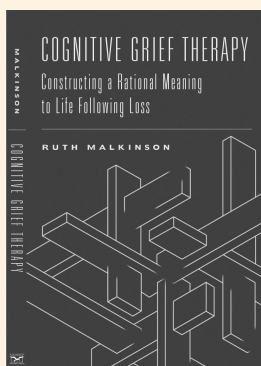


Book Reviews



Cognitive grief therapy Constructing a rational meaning to life following loss

Ruth Malkinson

London: WW Norton & Co, 2007
246pp
£24.99
ISBN 978 0 39370 439 6

Complicated grief is not widely discussed in psychiatry and clinical psychology. One reason for this is that complicated grief (or prolonged grief disorder, as it has more recently been termed [Prigerson, Vanderwerker & Maciejewski, 2008]) is not listed in DSM-IV, the international handbook of psychiatric disorders. For many clinicians and researchers, a clinical phenomenon that is not recognised in the western world's psychiatric 'bible' is of little interest. Fortunately, Ruth Malkinson, an Israeli clinician and researcher, is not of this opinion.

Cognitive Grief Therapy is in three parts. The first discusses cognitive theories – general theories and those concerned with grief and complicated grief – with a particular emphasis on Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT). Malkinson outlines clearly the basic tenets of REBT, such as the ABC scheme, the distinction between dysfunctional and functional beliefs and emotions, and secondary emotional problems. Understanding secondary emotional problems (eg. feeling depressed about your grief, blaming yourself for feeling angry at the lost person) is critical to coping with loss.

The second part is the core of the book. Here the cognitive approach to grief therapy is set out, with strong use of case descriptions. The comparatively short third section of the book deals with the problematic cognitions that grief counsellors and therapists themselves can have, particularly when working with patients with complicated forms of grief.

One of the positive features of this book is its attempt to integrate specific cognitive behavioural views of complicated grief with the traditional cognitive behavioural models of Ellis and Beck. The frequent use of illustrative case material is another very welcome feature. Malkinson does not report any evaluations of her interventions, but her approach fits well with the Utrecht cognitive behavioural theory of complicated grief (Boelen, 2008). Our main criticism is that the breadth of topics covered is at times at the expense of a more in-depth discussion of some important themes. For

instance, there is a long description in part two of farewell rituals and writing assignments; these are useful and effective interventions but do not form the essence of cognitive therapy and REBT.

Nonetheless, we feel that Malkinson has made a good, and timely, contribution to the literature on this important issue. ■

Jan van den Bout

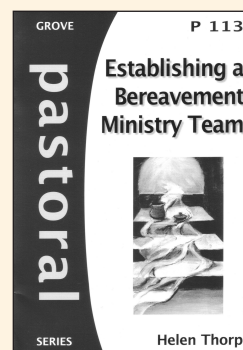
Professor of clinical psychology

Paul Boelen

Assistant professor of clinical psychology, Department of Clinical Health and Psychology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Boelen P (2008). Cognitive behaviour therapy for complicated grief. *Bereavement Care* 27(2) 27–30.

Prigerson HG, Vanderwerker LC, Maciejewski PK (2008). A case for inclusion of prolonged grief disorder in DSM-V. *Grief Matters* 2008 11(2) 23–32.



Establishing a bereavement ministry team

Helen Thorp

Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2008
28pp
£3.50 pb
ISBN 978 1 85174 682 8

In recent years, patterns of pastoral care within Christian congregations have changed to place an increasing expectation on lay members of churches to provide a variety of pastoral care. All too often, as Helen Thorp here explains, ministers find themselves so busy that they are unable to offer perhaps the most fundamental of support services – care for the bereaved.

This was Helen's experience, and here she describes how, as an ordained minister and trainer of ordained and lay ministers, she set up a system

for the provision of bereavement support by lay people who, although not trained counsellors or therapists, are able to accompany people during their personal journey of grieving.

The booklet does not claim to be a manual for bereavement support workers or counsellors. Helen references the leading names in bereavement theory in the bibliography and notes (Kubler Ross, Murray Parkes, JW Worden *et al*) but does not aim to provide an extensive handbook of training within its 28 pages. Rather, she offers her own reflections, based on her Christian experience of helping others through this transitional life experience.

Much of the content is concerned with the practical issues and team dynamics involved in setting up a lay bereavement team – sections deal with ‘Leaders and teams’, setting up the initial meeting with interested lay people, establishing the ministry team, and designing a training programme. Each chapter concludes with a useful series of questions to guide the reader.

It is slightly concerning that, in the chapter on the team training programme, she cautions that ‘familiarity with the latest psychological literature is not necessary and pseudo-psycho-analysis is dangerous’, and appears to foreground the intuitive skills gained from trainees’ life experiences. A superficial understanding of psychological theories can indeed be misleading and unhelpful, but it is important that those who support bereaved people have a broader understanding of bereavement issues than those they may have encountered in their own life experience. The training in bereavement awareness provided by organisations such as (for example, in the UK) Cruse can be invaluable in increasing the knowledge and understanding of both theory and practice.

