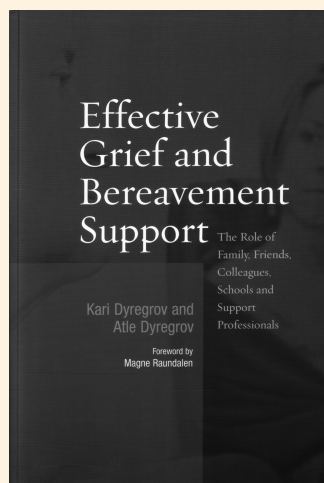


Book Reviews



Effective grief and bereavement support The role of family, friends, colleagues, schools and support professionals

Kari Dyregrov,
Atle Dyregrov

London/ Philadelphia: Jessica
Kingsley Publishers, 2008
272pp
£19.99 (pb)
ISBN: 978 1 84310 6678

In the face of the proliferation of bereavement services and the professionalisation of grief counselling, traditional social mechanisms for engaging with the needs of the bereaved have become more problematic. Families, friends, colleagues and neighbours have been made uncertain of their role and anxious about the requisite skills for responding to grieving people, especially when a loss is unexpected or untimely. This book combines the psychological and sociological evidence-based knowledge of its authors with practical guidance about the ways in which social networks can provide support and sustain well-being in situations of sudden or traumatic death.

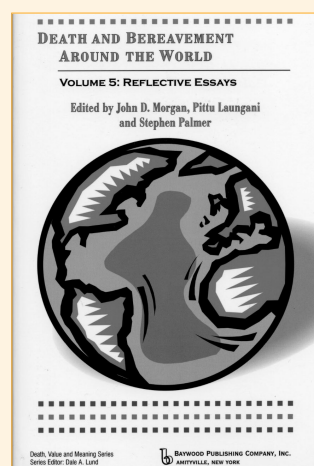
The book has a very accessible format, in which bullet-point summaries provide a readily available review of the central themes within each chapter. The chapters cover the effects of the sudden death of a close relative; the types of support encountered by the bereaved and what they want from support; the help needs of children and young people; the impact of sudden death on social networks; challenges and solutions in social network support; the main principles behind good network support; the kinds of help family and friends can give; provision of support by schools and workplaces; deciding when professional help is necessary, and how the social network can itself be supported.

The book's primary objective is to 'improve network support following death' (p23). To this end, it is aimed at professionals who make up the fabric of our formal social support service, such as clergy, police, doctors, psychologists, teachers, etc, but also at people who personally face a sudden death, and those who are part of a bereaved person's family/friendship/work group, thereby seeking to maximise the

effectiveness of existing network relationships. The book will thus provide a wide professional readership with fresh insights into the social context of grief, and give practical ideas for working within social networks in order to achieve effective grief support. It is an important companion to the literature on one-to-one therapeutic routes to bereavement care. I highly recommend it. ■

Linda Machin

Visiting research fellow, Keele University



Death and bereavement around the world Volume 5: Reflective essays

John D. Morgan,
Pittu Laungani,
Stephen Palmer (eds)

Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing,
2009
285pp
\$37.95
ISBN 978 0 89503 239 3

This book is the last in the series of five volumes that brings together a number of discussion papers on the theme of bereavement and grief around the world.

It is a sad fact that its two main editors, John Morgan and Pittu Laungani, have died and therefore were unable to see this volume published. It was left to Stephen Palmer to finish their task, and he has done a valuable job.

The main aim of this final volume is to allow space for the different authors to reflect on a variety of issues relating to death, bereavement and grief. We are presented with an informative selection that covers a wide variety of subjects, ranging from an in-depth interview with John Morgan to Marius Rotar's essay on the cultural complexity of death and dying in Romania, to mention just two.

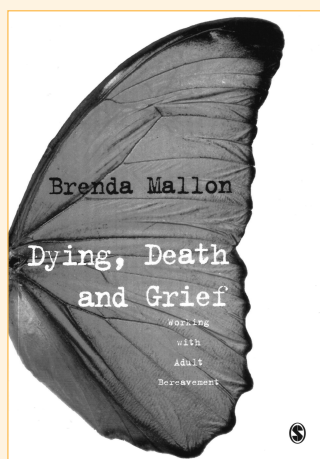
Throughout we are reminded of the difficulties that we face when trying to offer a global perspective on issues of death and dying. We all die; that is common to all of us, but the way we die and mourn is truly individual and different.

