

Responses to trauma

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

A developmental approach

Dora Black, Martin Newman, Jean Harris-Hendriks, Gillian Mezey (eds)

London, UK: Gaskell, 1997. £30.00 pb



With much being said in recent years on the topic of trauma, and in particular post-traumatic stress disorder, this book is a very important addition to the literature and I found it most interesting and informative. It will be especially welcomed by students wishing to know more about psychological trauma across the age range, and by those whose work brings them into contact with people who have had traumatic experiences.

The book is divided into four main sections: human responses to stress; disasters, war, civil conflict, dislocation and interpersonal violence; diagnosis, intervention and treatment; and legal aspects, victims as witnesses and claimants. It draws on the writings of over 50 authors and contains a wealth of experience to inform the reader's theoretical understanding and practice.

Of particular interest to me is Beverley Raphael's chapter on 'The interaction of trauma and grief'. Over recent years the attention given to major traumatic incidents has fuelled the debate about those who have been bereaved in these circumstances experiencing both traumatic stress reaction phenomena and bereavement phenomena. Are they parallel processes? Does the patient/client need to deal first with the trauma before dealing with the bereavement? Is the pathological outcome of PTSD the same as the pathological outcome of chronic grief? Raphael explores this whole area with reference to the work of Parkes, Pynoos, Horowitz, Lindemann, MacFarlane and others. I would certainly support Raphael's contention that much further work needs to be done, 'to develop models that take into account the delicate balancing of trauma and grieving to achieve

optimum outcomes for those suffering this double psychological burden.'

Section Two begins with a chapter by Parkes, 'A Typology of Disasters'. The author uses a matrix to define disasters in terms of size (small, medium, large) and spread (local, national, international). This way of defining disasters has been addressed by a number of writers. Marion Gibson in her book, *Order from Chaos* (Birmingham, UK: Venture Press, 1991), for instance, uses a similar matrix but the concept is more of academic than practical value. True, it can inform the emergency services and planning officers in their preparations for a major incident. On the other hand it matters little to the mother whose child has been murdered by a terrorist bomb, or to the social worker, general practitioner or volunteer supporting her, whether the death is part of a small local, small national or large national disaster.

Section Three is an exploration by a number of writers of various forms of intervention and treatment, including critical incident debriefing, behavioural and cognitive approaches and psychodynamic psychotherapy. Reference is

made in one paragraph to a relatively new treatment, eye movement desensitisation; interesting claims are made about the success rates of this although, as Newman points out, further research is needed. Some useful papers are included dealing specifically with the treatment of traumatised children. Dora Black explores such interventions as behaviour modification, family and group therapy, helpfully including case examples to illustrate various forms of these therapies. Emanuel Mendelsohn outlines the use of psychodynamic psychotherapy with children, again with case examples.

The final short section deals with legal aspects, in particular the relationship of PTSD to litigation, ethical issues and organising psychosocial support following disasters.

This book will be of interest to a variety of readers: many involved in post-trauma work and in planning appropriate responses will want to dip into it, and I know that it will be useful to me and others involved in training staff and volunteers. I see it becoming the basic text for anyone interested in the field of psychological trauma.

BC

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Caring for children in distress

COUNSELLING AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN DISTRESS*

Sonia Sharp, Helen Cowie

London, UK: Sage Publications, 1998. £12.99pb

All adults, not just 'experts', have a role in helping children in distress, argue Sonia Sharp and Helen Cowie in this book which aims to outline the ways in which everyone 'involved in the care of children and adolescents can play a part in supporting these young people at times of emotional distress'. However in my opinion, despite the laudable intention, the book will be of greatest interest and use to teachers and school staff.

The opening chapters place children in the context of their needs and rights: the Children Act, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and research which focuses on the issues that lead children and young people to experience stress and distress. A refreshing element here is the acknowledgement and description of factors which protect children from the potential negative impact of life experiences.

