

need post-bereavement and, in many cases, may not be required at all.

GIVING SORROW WORDS

(resource pack)

Steven Killick, Stuart Lindeman
Bristol, UK: Lucky Duck Publishing, 1999.
Manual 54pp, video 38 mins. £47.00.
Manual, pb, ISBN 1 87394 272 9

This resource pack, a manual and accompanying video, stresses the need to give children accurate and truthful information. Children need 'opportunities to remember', and to be able to ask questions. The usefulness of preparing a school policy in advance, and of keeping good records, are discussed. A policy framework and model policy are included in the book, as is advice on dealing with the media, on multi-cultural issues and on religious and spiritual issues.

These two publications complement one another, and provide useful advice for teachers and schools – provided that they are read and do not simply sit on a shelf in the head teacher's study.

Martin Newman


Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

A TEACHER'S HANDBOOK OF DEATH

Maggie Jackson, Jim Colwell
London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001, 176pp.
£13.95 pb. ISBN 1 84310 015 0

A Teacher's Handbook of Death is presented as a contribution to open talk with children about death. The authors identify a gap in the literature relating to teaching about how and why death occurs, rather than helping children who are bereaved and feeling grief. They argue that children from the age of eight upwards should be given basic information about death and dying, including how we die, dying and cancer, dying and AIDS, preservation of bodies, how the body is prepared for burial and cremation, among other topics. They suggest that this information is important for children in order to help them make more sense of death and recognise it as an everyday occurrence, part of all our lives.

While these objectives are welcome, I was left with serious concerns about how useful and appropriate the book is as a 'handbook' for teachers. The level of information is confusing. While the book is written for teachers, it is suggested that much of the information should form part of a 'death education' curriculum for children. Complex issues relating to teacher training, including the opportunity for teachers to talk through their own issues relating to death, are not

considered. Any school that is contemplating embarking on adding these topics to the curriculum would need to involve parents and community leaders. Sensitivity to those who may have been recently bereaved would be paramount and the context within which discussion about death arose would need very careful consideration. Issues relating to emotion, context, teacher education and community consultation are all noticeably absent. 

Susan Askew

Course Leader in Health Education

BOOK

THE CUE FOR PASSION Grief and its Political Uses

Gail Holst-Warhaft
Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2000, 228pp. £28.50 hb. ISBN 0 67400 224 5

Listening to Earl Spencer at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, showed me how revolutions can happen: had she died in an earlier century, and had Spencer ended his speech with the call to throw out the Windsors, millions might have responded. The power of grief can engender political change – that is the thesis of this well-written and highly original book.

The standard line in the sociology of grief is that, through funeral and other rites, mourners gather together and affirm the solidarity of the group over and against death. Holst-Warhaft, however, shows how the passion of grief can be the cue not for stabilising society but for transforming it. Moving easily from ancient Greek literature to the Vietnam war and Princess Diana, this is an enormously hopeful and energising book. Grief is probably the most powerful emotion that humans feel, carrying us to the edge of madness; in many societies, it was indulged, performed, shaped into song and lament. But many authority figures in church and state feared it, banning song, laments and wakes, and making mourning a dull business. They turned the energy of grief into depression.

But this book gives examples of how mourners (acting together, rather than the isolation into which modernity usually

thrusts them) have been powered by their grief to challenge authority. The most dramatic example is the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of Argentina's disappeared, who refused to be bought off with (probably fake) bones being returned to them and with talk of the need for 'closure'. As their newspaper wrote: 'Let there be no healing of wounds. Let them remain open. Because if the wounds still bleed, there will be no forgetting and our strength will continue to grow.' Only thus is a corrupt government changed.

It is easy to worry about mourners who make a career out of campaigning, seeing such prolonged grief as unhealthy for the individual. This book, by contrast, shows that loss-driven campaigns form a tradition that is millennia old and may be vital for the health of society.

Tony Walter

Reader in Sociology

ABSTRACTS

Does hospice care reduce the mortality following bereavement?