From a sociological perspective, the statistical information in some of these articles is both harrowing and illuminating. Examining death and bereavement in the developing world, Vals Maasdorp and Rona Martin tell us that more than 14 million children have lost one or both parents to the HIV/Aids pandemic, the consequences of which for future generations are hard to comprehend. In the developing world, services that are taken for granted in the developed world may be non-existent. In the absence of any adequate state support and intervention, families – if there is a surviving family – are left to fend for themselves to meet even the most basic need to bury their dead. Mourners are of necessity immediately thrown back into the business of surviving and scraping a living. Under these circumstances, to talk about ‘supporting the grieving process’ seems totally out of place. There is no time or space to grieve.

As with previous volumes in this series, the editors have fulfilled a worthwhile task in bringing to our attention some of the most dramatic factors that prevent us from experiencing what has been defined as ‘dying a good death’. ■

Maria-Alicia Ferrera-Peña

Sociologist and counsellor



Dying, death and grief Working with adult bereavement

Brenda Mallon

London: Sage Publications, 2008
185pp
£19.99
ISBN 978 1 41293 415 2

The stated objective of this volume is to provide a guide for practitioners who are supporting bereaved adults in a voluntary or professional capacity. However, there is also much of value for those whose connection with bereaved people is informal, including friends and family members.

A major strength of this volume is Brenda Mallon's broad professional experience, on which she draws extensively to offer guidance, identify topics and questions to explore, and discuss some of the least addressed, most taboo issues of concern to bereaved people (such as sexuality).

Importantly, this book recognises the continuum of bereavement care-giving, from basic support and/or information-giving to in-depth intervention for complex grieving by a skilled professional. In addressing the broad spectrum of needs, Mallon nicely avoids pathologising the bereavement experience: the underlying message is that most people will adjust to their loss without the need for

professional help, and we learn much about providing support in an informal capacity. Another fundamental point is that grief is experienced very differently by bereaved individuals, even within a specific cultural or family group. However, Mallon shows equal respect for the task of scientists in trying to identify patterns within this diversity, to enhance understanding and to identify those at risk of complications.

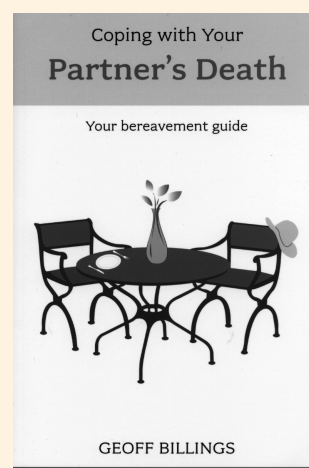
The chapters are easy to read and nicely varied in content, with examples from literature and poetry (including a couple of funny epitaphs), case studies, and diverse exercises, ranging from questionnaires to deepen one's own insight to suggestions for art work that conscientious readers might find useful (some tasks would take time to do properly).

Mallon writes with a light tone and in an engaging manner about so many difficult topics. She manages to avoid being either too casual or too overbearing. At times, the scientific foundations of this book are a little shaky, and it will probably prove most useful to those relatively new to supporting and counselling the bereaved; some of what is written may come across as familiar to those with more experience.

But, importantly, its strengths are her clinical wisdom, experience and insights, and the practical, constructive, down-to-earth way in which she conveys these to her readers. This, I think, will appeal to many who are searching for guidance in the difficult task of providing support for the bereaved. ■

Margaret Stroebe

Assistant professor of psychology, Utrecht University



Coping with your partner's death

Geoff Billings

London: Sheldon Press, 2008
111pp
£7.99
ISBN 978 1 84709 053 9

This book is one of an extensive range of short self-help books published in the Sheldon Press Overcoming Common Problems series.

The author has written about his own experience in the hope that it will be of benefit to others. He is an engineer by background, and it shows. This is not a book to read if you want help in coping with emotions, but it is a handy reference book for issues to do with finance, probate, new roles, formalities, health and security as life moves on. Indeed, a more accurate title might be ‘Coping with *practical issues* after your partner's death’.

