

# Book Reviews



## Resilience in palliative care Achievement in adversity

Barbara Monroe,  
David Oliviere  
(eds)

Oxford, UK: Oxford  
University Press, 2007  
295pp  
£29.95  
ISBN 978 019920 641 4

This useful book provides a detailed examination of the concept of resilience in relation to palliative and end-of-life care. Most palliative care books focus on risks and vulnerabilities. Refreshingly, this book is about strengths and possibilities. The many contributors to its 15 chapters bring an eclectic mix of perspectives to this complex phenomenon.

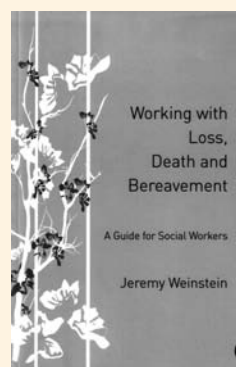
The early chapters focus on the individual and, in particular, on children, who are often considered to be more resilient than adults. In the first chapter, personal narratives are used as powerful illustrations of how extreme trauma and loss in childhood do not necessarily result in a dysfunctional adulthood. Chapter 3, by Julie Stokes of Winston's Wish child bereavement project, specifically identifies and explores factors that can help and hinder the development of resilience in bereaved children.

The book is structured so that, with each successive chapter, the focus widens from the individual to families, carers, professionals, organisations and communities. The thought-provoking discussions range from the theoretical to the pragmatic, drawing on examples from different countries and cultures to illustrate resilience in its many and varied forms, and there is a strong focus on bereavement throughout. References at the end of each chapter provide direction to those interested in further reading.

The book's subtitle accurately reflects its essentially positive stance, which emphasises the possibilities for growth and development inherent in adversity. It is targeted at health and social care professionals, but would also be appropriate for lay carers dealing with issues of palliative care or bereavement, as both its structure and accessible style allow the reader to dip in and out. This book provides a valuable contribution to the growing literature on resilience.

### Mary Turner

Research fellow, International Observatory on End of Life Care, Lancaster University



## Working with loss, death and bereavement A guide for social workers

Jeremy Weinstein  
London: Sage, 2008  
200pp  
£19.99  
ISBN 978 141292 390 3

I have long been of the opinion that loss and grief issues are sadly neglected in social work education and practice. This book is, therefore, one that I very much welcome, as it makes the point clearly and strongly that loss issues are very relevant to many aspects of social work.

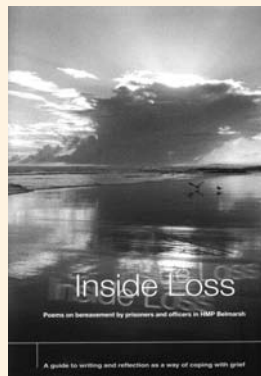
The text is divided into eight chapters; an introduction is followed by a discussion of psychological theories, followed by a consideration of social and cultural dimensions. Chapters follow on social work values, social work skills, the evidence base, and the importance of self-care.

The book is clearly written and based on an extensive knowledge base, with good links to the skills needed for practice. The author makes clear the relevance of a knowledge of loss and related matters across a wide range of social work situations. I very much hope that this book will be widely read and will stimulate further literature, debate and research on this subject.

The book will be of value to social work students learning the trade, as well as practitioners, managers, policymakers and educators who are able and willing to take on board the important message that, whatever the field of social work practice, loss and grief issues are never very far away.

### Neil Thompson

Professor of social work and well-being, Liverpool Hope University



**Inside loss**  
Poems on  
bereavement by  
prisoners and  
officers in HMP  
Belmarsh

Powys, Wales: Bar  
None Books  
32pp  
£5.00  
ISBN 978 1 90537 317 8

Available from [shop@cruse.org.uk](mailto:shop@cruse.org.uk)  
Tel: +44 (0)20 8939 9530

HMP Belmarsh high security prison may be better known to readers in connection with matters other than the support of bereaved people. However this collection of writings by prisoners and prison staff speaks from the experience of bereaved people to bereaved people and to those who seek to help them.

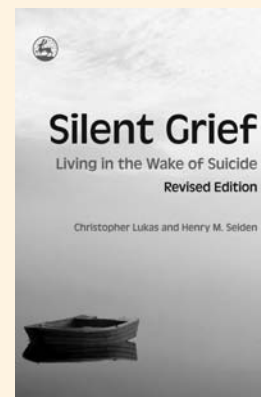
The poems and short fragments quoted in the book have emerged from a creative writing group, Sacred Reflections, for prisoners, staff and chaplains, led by the prison's writer in residence. They are expressions of the contributors' memories of sadness and happiness connected with the loss of someone close. Interwoven with the poetry are exercises in self-reflection, meditation and creative writing to encourage others to discover their own inner space and engage their imaginations creatively. Colour illustrations and quotations from eastern philosophers such as Tagore and Rumi make this an attractive and accessible publication for those of all faiths and none.

