

Building up a bereavement library



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The purpose of this article is to provide a selection of 20 books on bereavement suitable for volunteers offering a support service to bereaved people. It is based on the assumption that the volunteers would be trained, or in the process

of being trained, but would not necessarily have been involved in counselling previously. The selection could be for personal use, or form the basis of small library for shared use by a bereavement service.

The material selected here would be of use to both volunteers and those with accredited counselling or health care qualifications, but there is some bias towards choosing material which is not overloaded with professional jargon. All books in the core list are in print.

INTRODUCTORY READING

Where bereavement support workers should begin reading is debatable because there is such a range of literature with varying standpoints. However, volunteers should undoubtedly have training before working with bereaved people and also have supervision, individually and/or in groups, at the same time. So, to accompany this, it would be wise to start with some guidance on developing basic counselling skills. The book by Ford and Merriman has a disarmingly simple title, *The Gentle Art of Listening*, but serves as an excellent introduction.

Personal experiences are invaluable, preferably a number contained in one book, rather than a single account. Then one can see how people react differently. Three books that can be recommended in this area are *Good Grief* by Carol Lee¹, *Talking About Bereavement* by Rosamund Richardson² and *Perspectives On Bereavement* by Bel Mooney³. Unfortunately, none are now in print, but they should be available in public libraries. A text still in print and written specifically for bereaved people is Whitaker's *All In the End Is Harvest*. This is a collection of readings, suitable not only for its specified audience, but also for those who wish to understand

the nature of bereavement in its various manifestations.

In helping a bereaved person, it is useful to have some knowledge about death and dying. A text on this subject is *Death Dying and Bereavement* edited by Donna Dickenson *et al.* It has 64 short items in the form of newspaper extracts, poetry and short articles by health professionals. There are sections on 'Life and death', 'Caring for dying people', 'Dilemmas and decisions at the end of life', and 'Bereavement: private grief, collective responsibility'. It is a reader for a UK Open University course on death and dying and it offers a breadth of understanding on the subject.

'TEXTBOOKS'

There are many volumes on the subject of bereavement citing theories, models, contrasting views of bereavement and,

EDITOR'S NOTE

With the numbers of books on death and bereavement which are offered for sale increasing daily it becomes ever more difficult to choose what to buy. Reviews of new books in the field are published in *Bereavement Care* with the object of helping us to make such choices but those who seek to stock a useful library on bereavement will find this article of particular value.

Denise Brady is Librarian at what is probably the best library in the UK dealing with issues of death and bereavement. She is, therefore, uniquely qualified to guide others in choosing books for their own library.

indeed, some advice on how to communicate with, understand and assist bereaved people – but there are relatively few 'how-to-do-it' bereavement counselling textbooks. However, two are *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy* by Worden and *The Gift of Tears* by Lendrum and Syme.

Worden assumes readers already have a certain level of expertise – the book is aimed at those in professions where bereavement care is part of a larger role. He covers all aspects of the subject, but two chapters in particular, 'Normal grief reactions: uncomplicated mourning' and 'Grief counselling: facilitating uncomplicated grief', provide a firm basis for working with issues of bereavement.

The book by Lendrum and Syme complements Worden in many ways. There are sections on working with children, guilt and anger, and cultural diversity. There is also a thought-provoking diagram on factors to be considered in assessing a client's suitability for loss counselling and the preferable level of competence of the counsellor.

Two recently published books are not so much textbooks, but take up themes that augment and complement ideas on how to help bereaved people. In particular, they provide greater awareness of the social factors that can affect grief. Walter's *On Bereavement* contains a critique of models of bereavement. He offers insights into the way grief is 'policed' in Western society, a most insidious aspect being the assumption that one has to cry to be offered understanding. He provides evidence of the importance of the recognition of 'continuing bonds', a theme alluded to by Worden and further developed by Klass *et al* (core list), but also explored here. Riches and Dawson in *An Intimate Loneliness* describe qualitative research on families. They emphasise the crucial importance of social relations in the way people react to bereavement – this includes the way others in the family and in their immediate circle of friends react differently to the same bereavement. Both books are extensively referenced.

