

REVIEWS

CDs for school use

Coping When
Someone Has Died

Rotary International

Ashington, Northumberland, UK: SS
Multimedia, 2004
£11.00. ISBN 1 90282 613 2

'A Pocket Full of
Posies'

Kent County Council

Dover, Kent, UK: Kent Educational
Television/Smallwood Publishing, 2002.
£58.75. ISBN 0 95424 520 2

CD-ROM IS, POTENTIALLY, a hugely valuable communication format for a complex field like bereavement. It is inherently user-friendly, particularly for young people for whom the computer now plays such a central role and may, for this group, be significantly more accessible than a book. Capable of holding an enormous amount of mixed-media information in a physically small space, a CD lends itself to being dipped into interactively, engaging users whilst giving them a sense of agency. Used in a focused way, as an integrated part of a supportive or educational bereavement programme, it has an enormous amount to offer.

The comprehensive scope of *Coping When Someone Has Died* is both its strength and its weakness. Divided into three sections, the first two for students and for teachers certainly have much to contribute. However, the sheer volume of material could be completely overwhelming especially for the recently bereaved, and the third section, for families, feels tacked on and woolly. The accompanying notes suggest that children should be given the CD to take home, and that they should look at the families' section to 'gain an adult perspective'. This reviewer would be much happier for this resource to be part of a thoughtfully supervised package of support. The 'time out' photos of flowers and waterfalls only pay lip-service to the intensely exhausting and harrowing nature of the experience of bereavement.

The students' section, geared mainly to older children and teenagers, is particularly good on the quality of the pain of grief, on practical and symbolic approaches to processing it and on where to get help. The video and audio clips, used properly, as here, are moving and bring issues alive. They could do much to help to lessen feelings of isolation and despair in a young person.

The teachers' section is also well-structured and informative, with good

advice and pointers to training. The opening quote from Erica Brown gets to the heart of the matter: 'There is no single way to support children who are grieving...keep travelling alongside those who hurt...do not lose sight of the emotional price you pay for your own commitment.'

In the section for families there is a helpful emphasis on the importance of not being frightened of grief, and of its appropriate expression as fundamental to the building of internal resilience and to future mental health. But the effects on family relationships are not adequately explored, and little reference is made to the difficulty for parents of attending to children's needs while struggling with their own loss. The video clips lack diversity in terms of the experiences they describe. Advice on dealing with the bereaved child at risk of self-harm is much too general.

'A Pocket Full of Posies' is designed purely as a training tool for teachers. It looks specifically at the experience of grieving children at school, at the wider networks of services and support that schools can link into, and at the development of school policies in this area. There are relevant training group exercises at regular intervals in the programme, all of which are clear and uncomplicated, and introduce helpful

discursive and experiential components to learning.

These two CDs overlap somewhat in terms of content. Both outline the developmental contexts for grief for children of different ages, the importance of self-care for teachers, and how to talk to children about death and dying. Both also offer excellent lists of references and of sources of (UK-based) help for both adults and children. *Coping When Someone Has Died* is much better on the cultural factors that determine expectations, beliefs and ritual around death and loss and is exceptionally reasonably-priced. 'A Pocket Full of Posies' deals well with the death of a sibling and the impact of miscarriage. It also provides a more coherent experience, since its video/audio clips are integrated into the text, whereas in the Rotary CD these are segregated in separate sections. Kent County Council's presentation is certainly drier and more summarised, but is also more straightforward, linear and, in some ways, more accessible as a result.

Both CD-Roms lack discussion of an important aspect — the significance of a professional's own history of loss as a factor in determining their emotional response to bereavement in a child. ●

Liz Arbiter

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B O O K

The Whispering of Ghosts

Trauma and Resilience

Boris Cyrulnik



Trans Susan Fairfield
 New York: Other Press
 2005, 171pp
 \$24.00 hb
 ISBN 1 59051 114 X
 Marilyn Monroe,

Charles Dickens and Hans Christian Andersen are among numerous vivid case studies of achievement and survival after early deprivation, disturbance and trauma discussed in this book. In 56 short chapters, Cyrulnik processes the current thinking on the concept of resilience, which he defines as 'a process that allows for the resumption of some kind of development despite trauma or adverse circumstances'. The title refers to his central point that resilience is a strategy that makes it possible to seize some pleasure in life, despite the 'whispering of ghosts' in the depths of our memory.

The author is himself a survivor of childhood tragedy and now a television personality. He discusses at length the important role of memory, make-believe, and day dreaming in resilience. Other contributing factors he draws out are a multiplicity of attachments, snatches of good care, use of story and meaning in their various complexions, the role of heroes, sublimation, finding purpose and control, and humour. The core of the book is about coping with the shadow side of one's ghosts. I found the discussion on 'Inventing a fiction', holding that tension between make-believe and reality, fascinating.