Helen has nevertheless provided a useful general guide for Christian ministers and lay members who wish to pursue this kind of ‘shared ministry in practice’ that she describes. ■

Peter Hammersley

Vice chair, Cruse Bereavement Care



New journeys now begin

Learning on the path of grief and loss

Tom Gordon

Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2006

267 pp

£10.99 pb

ISBN 978 1 90501 008 0

Available (electronic format only) from www.ionabooks.com

Tom Gordon is an experienced parish minister and hospice chaplain who has spent many years supporting people as they work through their bereavement and grief.

This is not an academic or research-based text. Rather, it is a well-written reflection on these many encounters that captures the struggle people often experience as they seek to come to terms with and understand a significant bereavement in their life. Each chapter has two parts: a narrative describing a selection of people at various points in their bereavement journey, followed by poetry or prayers that reflect the theme of the chapter, many presumably (because unattributed) the work of Gordon himself. It is this that sets the book apart from the many others that explore loss and bereavement from a faith perspective.

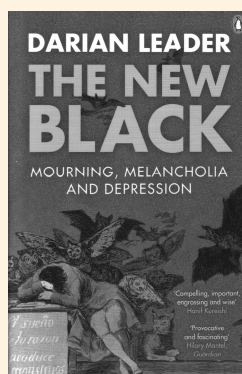
Readers may wonder if this is a faith text, but will quickly find it is grounded in real life experience. Many of the encounters are difficult and challenging and Gordon takes an honest look at the attacks on faith and belief that can accompany grief. He also describes many instances where sensitive care has led to healing and resolution of conflict and distress.

Those involved in bereavement support, in whatever capacity, will find this book echoes many of the encounters they will have experienced. It will provide them with useful

material for private reflection and meditation, and would be a useful text to share with clients as appropriate. ■

Peter Speck

Former health care chaplain/Honorary senior lecturer in palliative care, King's College London



The new black Mourning, melancholia and depression

Darian Leader

London: Penguin Books,
2008
223pp
£8.99
ISBN 978 0 14102 122 5

Modern medicine is wrong about depression, writes Leader. It can be seen as a disease of the brain – a chemical imbalance – producing symptoms such as insomnia, poor appetite and low energy. It can be seen as a psychological response to social pressures and the breakdown of support mechanisms and community cohesion. It can be seen as a protest against the high value accorded in the 21st-century western world to efficiency and economic productivity. In fact, Leader argues, we should regard depression as ‘a set of symptoms that derive from complex and always different stories’ – stories that always involve the experiences of separation and loss, ‘even if sometimes we are unaware of them’.

The first chapter in this challenging and provocative book presents an insightful discussion of Freud’s 1917 essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, drawing on Leader’s wealth of experience as a psychoanalyst and knowledge of a wide range of art, literature and film. Mourning is a constant re-visiting of memories of the dead. If that work is not done then the bereaved person’s self-regard is lowered and his/her self-image is

profoundly altered. In Freud’s own words: ‘In mourning, we grieve the dead; in melancholia we die with them’.

In the second chapter Leader compares the work of Karl Abraham and Melanie Klein with that of Freud. He points out that the mourning described by Freud is an intensely private process, yet sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, writing before Freud, and anthropologists like Geoffrey Gorer in 1965, remind us that every documented human society has mourning rituals that involve public displays. They are an important social dimension of mourning that help the bereaved.

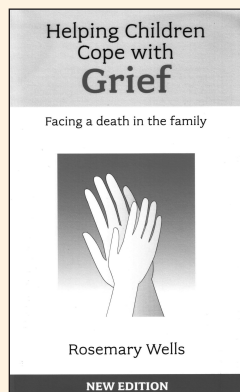
The third and fourth chapters offer an explanation of ‘the four processes which signal the work of mourning is taking place’. These Leader defines as ‘the introduction of a frame to mark out a symbolic, artificial space, the necessity of killing the dead, the constitution of the object ... and the giving up the image of who we were for them’. Worden (1991) put it more simply: the four tasks of mourning are to accept the reality of the loss, to work through to the pain of grief, adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing, emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. It is not possible to say when mourning ends, if it ever does.

Leader is extremely well-read and includes many excellent case studies from his psychoanalytic practice but his style does tend to ramble and the lengthy page notes he supplies at the end of the book are no substitute for an index or bibliography – neither of which he provides. In sum, this is a valuable addition to the literature on mourning, but one for experienced practitioners, with a good understanding of psychoanalytic concepts, not for beginners. ■

Joyce Rimmer

Chair, West Midlands Cruse Regional Committee

Worden JW (1991). *Grief counselling and grief therapy: a handbook for the mental health practitioner* (2nd ed). London: Routledge.



Helping children cope with grief Facing a death in the family (2nd edition)

Rosemary Wells

London: Sheldon Press, 2007
128pp
£7.99
ISBN 978 1 84709 022 5

As Wells points out, every day 40 children will experience the death of a father or mother, and many more will lose siblings, grandparents and friends. Bereavement in childhood is common. However, children's understanding of death changes as they grow and develop, making it difficult to know how best to help and support them. Wells suggests that bereaved children will cope better as they grow up if 'a huge load of bottled-up grief weighing them down' is released.