*Inside Loss* is intended as a resource to help readers evoke their own experience of grieving and resolve their own issues by expressing them. In her foreword the governor, Claudia Sturt, writes about ways in which people react to the death of a loved one, and suggests that writing, reflecting or talking through one's anguish can help. Her belief that the reader, whether

a bereaved person or a bereavement support worker, will find in the book something 'to guide, inspire and comfort' them, is well-founded.

**Peter Hammersley**

Prison chaplain (retired)  
Vice president, Cruse Bereavement Care



**Silent grief**  
Living in the  
wake of suicide  
(revised edition)

Christopher Lukas,  
Henry M Seiden

London: Jessica Kingsley  
Publishers, 2007  
217pp  
£13.99  
ISBN 978 184310 847 4

The back cover of this book states that it is for and about 'suicide survivors'. I think it could be of benefit to many more. Co-author Christopher Lukas lost his mother to suicide, and this partnership with Henry Seiden, a psychologist and psychotherapist, has resulted in a book that will help not just 'survivors' but also those who have not been personally touched by suicide, to better understand how survivors may feel.

Lukas's family kept the manner of his mother's death from him and his siblings, and this silence about suicide and the stigma and shame that inhibit so many survivors and others from talking about it gives rise to the book's title, *Silent Grief*. The book addresses this silence head-on, by arguing that survivors' emotions and behaviours following a suicide can be seen as natural reactions to what may be described as an unnatural experience.

The book uses quotations from survivors to vividly illustrate the feelings of those bereaved. Alongside, the collaboration of these two authors from different perspectives produces

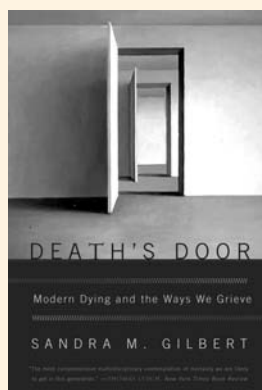
clear, well-founded explanations to help the survivor deal with their journey through their grief. The message is that it is important to share one's experience of 'survival' with others, and the authors encourage survivors to overcome the perceived stigma and shame associated with suicide and to seek support from self-help groups, psychotherapy, family therapy, friends and family.

A particularly valuable section is devoted to talking with children. Lukas's experience of family silence is a spur to urge families to talk to the children, to avoid some of the anger he felt when he learned in later life the truth about his mother.

Originally published in the USA but fully updated and revised for its republishing in the UK, its ready referral to therapy as a source of help may be alien to readers in countries where such forms of support are less culturally acceptable and practically accessible. But in the main the content of the book will be relevant to anyone touched by bereavement in this tragic way.

### John Peters

Volunteer, Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)



### Death's door Modern dying and the ways we grieve

Sandra Gilbert

London/New York:  
WW Norton, 2007  
608pp  
£10.99  
ISBN 978 0 39332 969 8

Sandra Gilbert is an American professor of literature whose husband died unexpectedly in 1991 following routine surgery. This huge book is a meditation, both academic and personal, on the intersections between personal, cultural and literary ways of understanding mortality and grief. Endorsed by US writer and mortician

Thomas Lynch as 'the most comprehensive multidisciplinary contemplation of mortality we are likely to get in this generation', it is indeed a contemplation, rather than a synthesis, of different perspectives.

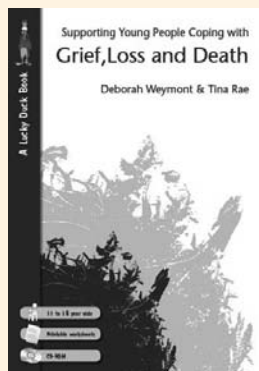
The book is in three parts: an exploration of Gilbert's personal response to the deaths of her husband and father; an examination of sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives and what makes 'modern mourning' distinct from the mourning behaviours and expectations of other eras and, finally, a literary critique of the differences in the work of the great elegists of the past and how today's poets write about death, loss and bereavement.

If bereavement care is about giving sorrow words, Gilbert explores how poets have done this, while artists and photographers have used visual media to name and claim their sorrow. Mourners today, and those who care for them, do not grieve and work in a cultural vacuum: loss and how individuals respond to it are central to countless novels, plays and other artefacts of our culture. While positive about the role of writing about grief in a society she claims imposes silence on the bereaved, Gilbert is less optimistic that writing about wrongful death will right any wrong.

The book has interesting things to say about how rituals of naming have developed in the twentieth century, from war memorials to the messages left at Ground Zero and personalised funerals. Naming helps mourners understand that the dead are dead. Gilbert sees this as a prelude to a Freudian emotional disinvestment from the dead, rather than as a prelude to continuing bonds (of which there is no mention). Yet she is rightly scathing of the idea of closure. 'No matter how we struggle to achieve "closure", death's door didn't close, can't close, and won't close. Indeed, the truism that death's door is always open has been the argument of this book.'

### Tony Walter

Professor of death studies, University of Bath



### Supporting young people coping with grief, loss and death

Deborah Weymont, Tina Rae

London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2006  
133pp  
£17.99  
ISBN 978 141291 311 9

This workbook offers a programme of 11 sessions for schools on the theme of grief, loss and death. Intended for young people aged 11–18 years, the sessions are split into three activities, with the third designed specifically for less able pupils and those less willing to engage. The programme meets the UK's personal and social health education (PSHE) and citizenship teaching criteria and is supported by worksheets that can either be photocopied or printed from the CD-Rom included. Also included is essential detailed guidance for teachers/facilitators on how to use, and deliver, the activities.