The chapter on grief provides a good overview of the effect of bereavement at different ages, though I was struck that children under the age of three are not mentioned. In

this, and many other chapters, the case examples and details of interventions are very helpful and provide creative ideas for others. For example, the description of a school responding to the sudden death of a pupil in a manner which informed and involved the whole community, would be very helpful to other schools having to deal with a similar event.

Teachers will probably use this book to dip into when they have issues such as bullying, fears or phobias to deal with, or a pupil causing them concern. The focus is on what children themselves identify as their main stressors, bereavement, school pressure etc. Other issues, such as abuse, are not addressed. The authors are keen advocates of peer support and there is a very useful chapter which will help school staff to establish systems for this in their own schools.

A short, final chapter on taking preventative action and creating the right climate in school could be developed further. Staff have an enormous amount to consider while teaching large numbers of children and, often, little opportunity to consider small ways in which they could improve the emotional environment generally in school. The book also neglects to

BOOKS

mention the importance of support for teachers, and others, when they are trying to address the concerns of children and young people in their care.

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Adapted, by kind permission, from the original review in *Young Minds Magazine* 1999; 40: 21.

COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT a handbook for teachers

John Holland

Cardiff, UK: Cardiff Academic Press, 1997. £11.95 pb

The author, a teacher and Cruse counsellor, has reported on his research in schools on the awareness of the effects of bereavement in their pupils (*Bereavement Care* 1997; 16(1):8-10). In this short book he sets out to provide schools with the knowledge they need to help bereaved children and their peers within the school community. After a general discussion of the effects of loss on adults and children, he makes suggestions for teaching children both about the life-cycle, including death (what he calls the proactive approach), and coping with a bereaved child (the reactive approach). Surprisingly there is little about the death of a child or a teacher and the reader will find little help in distinguishing the reactions and needs of children of different ages. The author is best at the proactive, educational aspects of life and death, although Ward's two work-books (see below) give a wider and more detailed choice of suitable teaching material. Holland includes at the end of each chapter a list of 'Follow-up activities' for teachers. Many will be baffled by the inclusion in these lists of such questions as 'Which TV programme have you most recently enjoyed and why?' and 'Where do you intend to go on holidays next year?'

The book contains some inaccuracies, omissions and obscure statements. The one I found most puzzling was: 'A sample of primary schools in Humberside rated the parents as the most important element in child bereavement, second only to the schools themselves' (p69).

I was disappointed not to find the full reference to Pattison (quoted on p35 but not listed in the references) or to Leshan (p39). Parkes' book has the wrong publisher and the wrong edition.

Although I was pleased at the frequency with which our *Bereavement Care* journal is quoted, it would assist readers if they were informed where it could be obtained.

Teachers seeking helpful literature on bereavement may find the following books more nearly meet their needs:

Dyregrov A. *Grief in Childhood: a handbook for adults.*
London, UK: Jessica Kingsley, 1991*.

Steffes D. *When Someone Dies: how schools can help bereaved students.*
London, UK: Cruse Bereavement Care, 1997*.

Yule W, Gold A. *Wise Before the Event: coping with crises in school.*
London, UK: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1993*.

Ward B and associates. *Good Grief: Vol 1 for under elevens; Vol 2 for over elevens and adults (2nd edns).*
London, UK: Jessica Kingsley, 1996*.

Dora Black

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

CHILDREN AND BEREAVEMENT

Wendy Duffy

London, UK: Church House Publishing, 1995. £4.95 pb

This is a brief guide to helping children understand and cope with bereavement. The author, a nurse, emphasises the unique and personal nature of each bereavement and the fact that children's grief may be neglected because the adults around them are preoccupied. Wendy Duffy stresses that it is better to say something and risk getting it wrong, rather than do nothing, and I found the simplicity and conversational style quickly made me agree with everything she said!

There are general chapters covering the stages of grief and the needs of children and adolescents, and others covering the child's response to the death of a brother or sister, a friend or pet. There is also a section on deaths by suicide. Each chapter has clear advice, given in a practical, down-to-earth way which inspires confidence. For relatives or friends wanting to know how to help, what to say and what to avoid, this book is excellent and will do much to allay anxiety. The author also includes a chapter on 'Where is God?' and offers prayers and readings, as well as recommended reading and sources of help.

