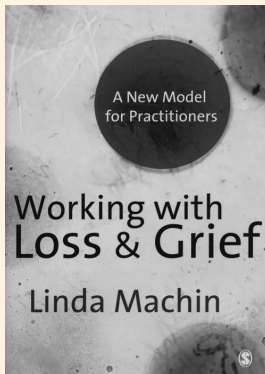


Book Reviews



Working with loss and grief

Linda Machin
London: Sage, 2009
200pp
£18.99
ISBN 978 1 41294 668 1

When I was qualifying as a social worker over 30 years ago, there was very little literature available on the subject of loss, dying and bereavement. I began my career with too little theory and too few models of working to inform my practice. Over the years this picture has changed, thank goodness, and there are now many books and articles out there on the subject of loss in all its forms and guises. Indeed, the choice and variety can seem overwhelming – and then a book comes along that makes you sit up and reconsider good and not-so-good working practices you have acquired over the years and the theories and models of working that inform them. Linda Machin's book is one of these.

Working with Loss and Grief presents a new model for understanding and working with loss and grief. Machin argues that many previous theories and models of working have, despite their usefulness in practice, tended to simplify and generalise loss and grief; the rich variation of individual reactions has been lost. Her Range of Response to Loss model and Adult Attitude to Grief scale bring together the general and the specific. We are offered a general theory that sits nicely alongside and can be incorporated into other theories and we also have a tool that applies the theory in practice, so that individual differences can be acknowledged.

The book is clearly written and very readable, guiding the reader lightly through what can be weighty theory. It takes the subject of loss and grief beyond illness and death, and rightly recognises loss as a fundamental feature of life that requires attention, support and consideration more often than we realise. More importantly the book is also a useful reminder to practitioners to acknowledge the unique individuality of the people with whom they work and the huge range of feelings and attitudes that will result from loss. This is particularly

important when working with children and young people, whose responses change as they get older and gain greater understanding. As the book explains, the model and tool can be adapted for use with children and young people.

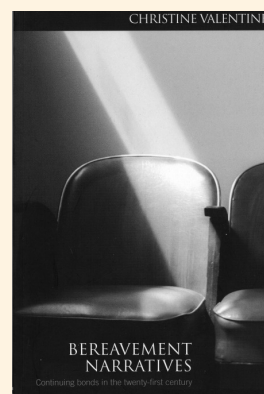
Established practitioners with an interest in developments in theories of loss and models of working will find Linda Machin's book very useful as it takes our working knowledge one step further. It offers new learning as well as reminding us of the vital work that has informed our practice over the years and remains relevant today.

For new practitioners, this is new and exciting learning. The tool is user-friendly for practitioner and service user alike and the way it is described will make it easy to apply in practice. It can therefore be shared with service users and will encourage interactive learning. The model is described with reference to previous theories and models of working and this helps guide the new practitioner towards extending their reading and learning to other related topics.

This book would also be a useful introduction to the subject for anyone working in the healthcare professions. ■

Judith Hodgson

Lecturer/practitioner in social work, University of Hull



Bereavement narratives: continuing bonds in the 21st century

Christine Valentine

Abingdon: Routledge, 2008
193pp
£22.99
ISBN 978 0 415 45730 9

This book 'takes a look at the experience of bereavement as it reflects the norms, values and beliefs of contemporary British society'. Its aim is to explore 'the ways in which dead loved ones may retain a significant social presence in the life of survivors' through the narratives or stories the living tell to make sense of their experience and gain comfort by it. Its emphasis is on how people remember the narratives or stories

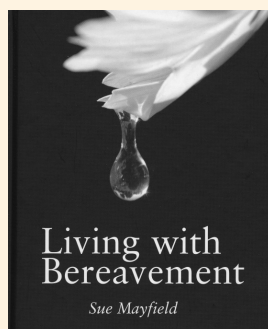
of the dead loved ones, or make up new stories to explain to themselves why things are happening to them.

It is both an academic look at bereavement and a social record of how 'normal' the range of people's stories or narratives are. Sometimes they may seem to the listener a little outside of their personal experience or personal belief systems. However, to the bereaved narrator they are a way of making sense of what has and is happening to them.

Valentine has clustered the narratives in themes for the purpose of her analysis, which will be of benefit to the researcher. However, the 'naming of parts' of each of the themes will be a useful resource to the bereavement counsellor and volunteer who are looking for ways to make sense of what their clients are saying, and offers a framework for better understanding the processes the bereaved are experiencing. More importantly, emphasis is put on the way each of the narratives, or stories, has personal value and should inform social policies about end-of-life services and the way society treats dying and bereaved people. ■

Janet Dowling

Cruse volunteer and professional storyteller



Living with bereavement

Sue Mayfield

Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008
128pp
£7.99
ISBN 978 0 74595 295 6

In her opening remarks, Sue Mayfield bravely poses the question: 'What use is this book?' She concludes by saying: 'If you are too distracted or sad to read at all, just look at the pictures.' And indeed, the colour photographs may be the best part of this book: they have clearly been selected with care and imagination to convey a variety of sympathetic moods.

In its physical dimensions, this is only a small book, but it feels solid in the hand, and is beautifully presented. You can imagine people deriving comfort and reassurance just from holding it.