This book seeks to suggest ways in which children can be supported following a bereavement. Topics covered include breaking bad news, helping children to talk about their feelings, coping with difficult behaviours and helping a child who shows no signs of grief.

There are chapters on expected and sudden death, including suicide; on parental and sibling death; and a whole chapter devoted to schools – a major feature in every child's life – and how teachers can help. There is also a very useful chapter on religious beliefs, covering a wide range of different rituals and practices after death.

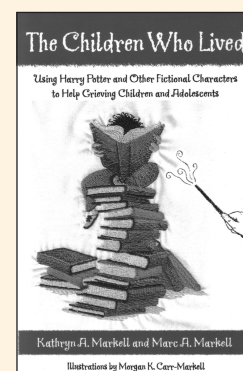
The final chapter considers how bereavement in childhood may affect adult life. To avoid possible later complications, Wells suggests that adults can help best by being with bereaved children, being honest and trying to understand their feelings.

This second edition is a well-written, clear and sensitive book, full of information and good sense, and thoroughly recommended for parents,

teachers and health care professionals. It offers a useful complement to Dyregrov's recently published second edition of *Grief in Children* (reviewed here). Together they ensure that anyone caring for a bereaved child has a wealth of information on which to draw. ■

Ann Dent

Former honorary research fellow in child health, Bristol University



The children who lived

Kathryn A Markell,
Marc A Markell

Abingdon: Routledge, 2008
179pp
£21.95
ISBN 978 0 41595 765 6

This is an unusual book that usefully occupies a gap in the current literature on therapy with grieving children and teenagers. The high price reflects the inclusion of a CD loaded with thought-provoking material for direct use with clients.

The American authors, both educational psychologists and thanatologists, are also both dedicated fans of JK Rowling's Harry Potter series. Like many of the best children's stories, these books are, they argue, filled with loss and grief, and instances where the children and (as they grow up through the series) young people face and survive immense challenge. In this book they demonstrate how the Harry Potter stories, as well as other much-loved children's literature such as EB White's *Charlotte's Web*, can be used to facilitate the therapeutic exploration of death and dying with children and young people.

I do have two caveats. First, the books used in the text demand a high level of literacy and concentration from the child/young person.

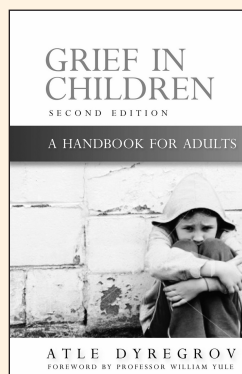
Second, many children and young people will

have seen the films and may not have actually read the books, which may be less effective in enabling the complex identifications with Harry and his mates required for empathetic therapeutic work. The other books used are less demanding in this respect, but reading skills are required for all the proposed work.

That said, this book offers rich material and I would recommend it both to clinics and for personal use. The illustrations (by Morgan K Carr-Markell) are charming, and the suggestions for engaging with growing children are clearly and sympathetically presented. ■

Jean Harris Hendriks

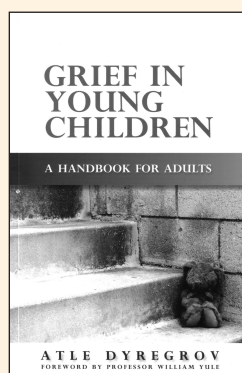
Honorary consultant psychiatrist/senior lecturer
Traumatic Stress Clinic



Grief in children A handbook for adults (2nd edition)

Atle Dyregrov

London: Jessica Kingsley
Publishers
208pp
£14.99
ISBN 978 1 84310 612 8



Grief in young children A handbook for adults

Atle Dyregrov

London: Jessica Kingsley
Publishers
91pp
£9.99
ISBN 978 1 84310 650 0

Amid the plethora of books on grief and children, these two books are outstanding and are, in my

view, essential reading. The author is a distinguished clinical psychologist and director of the Center for Crisis Psychology in Bergen, Norway. Both books are comprehensive, well referenced, and well written. Unlike some books that rely too heavily on personal anecdote, these make good use of brief vignettes to illustrate the text.

Grief in Children, now in its second edition, comprehensively covers the topic: children's understanding of death at different ages, how children grieve, unusual grief reactions, the difference between trauma and grief, the differing impacts of the deaths of a parent, sibling, grandparent, and friend, and the importance of considering the child's developmental level and gender. Dyregrov also covers traumatic death and includes information from recent studies on suicide. There is helpful advice for families and schools about how to care for children who are grieving. I found it particularly useful to read about how a child's ambivalent relationship with the deceased can complicate their grief, as their feelings of loss may be mixed with relief, shame, and self-reproach, and also to be reminded that poor attachment can increase the risk for complicated grief, strong reactions and fear of a new loss.

Grief in Young Children relates to pre-school children and describes how much younger children may react after a bereavement, with advice about what can be done, both immediately following the death and over time, to help them to process their loss – for example, as their level of understanding increases they may have new questions or want further information.

Both books will be helpful to families, bereavement counsellors, and to a wide range of professionals involved in assessing and working with bereaved children and families. ■

Martin Newman

Consultant in child and adolescent psychiatry, South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust