

Families

Family Process

Group and Family Therapy

International Journal of Family Therapy

Journal of Family Therapy

Journal of Marital and Family Therapy

Pastoral Studies

Contact

Attachments

Attachment and Human Development

SOME MAJOR BOOKS ON BEREAVEMENT-RELATED TOPICS

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***Parkes CM**. *Bereavement: Studies of grief in adult life (3rd edn)*. London/ New York: Routledge/Penguin/International Universities Press, 1996.

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Zisook S (ed). *Biopsychosocial Aspects of Bereavement*. Washington DC, USA: American Psychiatric Press, 1987.

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A SELF-HELP SERVICE

SAMM - support after murder and manslaughter (London)

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The death of a loved one is painful and distressing, particularly when it occurs suddenly, but when the cause of death is murder or manslaughter, the problems are compounded and the aftermath can be very traumatic. In these cases, feelings of helplessness and shock are multiplied for the family who will have the added stress of a police investigation, sometimes with themselves as the main suspects. Add to this the media attention and the feeling of powerlessness over controlling what is said in public about your loved one, and you have a recipe for major bereavement problems.

One thing that can help bereaved people in this situation is to talk to others who have been through the same horrific experience and Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM) offers this through a telephone helpline that individuals and professionals can ring for information and support. The helpline is manned from Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm by paid staff, and outside office hours by trained volunteers. We also have a network of support groups around the country which provide emotional support by telephone contact, visits or monthly meetings. In addition, we produce a quarterly newsletter.

Until you walk in another's shoes you cannot know how they feel. The strength of SAMM is that all of our members, helpline staff and volunteers have been through the nightmare experience of murder and can know more than others what it is like to cope afterwards. For instance, if there are children in the family who are also affected, adults often feel that the best thing to do is to protect them by not discussing the crime with them. But if children are not kept informed then their imagination will take over and run riot. It is far better to be honest with children and to include them in decisions about their future.


SAMM began as a sub-group within The Compassionate Friends (a registered charity offering support to parents whose child has died) called Parents of Murdered Children (POMC). In September 1990 POMC became a separately registered charity and then in 1994 the name was changed to SAMM to reflect the fact that

the extended family and friends of the victim are affected by a murder. We currently cover England and Wales, with a group operating in Edinburgh. SAMM also provides some telephone support in Northern Ireland and, encouraged by the local police, we are considering setting up a group there. Occasionally we handle enquiries from the Republic of Ireland, usually about murders that have taken place in England.

The basic human right to see and touch a loved one's body is denied in the case of murder. The relatives may be able to see the body but often only through a glass window: more importance seems to be given to protecting evidence than to the grief of the relatives.

Thankfully, the police are now more aware of the needs of relatives in the aftermath of murder, but there are still many problems for families. For instance, it can sometimes be months before a body is released, and the funeral must be delayed all this time. Here again, the rights of the bereaved seem to take second place and the rights of the accused (if there is one) to take precedence. There will inevitably be a post-mortem. The defence team may insist on a second post-mortem and, if there is more than one accused, there may even be a third! This is very painful for those close to the dead person who are often left feeling understandably resentful.

One important aspect of our work is raising awareness of the effects of murder on the surviving family by helping to train the professionals, ie police family liaison officers, coroner's officers etc. We also take part in interagency work parties and liaise regularly with the police, crown prosecution service, Home Office and probation service. We work particularly closely with Victim Support, a national charity offering help to victims and witness of crime, with whom we share the same national office.

The Home Office has funded a 4-year grant to enable SAMM to continue to support families and friends of murder victims. Our charity is governed by a national executive committee and its members, voted in at our AGM, are the trustees. Committee members and volunteers are offered regular training to keep them updated on issues relating to supporting traumatically bereaved people and we now have codes of conduct and of confidentiality, as well as a complaints procedure. For more information, contact Support After Murder and Manslaughter, Cranmer House, 39 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ. Helpline: 020 7735 3838. 

BOOKS FROM CRUSE

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- For those who are bereaved
- For those professionally involved with bereavement
- For children and young people and those working with them

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