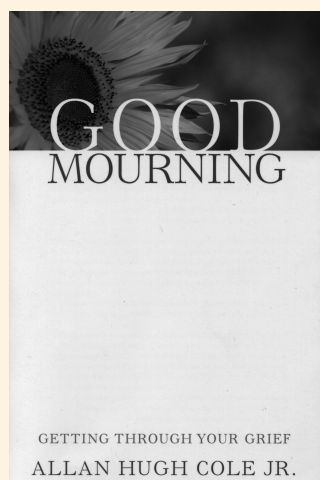
The commonsense advice will probably appeal more to a male readership; the style is unemotional and matter-of-fact. Feelings are acknowledged, but only in passing and in somewhat clichéd terms. However for those trying to steer a clear course through the essential paperwork and financial pitfalls after bereavement, there is plenty of advice, and plenty of lists. Chapter One, for example, lists the tasks that need to be carried out immediately following the death, and the documents that you need to access. The other chapters adopt a similar model; indeed, there is a whole appendix of other lists that the author found very helpful following his own bereavement, and a comprehensive list of organisations that offer all types of help, including counselling, with addresses and websites, is found at the end of the book.

Not everyone will need this level of attention to detail; I remain unconvinced of the value of including basic stationery items, spare printer ink cartridges and a scanner on the administrative list. On the other hand, in the confusion and shock of a recent bereavement, some may find the very prescriptive style and the model business letters of great help.

The author admits he was brought up to keep a 'stiff upper lip' and he is certainly very brisk with his own and others' emotional needs. This book should perhaps carry a caveat that it will not be helpful to all on their emotional journey, but it is a very useful tool in dealing with the practicalities of life after bereavement. ■

Elizabeth Turner

Bereavement volunteer, Cruse



Good mourning Getting through your grief

Allan Hugh Cole, Jr

London: Westminster John Knox
Press, 2008
102pp
£7.99 (pb)
ISBN 978 0 66423 268 9

This book was reportedly written in response to many requests for help in getting through a loss. There are numerous books with similar content, but Cole, unusually, distinguishes between grieving (Part 1) and mourning (Part 2). Grieving is described as the response to loss in terms of thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Mourning is explained as how we get through and beyond the loss and value living again. While primarily concerned with death, other losses are also referred to, such as job, health and relationships.

Linking to Bowlby's theories, Part 1 explains that we must suffer loss because we love and form attachments. There then follows an exploration of the range of feelings experienced after a loss. This material is not new, but an important message is that we must give ourselves permission to feel what we feel. The feelings themselves are neither good nor bad; it is how we deal with them that can be constructive or destructive.

Part 2 looks at the process of loosening the emotional bonds to the deceased, and the need for a purposeful and focused effort to cope with the loss. Here there is acknowledgement and expansion of Worden's tasks of grieving. Again, much of this is familiar, but what makes this different is the comprehensive 'map' to guide the reader through this process in a series of clear, practical steps. It is compassionate yet not sentimental, spiritual yet very real.

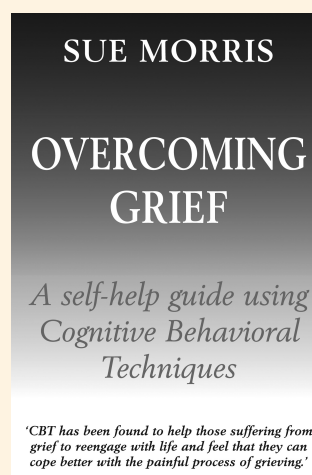
Accepting that everyone's grief is unique to them, Cole packs the book with helpful alternatives from which the reader can pick and choose. The coping strategies are wider ranging than often found, and include rituals, seeking support, solitary reflection, 'scaling' feelings, prioritising changes, and identifying new opportunities. This self-help style is appealing and very readable. Extracts of personal stories enhance and illuminate the messages, and the pain of loss is never glossed over. Nor is the time, hard work and energy it takes to cope 'successfully'.

Cole's Christian influence may be off-putting for some. It is evident throughout, but not intrusive. For those who share his faith, there is a final chapter on this.

This is an excellent book for the bereaved to dip into as they move through their pain, and an invaluable companion for anyone working with sufferers of loss. ■

Heather Price

Qualification leader, Counselling and Psychotherapy Central
Awarding Body (CPCAB)



Overcoming grief A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques

Sue Morris

London: Constable Robinson, 2008
303pp
£9.99
ISBN 978 1 84529 677 3

This book is the work of a clinical psychologist who has worked with many bereaved people and has expert knowledge about grief. As its title suggests, it is an in-depth exploration

of grief and how to survive it, written for the bereaved person, and helpfully illustrated with numerous small vignettes and brief quotes from bereaved people to exemplify the points the author is making.