Teachers who approach this subject with hesitation will be reassured by the clear, 'hand-holding' but not prescriptive style of this book. Refreshingly, the user is encouraged to be flexible in how they deliver the programme, and to tailor the content to meet individual, class or whole school needs. I am not sure how realistic it would be for a teacher to deliver the entire programme – it is ambitious in terms of time and spread of content – but there is plenty from which to cherry pick for a shorter programme of work.

This book's strengths lie not in originality but in its practical, teacher-friendly approach. The graphics are kept simple and the worksheets are well designed. The activities will provoke thought and encourage discussion. Mindful of the target age group, it wisely does not condescend or attempt to be trendy.

It is similar in approach to Harvey's *A Resource Bank on Loss and Grief*, but offers a greater choice of activities. Similarly, while *Good Grief* is useful for the over-11s, it does not provide the structured scheme of work found here. As both a secondary school teacher and a bereavement trainer who runs workshops on death education in the classroom, I highly recommend it for both purposes.

#### Jill Adams

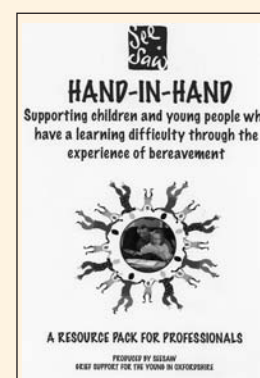
Schools training and support coordinator  
The Child Bereavement Trust

Harvey MA (1999). *A resource bank on loss and grief*. London: Youth Clubs UK.

Ward B (1998). *Good grief*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

#### Hand-in-hand

Supporting children and young people who have a learning difficulty through the experience of bereavement



Christine Pentland,  
Christine Druce

Oxford: Seesaw  
29pp  
Free from  
[www.seesaw.org.uk](http://www.seesaw.org.uk)

This slim resource pack for professionals is a sensitive and practical guide

for supporting young people with intellectual disability through the process of grieving. It is very readable and clearly laid out. It gives useful advice on how to approach and communicate with bereaved children, their families and their friends, and offers practical examples (such as life story books, comfort cushions and memory trees) of ways in which children can be helped to understand and be supported through their loss.

Attention is paid to the many non-verbal signals that may indicate that a child is suffering. There is recognition of the need for consistent support to be provided for the child and family over an extended period of time, acknowledging that grieving is a long-term process with strong feelings triggered at different times and in different contexts. The need to respect the family context is highlighted, particularly in terms of the family's constructs about death and the language that is used to explain death. There is also acknowledgement of the likely impact of the bereavement on the wider system: ie. staff and other children.

The pack is clearly intended for school staff (there is a helpful step-by-step guide to formulating school policy on bereavement). However, surprisingly, this is not stated. Nor is there a statement about the value of supporting children in expressing their difficult feelings. The author(s) may have felt this was so obvious it didn't need saying. However, I think the pack would have benefited from a few introductory sentences explaining the rationale for helping children express their emotions, and describing common emotional processes associated with bereavement. Emotions such as shock, denial, anger, despair and sadness are acknowledged in the text but are not conceptualised in terms of a process that can ultimately lead to a coming to terms with loss.

The pack contains three moving and instructive children's stories. There is also some advice from children themselves: for example, that activities should be engaged in side-by-side with the child, rather than face-to-face. More of this would, I feel, have been useful. However, overall it is a very valuable little guide.

### Catherine Taylor

Principal speech and language therapist  
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Learning  
Disability Service, South West London & St George's  
Mental Health NHS Trust



### The thing with Finn

Tim Kelly

London: Macmillan  
Children's Books, 2007  
232pp  
£9.99  
ISBN 978 1 40509 021 6

Ten-year-old Danny is feeling confused and scared; he is grieving

for his twin brother Finn, but at the same time feels guilty that he is the one who is alive. The world he lives in looks the same as it did before Finn died, but does not feel the same. Danny observes his parent's grief through his own eyes, which is sometimes both scary and amusing, and he decides the best thing for everyone would be for him to go away – he just doesn't know where.

The book is about how Danny finds a way 'home'. On his journey he flattens a stuffed otter with a brick, messes with a dog called the Beast and ends up by the sea, where he meets Nulty. He tells Nulty all about Finn and the night he died. He realises that running away is not the answer and returns to his family. Finally he understands that he is not to blame for his brother's death and that his family would have felt the same if he, rather than Finn, had died.

This book would be suitable for adolescent children struggling to come to terms with the loss of their twin. Lone twins would also probably benefit from reading it, even if they lost their sibling at birth, as it deals with the feelings of a living twin convinced that his parents preferred his dead brother. Parents would also benefit from reading this book for the insight it offers to the mind of a bereaved child.

### Carol Clay

Bereavement coordinator, Tamba (Twins and Multiple Births Association)