This is a good resource for schools, clergy, nurses and others who want a sensible, sensitive and reassuring guide to helping bereaved children. **BC**

Judith Bevan

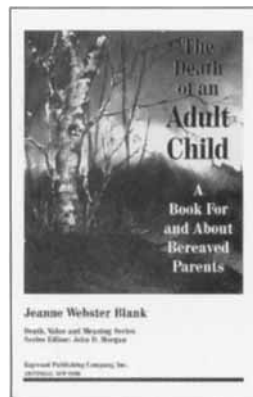
Family Therapist

All titles marked * are available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126, Sheen Road, Richmond TW9 1UR ☎ 0181 940 4818 Fax 0181 940 7638

THE DEATH OF AN ADULT CHILD

Jeanne Webster Blank

Amityville, New York, USA: Baywood Publishing, 1998. \$44.95 hb



Not enough has been written on the death of an adult child so, if only for that reason, this book is very welcome. It is based on personal experience (the death of a 39-year-old daughter from cancer) and 60 responses to questionnaires from bereaved parents associated with the *Compassionate Friends*.

Though intended 'primarily for bereaved parents and also for professional caregivers to increase their... understanding', there are no references to other work on this topic and bereavement professionals may find it of limited value. However there are insights into grief reactions pertinent to the loss of an adult child (one over the age of 18) and many parents will identify with the intensity and range of feelings described. The book is over-long and repetitive and I doubt whether anyone would want to read it cover to cover, but the chapter headings are helpful and allow the reader to pick up what is of interest to them.

The author is American and therefore some of the effects and social implications of the death of an adult child relate to that culture, in particular the chapters on 'Happy Holidays' (eg Christmas, Thanksgiving) and 'Seeking Justice' (redress through the legal system). She claims that this is not a 'how to' book, but includes plenty of advice on, for example, dealing with fair-weather friends.

Two chapters had something new to say to me, as someone familiar with grieving people and also with a loss similar to this one. Chapter six, 'Why', introduces the concept of 'disallowed grief' and brings in the needs of older parents who are often overlooked due to ageism. Chapter eight, 'Whither thou goest', deals with suicidal thoughts, suggesting that these are not about

ending the pain, but wishing 'to be with the deceased child'. **BC**

Els Footman

Bereavement Trainer and Therapist

VIDEO

HARD MEDICINE

A journey in adult grief

Center for Grief Education

PO Box 1569, Clayton South 3169, Victoria, Australia: 1997. AUS \$65.00, including a Facilitator's Guide

This pack is intended for use in training programmes for professionals and others who provide support to bereaved people. The newly bereaved are warned not to view it.

In a technically excellent and visually compelling video, four people who have experienced complicated grief talk about their experiences; these include multiple losses, suicide, adoption and death of a child. The first 10 minutes is hard going. The camera cuts rapidly from one interviewee to another as they describe their reactions to the death itself. These are very varied and the viewer may find it hard to keep a grasp on who has lost what, how and when. Thereafter the pace relaxes and we get to know each of the bereaved people in more detail. Even so there is no commentary and this reviewer ended up with very little understanding of the underlying dynamics or patterning of their grief. One dips briefly into the maelstrom of feelings and thoughts which inundate these traumatised people and ends by feeling inundated oneself.

The Facilitator's Guide does little to dispel our disorientation; indeed it makes a virtue of the confusion by emphasising the unique quality of each person's reaction and the dangers of over-simplification. It succeeds in its object of sensitising us to the desperate needs of the sufferers without giving clear indications of how these needs can be met (apart from the trite general injunction to 'notice and permit grief however it is expressed'). It provides group leaders with a list of good questions but does not suggest any answers. Although it may be true that 'there are no easy answers' it does not follow that there are no answers at all.

All in all this training video is less useful than others which deal in more detail with particular types of loss. With all the excellent equipment and expertise at their disposal it is to be hoped that future productions from this group will attempt less and succeed more. **BC**

Collin Murray Parkes

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