Christakis NA, Iwashyna TJ. *Social Science and Medicine* 2003; **57**: 465-473

Several studies, which are referenced in this paper, have demonstrated an increased risk of mortality, most often from heart disease, among widowers and widows following spousal bereavement. In this large-scale study the authors followed up the spouses of people who had died of cancer in the USA. Using information from Medicare files they were able to match the spouses of 24,721 cancer patients who had died under the care of a hospice with the same number who had died under other care. The matching criteria included age, sex, diagnosis, duration of illness, and financial status. Both groups were followed up for 18 months after their bereavement in the course of which 4.9% of the widows of hospice users had died compared with 5.4% of the other widows. Similarly, 13.2% of the widowers of women dying in a hospice were now dead compared with 13.7% of those who died elsewhere. These differences are significantly in favour of the hospice use. In widows 'hospice use by their husbands reduced their short-term odds of death to 0.92'.

This difference is greater in magnitude than the benefit obtained from beta-blocking drugs and similar to the benefits of improving diet and exercise risk factors.

In the USA most 'hospice' care is provided in the home and includes some form of bereavement support. It is not

clear whether the care, which appears to have reduced the mortality rate in the 'hospice' bereaved group, resulted from the help given to the patient or to the family before and/or after bereavement.

Colin Murray Parkes

Soldiers and students: lessons in coping with loss and grief

Stevenson RG. *Illness, Crisis and Loss* 2003; **11**(3); 242-257

With the bombing of the World Trade Center, terrorist violence reached a new level. The author of this article is a member of the New York Guard, a teacher, and a counsellor who was closely involved in the aftermath of September 11, helping both students and the military to cope with their shock and grief, and with the loss which some of them had experienced through the death of loved ones. Dr Stevenson describes the varying ways in which teenagers and soldiers tried to address their fear, helplessness, anger, loneliness and guilt, and discusses how these emotions, if not properly resolved, can lead to violence. The lessons learned from the response and the recovery of those involved can, he believes, benefit educators and parents as well as the general public.

Sibling support systems in childhood after a parent dies

Hurd RC. *Omega* 2002; **45**(4); 299-320

The research question addressed was: to what extent did the interactions of childhood sibling subsystems after a parent died help healthy grieving in families where the surviving parent was emotionally unavailable to the children? The researcher studied two quartets of middle-aged sisters who, when 3-10 years old, had experienced the deaths of their fathers and the emotional absence of their mothers. The results included a variety of interactions that demonstrated the potential for siblings to contribute to each other's healthy grieving, although the stable presence of a supportive adult was important. Helping professionals should be encouraged to nurture sibling subsystems by teaching and coaching children how to help each other's grief in ways appropriate to their age. They should also avoid focusing too closely on the pain of the emotionally unavailable surviving parent to the neglect of the children's individual needs and care-giving capacities. As the author points out, a limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reports about experiences from 30-40 years earlier.

ABSTRACTS

Grief rituals: aspects that facilitate adjustment to bereavement

Castle J, Phillips VL. *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 2003; 8(1): 41-71

Based on the participation of 50 Californian adults, this study discusses the extent to which post-funeral ritual can help the mourning process. The authors found that such rituals are useful from various points of view: they help the bereaved to maintain social bonds and a sense of control through making decisions, to externalise their deeper feelings and keep in touch with their emotions, and to legitimise their continued emotional connection with the deceased. Invaluable components of

these rituals include symbolic elements such as photos and music, and sharing the ritual with chosen others. A spiritual aspect is also very important.

Battling the Black Sea despair: cross-cultural consultation following an air disaster

Malkinson R. *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 2003; 8(2): 99-113

With the increasing number of man-made traumatic losses around the world, there seems to be a sense of global vulnerability and a need for suitable intervention programmes. This article describes a working seminar for professionals in Novosibirsk, former Soviet Union, a community that suffered a traumatic loss following an air disaster in 2001, when a plane on its way from Tel Aviv to Russia

was shot down by the Ukraine during a naval exercise. The author was invited by two Jewish organisations to go to Novosibirsk to conduct a seminar on traumatic grief and initiate consultations with the bereaved families. This interesting article describes her experiences and the difficulties caused by language and cultural differences. It emphasises the added trauma of coming to terms with death in the absence of a body.