The text is written in an entertaining, readable style which survives the French translation into American English, even though the second half of the book becomes repetitious. Fewer anecdotes and more clarity about the author's conclusions on resilience-promoting factors and effective interventions for professionals would have been welcome. We are presented with a huge range of qualitative experiences, albeit very briefly, in diverse situations from bullying to child soldiers. Cyrulnik draws examples from literature but it is not always clear if other cases, data and statistics cited are from his clinical experience as a neuropsychiatrist or from research. The focus is on loss in general rather than grief or trauma following death and there are some bereavement statistics, but the sources are sometimes unclear. Thus the book has limited direct

relevance for bereavement counsellors and workers.

However, the insight into resilience is important. At the moment this concept is being applied to help us understand palliative and bereavement care, by actively identifying strengths, resources and coping mechanisms in assessment and intervention to balance an emphasis on risk and vulnerability (Monroe, Oliviere, 2006; Machin, 2006). Cyrulnik has published widely on this subject, and has given hope to many who have suffered trauma. The vast range of references in *The Whispering of Ghosts* opens up the French literature on the subject. For anyone learning about the ability to heal the wounded self and move on, to make sense of traumatic experiences by forming new emotional and social ties, to consider the complexities of attachment beyond the superficial, and to understand what children can experience as they construct their resilience, this is a productive read. ●

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MONROE B, OLIVIERE D (2006). Resilience and palliative care. *European Journal of Palliative Care*; 13(5):22-25.
 MACHIN L (2006). The landscape of loss. *Bereavement Care*; 25(1): 7-11.

A B S T R A C T S

Complicated grief

In 2006, two bereavement journals, *Omega* and *Grief Matters*, each devoted a full issue to complicated grief. In addition, this concept is mentioned in the title or abstract of 82 references added to major bibliographical databases (eg Medline, Psychinfo, Cinahl) since the start of 2006. Thus, complicated grief is currently a topic of great interest, probably fuelled by the impending 5th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V). This manual classifies psychiatric disorders and assists in diagnosis and provision of effective treatment. The following are short abstracts with comment from articles in the two journals mentioned above. They reflect key aspects of the wide-ranging debate on this topic. The full list of articles is provided at the end of this section.

Complicated grief: an attachment disorder worthy of inclusion in DSM-V

Ray R, Prigerson H. *Grief Matters* 2006; 9(2): 33-38

This is a succinct account of the diagnostic criteria for complicated grief proposed by Prigerson for DSM-V. It also includes criteria for a complicated grief disorder developed by Horowitz. In Prigerson's scheme, four criteria have been validated in a

variety of situations, and references to previous work by Prigerson are cited. The first criterion concerns pining for the deceased person. The second is a set of eight symptoms which must have been experienced by the bereaved person in the previous month and include, for example, trouble in accepting the death, and feeling that life is meaningless or empty without the deceased. The third criterion stipulates that the symptoms must have caused significant dysfunction and the fourth, that the symptom disturbances must have lasted for at least six months.

The criteria continue to evolve, partly based on validation studies, partly on professional judgement, eg the extension of the period for symptom disturbance has recently been extended from two to six months. The authors also discuss the concept of normal grief, resilient responses to bereavement, and the links with other psychiatric diagnoses such as PTSD. Psychological and physical problems related to the distress caused by grief are discussed and possible treatments are outlined. Judging by the overall thrust of the special issue of *Omega*, this is likely to be a benchmark set of criteria on which much of the future discussion will be based.

Symposium on complicated grief

Parkes CM. *Omega* 2006; 52(1): 1-7

Guest editor's conclusions

Parkes CM. *Omega* 2006; 52(1): 107-113

These two contributions provide an overview of a (virtual) symposium of 12 articles published in this issue of *Omega*, explicitly related to whether or not complicated grief should be included in the DSM. Currently grief is subsumed as an aspect of other psychiatric diagnoses such as depression but is not regarded as a disorder in itself. The debate focuses on three issues: a) can complicated grief be regarded as a mental disorder? b) if so, where does it fit in relation to other disorders? c) what criteria for diagnosis are best supported by systematic research?

Parkes' introductory paper gives a brief history of the development of the concept of complicated grief; presents, with some comments, the two recent sets of criteria for the condition by Horowitz and by Prigerson; and outlines the main areas for debate on the subject. He cites a criticism of Prigerson's criteria for complicated grief in relation to bereaved parents and looks at concerns that bereavement in general may come to be seen as a psychiatric diagnosis and unnecessarily medicalised, as well as arguments that accepting complicated grief as a psychiatric diagnosis will result in social stigma. There is an ongoing discussion of what is 'normal' versus 'complicated' grief.