The final book of this section is the classic text *Bereavement* by Parkes. Now in its third edition, it commenced life with a focus on widows. The latest edition goes beyond this group and includes a concise overview on changing perspectives on working with bereaved people. In this latest edition, Parkes mentions three

books which have not been included in the core list but would be relevant to anyone looking at the development of ideas on bereavement over time, particularly from a psychiatric viewpoint. They are Raphael's *The Anatomy of Bereavement*⁴, Osterweis' *Bereavement*⁵ and Jacob's *Pathologic Grief: Maladaptation to loss*⁶. Another expert on psychological aspects is Rando^{7,8,9}. These texts may be useful to counsellors wanting to look at the subject in greater depth or pursuing a psychotherapeutic approach.

PARTICULAR SITUATIONS

The authors of the next three books have had a personal experience of the bereavement they describe, yet they also take a more objective view as qualified counsellors.

When Parents Die by Rebecca Abrams is about the author's personal bereavements when her natural father and her stepfather died within a short time span. Aimed at 15-25 year olds, it gives insight beyond this age group and situation, but it is primarily about loss of a developing relationship at an age when young people are just beginning to be treated as adults by their parents.

The Lone Twin by Joan Woodward, a psychotherapist, is a research study whose findings illustrate the implications of twin loss for different age groups. In addition, Woodward provides an analysis of John Bowlby's attachment theory and it is this theoretical dimension which gives the book an added value. Those wanting to explore further how Bowlby's rich understanding of attachment and loss works in practice should read his short collection of lectures, *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*¹⁰, which avoids the technicalities of his major works.

The third book, *A Special Scar* by Alison Wertheimer, describes the author's own traumatic experience of a sister who committed suicide, but is also based on interviews with 50 people bereaved in this way. A table in the final section gives brief information on the bereaved interviewees and their deceased relative; this ensures privacy, yet it also acknowledges people as individuals in their contributions to the book.

Gender differences, an area in which there is increasing interest, are helpfully explored in *Men Don't Cry... Women Do* by Terry Martin and Ken Doka. There is no 'cookbook' for addressing particular needs of people from different cultural or ethnic groups, but a chapter in this book does provide helpful guidance for those working in a variety of cultural settings.

The Empty Bed by Susan Wallbank

deals with intimacy, sexuality and the loss of being a couple following bereavement. As partner bereavement is a frequent reason for bereavement counselling, this is included as a key resource.

This article focuses on adult bereavement but it is worth mentioning one book among the many on the subject of child bereavement. *Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss*¹¹ by Claudia Jewett is almost a classic and provides an excellent introduction to counselling young people. However, this specialised area needs an article to itself and one is planned for a future issue of *Bereavement Care*.

Other particular situations, eg AIDS bereavement, neonatal bereavement, death of an adult child, are covered in chapters in the books mentioned in the next section.

WIDE-RANGING BOOKS

Two books with a variety of contributors contain a wealth of material on different types of bereavement and also indicate the areas in which research is currently taking place. *The Handbook of Bereavement Research*, a new book edited by Stroebe *et al* (it builds on the previous *Handbook of Bereavement*¹²) covers theoretical perspectives, bereavement across the life-span and all aspects of coping with grief. *Continuing Bonds*, edited by Klass *et al*, emphasises the importance of living without someone who previously played a large part in one's life, while also maintaining a bond with them. Individual chapters in these two books can be read as units and will provide practitioners with added insights into particular bereavement situations.

Two further multi-contributor books, *Coping with Loss* (Parkes and Markus) and *Disenfranchised Grief* (Doka), depict a wide variety of loss situations, not just bereavement from death but, for example, unemployment, loss of body parts, staff grief, relinquishing foster children, divorce and unwanted pregnancy. These books use research findings but are not research-based to the same extent as the previous two titles. However, they are illuminating, helping us to understanding an even greater variety of loss experiences.

AND FINALLY...

A useful way of looking at evaluating one's own service is to see how others have fared. *Bereavement Counselling Effectiveness* by Danbury is a research study of a combined bereavement service – a hospice, and volunteers from the UK charity, Cruse Bereavement Care. Both bereaved people and volunteers were interviewed. This may not be a perfect piece of research and the

author may not have researched a typical service, but it raises interesting questions and considers many strands in service provision. For example, how do bereaved counsellors and bereaved people see the 'stages of grief' theory? Do people 'recover' from bereavement? This study is presented in a clear format, and can stimulate debate on effectiveness of service provision as well as on the effectiveness of the research process itself.