Conflict in the context of care: an examination of role conflict between the bereaved and the funeral director in the UK

Parsons B. *Mortality* 2003; 8(1): 67-87

There is evidence that funeral directors can become a target for the anger of the

bereaved for whom they are among the primary caregivers. While anger is recognised as a characteristic of the grieving process, analysis of the role of funeral directors reveals a number of areas where additional conflict can be generated. This article identifies and discusses four areas. The first three are interrelated and concern the relationship between the funeral director and the bereaved: namely, the economic environment of funerals; the contractual relationship between the funeral director and the client; and control of the funeral. The fourth area considers the role of the funeral director as the agent between the bereaved and others who are involved in carrying out the ceremony: the officiant, the cemetery and the crematorium. **BC**

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

INDEX TO BEREAVEMENT CARE

Volume 22 Spring 2003 - Winter 2003

Key: A = article No 1 = Spring issue
Ab = abstract No 2 = Summer issue
O = obituary No 3 = Winter issue
R = review

After Suicide (R); No 3: 43
Al-Amasy T (A); No 3:35-36
An Intimate Loneliness (R); No 1: 5
Assistance from local authorities versus survivors' needs for support after suicide (Ab); No 1: 16
Association for Death Education and Counseling, The (A); No 2: 29
Bartlett A (R); No 3: 44
Battling the Black Sea despair: cross-cultural consultation following an air disaster (Ab); No 3: 47
Becvar D (R); No 1: 15-16
Bereaved parents' outcomes 4 to 60 months after their children's deaths by accident, suicide, or homicide: a comparative study demonstrating differences (Ab); No 2: 32
Bereavement interventions for people with learning disabilities (A); No 2: 19-21
Beyond Bereavement (R); No 1: 15
Bloch S (R); No 1: 5
Changing Hindu attitudes to cremation in the UK (A); No 2: 25-28
Chichester-Clark E (R); No 3: 44
Chronic Sorrow (R); No 2: 31
Colwell J (R); No 3: 46
Compassionate Friends, The (A); No 3: 45
Conflict in the context of care: an examination of role conflict between the bereaved and the funeral director in the UK (Ab); No 3: 47
Cooley J (R); No 2: 31
Coping with Suicide (R); No 3: 43
Crisis intervention in Gaza; No 3: 35-36
Cue for Passion, The (R); No 3: 46
Current status of bereavement follow-up in hospice and palliative care in Japan, The (Ab); No 1: 16
Dawson P (R); No 1: 5
Death and Bereavement Around the World: Major Religious Traditions (R); No 2: 30
Does 'grief work' work? (A); No 1: 3-5
Does hospice care reduce the mortality following bereavement (Ab); No 3: 47
Does it hurt to die? Bereavement work to help people with learning disabilities (A); No 1: 9-11

Dowling S (A); No 2: 19-21
Echoes of Suicide (R); No 3: 43
Evie and the Man who Helped God (R); No 3: 44
Faldet R (R); No 1: 15
Families making sense of loss (Ab); No 1: 16
Family focused grief therapy (A); No 1: 6-8
Family Focused Grief Therapy (R); No 1: 5
Family grief, editorial (Ab); No 1: 16
Firth S (A); No 2: 25-28
Fitton K (R); No 1: 15
Foreman M (R); No 3: 44
Foster-Ryan S (R); No 3: 43
'Fret no more my child... for I'm all over heaven in a day': religious beliefs in the bereavement of African American, middle-aged daughters coping with the death of an elderly mother (Ab); No 2: 32
Giving Sorrow Words (R); No 3: 46
Goodbye Mog (R); No 3: 44
Grief groups on the internet (A); No 3: 39-40
Grief in School Communities (R); No 3: 46
Grief in the Family (R); No 1: 15
Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual (R); No 2: 29
Grief rituals: aspects that facilitate adjustment to bereavement (Ab); No 3: 47
Handbook of Bereavement Research (R); No 1: 12
Hansson R (R); No 1: 12
Harvey J (R); No 2: 31
Hawton K (A); No 3: 41-42
Helen M (R); No 3: 43
Helping people bereaved by suicide (A); No 3: 41-42
Henley A (R); No 1: 15
Hockey J (R); No 2: 29
Hollins S (A); No 2: 19-21
Holst-Warhaft G (R); No 3: 46
Holtkamp S (R); No 2: 32
Hubert J (A); No 2: 19-21
In the Presence of Grief (R); No 1: 15-16
Jackson M (R); No 3: 46
Katz J (R); No 2: 29
Katz, M (R); No 1: 13-14
Kerr J (R); No 3: 44
Killick S (R); No 3: 46
Kissane D (A); No 1: 6-8
Kissane D (R); No 1: 5
Kohner N (R); No 1: 15
Laughani P (R); No 2: 30
Learning disabilities and bereavement (R); No 1: 14
Lindeman S (R); No 3: 46
Living Victims, Stolen Lives (R); No 2: 31-32
Lloyd-Hughes D (A); No 3: 45
Loss and Bereavement (R); No 2: 31
Lovely Bones, The (R); No 3: 42
McCarthy S (R); No 3: 43
MacFarlane B (R); No 1: 15
McGauron F (R); No 2: 31
Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss (R); No 1: 13
Midwife and the Bereaved Family, The (R); No 1: 15