The book is structured in the form of a formal course, with exercises on topics such as ‘Carving out and structuring your “grief time”’, and ‘Making sense of the “whys”’. It includes helpful guidelines and lists of suggestions on a wide range of topics, from ‘How often should I visit the cemetery?’ to ‘Tips for creating a support system’.

These cognitive behavioural techniques mentioned in the subtitle refer to a mini-course on cognitive therapy (in fact a mixture of Beck’s cognitive therapy and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy). One example is the exercise ‘Challenging the thoughts that are keeping you stuck’. Morris identifies four types of grief-specific unhelpful thoughts (‘Life isn’t fair’; ‘Life is over’; ‘Fear about forgetting your loved one’, and ‘Feelings of guilt about going on with your life’), and gives examples of how the bereaved person can challenge these thoughts.

Although the brief explanation of cognitive therapy is clear and well-written and the few exercises are well-designed, I doubt whether people are really capable of acquiring these cognitive skills and applying these on themselves in such a condensed way. I also have some concerns about the tone, which tends to be quite didactic.

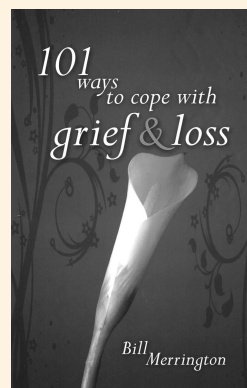
The author repeatedly stresses that there is no right way to grieve and that no one way is better than another. This is an important message as many bereaved people are affected by all sorts of misconceptions about how to grieve properly. At the same time, however, the author offers some rather specific guidelines about how to grieve ‘properly’. For example, she writes ‘You need to decide how to tackle your avoidance because it will only make things harder in the long run’ (p67), which is in my opinion too harsh and too general a statement. Similarly, I entirely agree with her that it is beneficial to express your grief (although the benefits of expressing grief emotions are still a much debated topic in academic research), but she is quite prescriptive about the ways of grieving she considers better than others.

At the end of the book Morris advises readers who have done the exercises and still feel that nothing is helping them to seek professional help. In my view, this advice is somewhat too strict. In addition, I wonder how many readers will indeed do all the exercises.

That said, perhaps this is not really a problem. Regardless of whether they follow the ‘course’ or not, just reading this insightful book is in my view beneficial for all bereaved people (although research should prove the validity of this contention). ■

Jan van den Bout

Professor of clinical psychology, Utrecht University



101 ways to cope with grief and loss

Bill Merrington

Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew Ltd
125pp
£7.99
ISBN 978 184417 789 9

Grief is messy. *101 Ways to Cope*, is, on the face of it, a tempting prospect. The volume is small, and structured neatly into single-page thoughts, reflections, and ideas on 101 different aspects of bereavement. A publication ideal, perhaps, for the restless grieving mind? I have my reservations.

Merrington’s qualification to write it cannot be questioned: he understands his topic and would appear to have a great deal of experience – specifically gained in his Anglican ministry. There is much in this book that might be useful for a person suffering loss – if they have the patience to sift. The writer describes the book as ‘providing signposts through grief to guide and aid the bereaved on their journey’. But you can suffer from too many signposts, just as much as from having none at all. This book, for me, does little to alleviate the chaos and dislocation of loss.

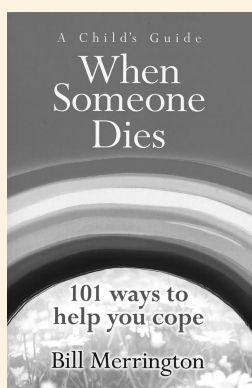
I have grown to love *A Grief Observed* (Lewis, 1961), because it declares the torments and consolations of grief with sublime brevity – delicately sketching a masterpiece of dual-process dynamics into the bargain. *101 Ways to Cope*, by contrast, tries to convey too much, rather repetitively, and just turned me off. The layout is unattractive and bitty, and, at the risk of sounding picky, some pages simply contain too many words – too much advice. There is a sense that the writer liked the notion of – or was asked by his publisher to provide – 101 reflections, and did his best to fill the brief.

I may be wrong. You could equally well argue that the random, bitty, backwards-and-forwards nature of grieving is reflected in the ordering of this work. I would like to think it was a deliberate device that just happens not to suit me. But what comes across is an author who is trying too hard to miss nothing out and, in seeking to please everyone, he certainly hasn’t pleased me.