For those who feel the need for a greater knowledge of the varieties of counselling, a broad view is contained in *Theory and Practice of Counselling* by Nelson-Jones.

Sudden Death by Bob Wright is, to a greater extent than the other books, concerned with communication with bereaved people in the immediate aftermath of a death. It involves a crisis intervention approach, yet also incorporates how to deal with bereaved people on an ongoing basis. One chapter is titled 'Everyone has a story to tell' – a core aspect of bereavement counselling. This book is included because many bereaved people have experienced sudden death, and this has an impact on their subsequent bereavement reactions. There is also a very useful section on care for the carer here.

'You'll Get Over It' - The rage of bereavement by Virginia Ironside is a gutsy, frank account of her own and other people's bereavement. Maybe it should have been included as an introductory text, but it provides such a hefty dose of straightforward talking that it is a treat on which to ponder, at the end of a list of more circumscribed, restrained writing.

COMMENT

Read some of these books, skim through others, chose items of particular relevance to the bereaved people you meet; you will then have an understanding of most of the issues in bereavement counselling. If possible, keep abreast of further material by reading journal articles but, most importantly, always read with a critical eye!

There are many avenues of research to pursue on issues related to bereavement and it is not easy to measure outcomes. In reading this set of books, two areas in particular seem to merit further examination. Bereavement care is often associated with bereavement counselling, but we should continue to look beyond this. Further studies could be initiated to find out if, for instance, teaching new tasks, bibliotherapy – even organised walks – may be equally, or indeed, more effective for some people. Secondly, identification of when basic counselling is sufficient and

when more advanced counselling skills are needed, requires further consideration (quite apart from the question 'what is a counsellor?')

The following quote from Riches and Dawson (core list) sums up what, above all else, I would like readers to take from their reading of these books:

the model of professional support we offer sees the 'practitioner' as an explorer and companion rather than an expert. To be sure, some of the landscape the bereaved...inhabits may seem familiar to us, and we may think the maps we already possess might help in guiding them through this territory. But it is *their* journey, not ours, that has to be travelled. **BC**

My thanks to social workers and bereavement service volunteers at St Christopher's Hospice, for some of the suggestions in this list.

CORE LIST

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* All asterisked books are available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond TW9 1UR, UK. crusebereavementcare.org.uk

BOOK REVIEW

BUT I DIDN'T SAY GOODBYE

Barabara Rubel

*New Jersey, USA: Griefwork Center, 1999, 85pp. \$14.95 pb. 1 89290 600 7**



Rubel has harnessed the passion of personal experience of suicide – her father 'completed' suicide while she was in labour with her triplet sons – to professional knowledge, and produced a very useful text. She aims to explore children's experience of the crisis of suicide and offer guidance on the issues that are uppermost immediately and in the longer term.

The book follows a case study format. Each chapter focuses on a stage in the aftermath of suicide and explores topics of which parent and professional alike should be aware. Rubel offers a list of questions that facilitate the child's examination of their feelings and thoughts. The language she uses is clear, simple and child-friendly. Possible responses to the prompts are

described in detail in the relevant episode of the case study, so there is plenty of reassuring guidance for the adult.

One of the strengths of Rubel's book is the way in which she highlights the volatility and intensity of children's mood states and how confusing and frightening these can be for the child. She pays particular attention to the power of anger and the way in which anger challenges and threatens the love the child may feel for the deceased person. This dilemma is neatly resolved by validating the anger and locating it within the act of suicide rather than being a characteristic of the relationship with the deceased.

The only criticism I could make is that the text does not address the complicating factors of family myth and taboo in any detail: these are often highly significant elements in a family's management of the aftermath of a suicide. It also does not consider developmental issues beyond childhood. However, these minor shadows aside, this is a handbook that many professionals and most parents of primary school age children will find an invaluable resource in understanding children's experiences and helping them to do the same. **BC**

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