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EDITORIAL

Tom Lundin

Guest Editor, Sweden

What makes bereavement traumatic or complicated? How and when will family support be sufficient? Does counselling help? There are many questions concerning grief and professional support for bereaved people to which it is difficult to give one correct answer.

When we provide professional help in the form of counselling, support or treatment, the most important thing is not to harm or make things worse than they already are. It has been suggested that counselling and debriefing will re-traumatise those

affected by a serious traumatic event. On the other hand, we know that working through feelings and experiences is the only possible way to help the psychological healing process. You can never get around or escape from mourning. Frank Ochberg has given us a goal for grief in his poem, *Survivor Psalm*.

I have been victimised
I was in a fight that was
not a fair fight.

I did not ask for the fight. I lost.
There is no shame in losing such
fights, only in winning.

I have reached the stage of
survivor and am no longer a
slave of victim status.

I look back with sadness
rather than hate.

I look forward with hope
rather than despair.

I may never forget, but I need not
constantly remember.

I was a victim,
I am a survivor.

In this issue Colin Murray Parkes discusses whether counselling will help or harm bereaved people. It may be possible

to differentiate those types of counselling that are more helpful, and also those types of counsellor more likely to do good than harm. Parkes stresses the importance of the selection of counsellors, and good training. Sudden and unexpected losses

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will often be more traumatic, and also pathogenic, so close relatives who have experienced such situations should be more strongly encouraged to accept counselling.

We can certainly learn much from pictures by great artists about what the death of a close relative can

mean for those who are left behind. Dora Black tells us about the cover picture of a young mother's death, painted by Pablo Picasso when he was only a teenager. The impact of the death of Picasso's own sister was the inspiration for this subject.

When a schoolchild is killed in an accident, witnessed by friends and teachers, a great many people will be traumatised. Jo Ebner-Landy reports on a school's responses to the death of a 14-year-old pupil and the counselling of the different groups of affected people: the bereaved parents, children, teachers, and parents of other pupils. The school itself constitutes one kind of society, so it is therefore very important to provide good counselling services there.

Kate Davidson's study on gender, age and widowhood casts new light on a very common situation: bereavement in older people. She describes the various types of coping strategies adopted as people age, and the differences in the adaptation processes of widows and widowers.