Phil Clarkstone

Counsellor and manager, Greenwich Cruse

Lewis, CS (1961) *A grief observed*. London: Faber & Faber.



When someone dies 101 ways to help you cope – a child's guide

Bill Merrington

Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew Publishers
111pp
£7.99
ISBN 978 1 84867 106 5

This is a lovely book – small enough to go in a pocket or bag, with a colourful cover picture of a rainbow. The size makes it easier for children to carry about, and the sections are short, making the book easy to dip into. Often bereaved children have lots of questions going round in their heads, and there may not be a person on hand to listen to them, or they may not want to ask, so having this accessible kind of book handy could be very helpful.

The format – 101 ways to cope, each with its own chapter heading – makes it easier to find a particular question, rather than having to read through the whole book – although an index would have also helped.

What I like about the book is its format: to each of the 101 ways to cope it matches an analogy with a related activity to help children express their feelings. So, for example, No 9, 'Help, I've fallen off my bike,' states: 'When someone close has died, it can feel as if you have fallen off a bike. It can hurt although there are no scratch marks on the body. These aches and pains are not serious, but it can help to see a doctor to talk about them and be reassured.' The suggested activity at the bottom of the page is to draw your body and colour in where the aches and pains might be, and if you do decide to go to the doctor, to take the picture with you.

No 23, 'Fizzy drinks', states: 'It can really shake you up when someone dies, and all the feelings get jumbled up just like gas in a fizzy drink can.' Here the suggested activity is: 'Draw a fizzy drink can, think of a name for it, design the label and then say what would be in the can of feelings.'

Some activities are very similar to the ones in the *Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine* workbook published by Winston's Wish for younger children from 5 to 12 years (depending on their developmental age). But, whereas the Winston's Wish book is possibly more suited to be used with a carer or a bereavement volunteer, *When Someone Dies* can also be used by older children on their own.

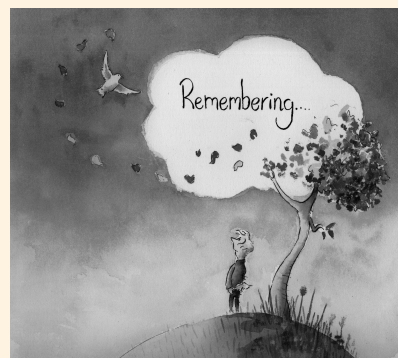
There is also a helpful section at the back of the book with advice to adults on ways to help children cope.

In summary, I found this a useful book that I think children and young people will find relevant to their lives, as will carers and bereavement workers. ■

Wendy Rayner

Cruse bereavement volunteer and children's counsellor

Crossley D, Sheppard K (2009). *Muddles, puddles and sunshine* (2nd ed). Cheltenham: Winston's Wish. www.winstonswish.org.uk



Remembering ...

Dianne Leutner,
Daniel Postgate

West Wycombe: Child
Bereavement Charity
24pp
£5.00
ISBN 978 0 95216 618 4

Published by the Child Bereavement Charity, *Remembering...* is understated, inexpensive and a book that younger children will treasure. The watercolour illustrations (by Daniel Postgate) are enchanting. The text is clear and easy to read, and the everyday vocabulary makes it user-friendly for primary school-age children and adults/carers with no specific knowledge of grief theory. The analogy of sunshine and showers in relation to the grief experience is spot on and I feel any of my bereaved clients from the age of four years up could readily relate to it.

Remembering... invites the young reader to use artwork to explore and express their emotions. It states very clearly at the start: 'This book is for children to do at their own pace with an adult, to help them remember and talk together about the person who has died.' Unlike, for example, a similar paperback with equally charming illustrations, *It isn't Easy* (in fact now out of print), which tells the story of one young person's experience of loss and their struggle with anger and guilt, *Remembering...* does not address emotional issues directly. But it does contain gentle, prompting questions to encourage the young person to explore their own personal grief journey through art.

Remembering... delivers what it promises and has, I think, potential to help very young people retrieve memories feared lost forever. In this way it could be both helpful and healing for a bereaved youngster.

Retailing at £5.00, it is also extremely good value. I have come across books on a similar theme costing more than £30.00. ■

Sandie Downer

Somerset Young Cruse school project worker and trainer

Connolly M (1997). *It isn't easy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.