? The authors describe in detail the short and long-term issues which have to be faced. Many decisions are best made in advance, and so a school is more likely to be an effective support if there is a clearly set out contingency plan, preferably supported by the local authority. A very helpful chapter outlines the main topics which need to be included in such a plan.

The final section draws attention to the need to foster an atmosphere in schools where pupils are helped to think about death and loss, and to talk about painful feelings and support one other. Careful planning of the curriculum, support for teachers, and an awareness of multi-cultural issues all contribute to the development of a supportive ethos within a school.

I would recommend that every school uses this book as a starting point to develop a policy both for dealing with crises and for incorporating the sensitive topics of bereavement and loss in the wider sense into the curriculum. In this way some of the mystery and taboo surrounding this area can be removed and our young people will be better prepared to cope with difficult events as they arise.

Marianne Urbanowicz
Educational Psychologist

[†] Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, UK, TW9 1UR.

HEALING GRIEF: A Guide to Loss and Recovery

Barbara Ward. London, UK: Vermilion Press, 1993. £9.99 pb[‡].

Drawing on her many years as a counsellor, trainer and consultant in bereavement and stress management, Barbara Ward has produced a book containing a wealth of information about different aspects of loss. From her breadth of understanding, she draws many poignant and useful illustrations. In the characteristic title of her first chapter, 'Growing through grief', we

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recognise her special optimism and courage for the painful process of moving from loss to acceptance, and given her life experiences, this has a ring of authenticity. For some her insights will be a spur towards recovery; for others, perhaps the mountain may seem too steep for climbing.

Her language is clear and without jargon; explanations of process are combined with suggestions on how one may help bereaved people in a variety of ways. Those who need a deeper exploration of a particular aspect of loss may find the scope of this book too wide. It does not contain, for example, the detailed, theoretical discussion of aspects of bereavement in Beverley Raphael's *Anatomy of Bereavement*¹, nor the imaginative, cultural discussion in Alida Gersie's *Storymaking in Bereavement*², based on myths and folk tales from around the world. For experienced counsellors, the prescriptive nature of the do's and don'ts may limit a more imaginative and creative response to each new client. Nevertheless, the listing of what is and is not useful to the bereaved can also be a healthy reminder of the essentials in our work.

The appendix opens with an anonymous quotation, 'sorrow that has no vent in tears makes other organs weep', introducing relaxation and visualisation techniques used by the writer on her courses, to give physical relief from stress. I would

have liked more of these. There is also an excellent bibliography and section on addresses and support groups.

Eileen Pitman
Bereavement Counsellor

1. Raphael B. *Anatomy of Bereavement*. London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1984.
 2. Gersie A. *Storymaking in Bereavement*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley, 1991.
- ³ Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR.

ABSTRACTS

Towards an Experiential Theory of Bereavement

Hogan N, Morse JM, Tason MC. *Omega* 1996; 33(1): 43-65. This long article is divided into two parts: the first reviews the perspectives that have guided bereavement research in the past, and the second describes and draws conclusions from a study by the authors of the reactions of 34 persons bereaved for between six months and 30 years. The authors find that, despite wide variation in the circumstances of the death, the process of grief followed a consistent overall pattern. The various stages of grief are described and the findings compared with those of other writers.

The authors claim to have developed 'an experiential theory', but what they have produced is a descriptive classification which is not much different from the descriptions of grief which emerge from other studies. They

have not attempted to explain their findings and their account remains free of theoretical assumptions or conclusions. It is not without interest but is certainly not the break-through in theory that the title suggests.

Sheila Hodges, John Bush and
Colin Murray Parkes

'We've had the same loss, why don't we have the same grief?': Loss and Differential Grief in Families

Gilbert KR. *Death Studies* 1996; 20(3): 269-83.

'Families do not grieve. Only individuals grieve. This is done in a variety of contexts, one of which is the family.' In this interesting and helpful article, the author discusses the generally-held assumption that after a bereavement all the members of a family express their sense of loss in a similar fashion. In reality, this is often not the case, and the result may be misunderstandings and additional stress and grief. Various aspects of the different ways in which family members grieve are explored, and practical suggestions made for dealing with this situation.

Responses to Loss and Bereavement in HIV

Maxwell N. *Professional Nurse* 1996; 12(1): 21-4.

The stigma of HIV/AIDS means that those bereaved through this illness can feel shunned by society and isolated in their grief. Nurses can provide vital help at this time through good communication and counselling skills, and through an understanding of the patient's emotional as well as physical needs. Their relationship both with the patient and with the family and significant others will be close and perhaps long-term, and, in order to provide support, they themselves need to have sources of help and referral.

A Critical Review of the Concept of Pathological Grief following Pregnancy Loss

Janssen HJEM, Cuisiner MCJ, Hoogduin KAL. *Omega* 1996; 33(1): 1-19.

It has often been suggested in the literature on pregnancy loss that parents run a high risk of pathological grief as a result of such loss. What confuses the issue is that the definition of pathological grief is unclear. This useful, but somewhat repetitive, article reviews the empirical studies on pathological grief following pregnancy loss according to four subtypes taken from general bereavement literature: chronic, delayed, masked and exaggerated grief. It is suggested in conclusion that pathological grief may be less common than had previously been thought, and that many women seem to be able to recover in time from pregnancy loss, drawing on their own strength.

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

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