Monaghan L (R); No 3: 43
Moore, KG (A); No 2: 29
Morgan J (R); No 2: 30
Murray J (R); No 1: 15
Neimeyer R (R); No 1: 13
Notifying individual students of a death loss: practical recommendations for schools and school counselors (Ab); No 2: 32
O'Connor M (A); No 2: 22-24
Oliveri T (A); No 3: 39-40
On Playing a Poor Hand Well (R); No 1: 13-14
Our Stories of Miscarriage (R); No 1: 15
Papadatou D (Ab); No 1: 16
Parent's response to a child's murder, The (Ab); No 1: 16
Persaud M (A); No 1: 9-11
Persaud M (R); No 2: 31
Persaud S (A); No 1: 9-11
Persaud S (R); No 2: 31
Perspectives on Loss and Trauma (R); No 2: 31
Puttock S (R); No 3: 44
Ratcliffe L (R); No 3: 46
Reconstructing the language of death and grief (Ab); No 2: 32
Resources for working with traumatic loss (R); No 3: 38
Responding to Pupil Bereavement (R); No 3: 46
Riches G (R); No 1: 5
Roos S (R); No 2: 31
Rosen M (R); No 1: 15
Ross EB (R); No 3: 43
Rowling L (R); No 3: 46
Russell A (A); No 2: 22-24
Saunders D (R); No 1: 15
Schut H (A); No 1: 3-5
Schut H (R); No 1: 12
Sebold A (R); No 3: 42
Shared grief: a family affair (Ab); No 1: 16

Sibling support systems in childhood after a parent dies (Ab); No 3: 46
Simkin S (A); No 3: 41-42
Small N (R); No 2: 29
Social services at a Jerusalem hospital (A); No 3: 37-38
Soldiers and students: lessons in coping with loss and grief (Ab); No 3: 46
Stetson B (R); No 2: 31-32
Stevenson R (R); No 3: 46
Story for Hippo (R); No 3: 44
Stroebe M (A); No 1: 3-5
Stroebe M (R); No 1: 12
Stroebe W (A); No 1: 3-5
Stroebe W (R); No 1: 12
Supporting the bereaved child: teachers' perceptions and experiences in Greece (Ab); No 1: 16
Talking Together About Death (R); No 2: 31
Teacher's Handbook of Death, The (R); No 3: 46
Testing the grief to personal growth model using structural equation modeling (Ab); No 2: 32
Traumatic bereavement and the cycle of violence in the Middle East (A); No 3: 35-38
Trickey D (R); No 3: 44
Up in Heaven (R); No 3: 44
Voice for those Bereaved by Suicide, A (R); No 3: 43
Warland J (R); No 1: 15
Weiss R (A); No 3: 37-38
What Will We Do (R); No 3: 46
When a Baby Dies: 2nd edn (R); No 1: 15
Working with the legacy of trauma (A); No 2: 22-24
World-wide mourning customs (R); No 2: 30
Wrapped in Mourning: The Gift of Life and Organ Donation (R); No 2: 32

WORKING WITH BEREAVED COUPLES

This group of three afternoon workshops will focus on thinking about the couple relationship in the wake of the death of a child. The tragedy will inevitably impact on the couple's relationship and often exacerbate existing tensions, patterns of relating and conflicts. The nature of the relationship might also impact on the course that mourning takes for each partner. The workshop will also focus on thinking about the anxieties that practitioners bring when contemplating focusing on the couple, rather than just seeing one partner.

Date: January 16, 30, February 13 2004.

Cost: £135 for all three. Course leader: Jenny Riddell

Tavistock Marital Studies Institute, Tavistock Centre,
120 Belsize Lane, London, NW3 5BA Tel: 020 7447 3725
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International Conference

The 7th International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society will be hosted by Cruse Bereavement Care on 12-15 July 2005 at King's College, London. Further information in the next issue