Mayfield has done her research, as is evidenced by a worthy reading list, which includes Kubler-Ross, Murray Parkes, poet Douglas Dunn and actress Sheila Hancock. Sensitive and sparing use is made of poetry, and biblical references feel humane and supportive rather than intrusive or proselytising.

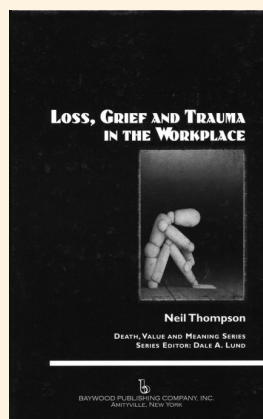
Chapters are headed chiefly around abstractions, such as 'Absence and Presence', 'Loss and Despair', 'Tears and Sadness'. For some, this will present an invitation to dip into the book for solace. Less easy to imagine is what use

the bereaved reader may make of Mayfield's case studies, with which she illustrates her themes. In 'Tears and Sadness', for example, which occupies barely five pages (including photographs), we are introduced not only to CS Lewis, Shakespeare and Jesus, but also to Julia, Rachel, Sheilagh, Tom, Penny, Mark, Molly, Sarah, Uncle Stan, and at least 11 other purportedly 'real' people. This is counter-productive – perhaps Mayfield meant to 'humanise' her book by bringing in these everyday folks, but to me the effect was distancing.

Similarly, I wonder what conclusion the average bereaved reader is to draw from the information that bereavement 'experts' have identified four or five or three stages of grief. Better to have assimilated the research, not merely announce that it has been undertaken. And Mayfield seems unaware of Worden's in some ways more useful concept of 'tasks' of mourning, with its notion of active working through grief.

A second edition could leave the pictures and format untouched, but sharpen up the content. ■

Ray Snape



Loss, grief and trauma in the workplace

Neil Thompson

Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing, 2009
154pp
£43.95
ISBN 978 0 89503 342 0

This is a timely addition to a developing area of interest in bereavement care where the number of articles and publications is increasing, as is awareness of its significance (see, for example, the special issue of *Death Studies* [33(5) 2009] on 'Death, Loss and Work'). Indeed, one of Thompson's key themes is a call for those who know about the workplace to learn about grief, and those who know about grief to learn about the workplace. This book sets out to help both groups to do just that.

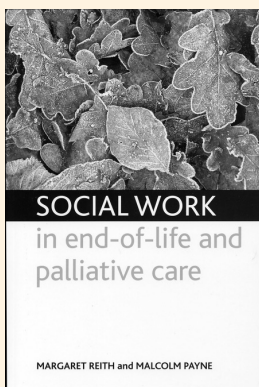
Thompson's approach is comprehensive and systematic. He begins by explaining what loss, grief and trauma are and what they mean in the workplace context. The impact of trauma, including terrorism, is explored in great detail in chapter 3 – one of the book's strongest chapters. Chapter 4 looks at the policy context and covers key areas such as commemoration of the person who died and liaison with the family and media. Chapter 5 provides a good explanation of the difference between what Thompson calls 'typical grieving'

and 'complicated' grieving. Chapter 6 provides a very useful explanation of what is helpful and not helpful when supporting a bereaved employee – a very useful chapter that will appeal to many. Finally, chapter 7 explores the roles of leadership, spirituality and meaning in developing a healthy workplace environment for dealing with loss.

Thompson's book takes us a significant step forward in our understanding of grief and loss in the workplace and how best to respond. It is written in a thoughtful and informed way that is solidly grounded in current grief theory. Some of the explanations require a degree of concentration but, overall, the book is accessible and practical. It will appeal both to workplace managers, team leaders and human resource personnel, and to grief specialists interested in learning more about bereavement in the work context. It does what it sets out to do, and is ideal for anyone looking for a comprehensive yet practical reference book on this subject. ■

Breffni McGuinness

Training officer, Irish Hospice Foundation



Social work in end-of-life and palliative care

Margaret Reith, Malcolm Payne

Bristol: Policy Press, 2009
239pp
£18.99
ISBN 978 1 84742 414 3

The social work profession has been having a hard time in the UK press following some high profile child deaths in which social workers were criticised for their lack of intervention and judgement. It is a profession whose achievements are rarely acknowledged publicly.

There are approximately 500 experienced UK palliative care social workers working in statutory and voluntary sector hospices and palliative care teams within the NHS. Beresford and colleagues (2007) researched the experience of patients and carers supported by palliative care social workers and their findings were both moving and supportive of the value of the role. The European Association of Palliative Care recognises these social workers as core members of the palliative care team.

This basic book is a very welcome addition to the current discussions in Europe and North America about the palliative care social work role and the competencies and skills required. It efficiently draws together the main elements of the role, placing it within a societal and team context. The book is

illustrated throughout with case studies and the chapters on communication and assessment will be of interest to nursing colleagues. It tackles complex ethical areas as well as describing interventions. Working with loss and grief is central to the social work role and the chapter on bereavement provides an excellent overview of our understanding about grief and interventions, including work with children and families. Unusually, the book includes a pause and reflect section in each chapter, and also a useful (but not exhaustive) list of suggested reading and relevant websites.

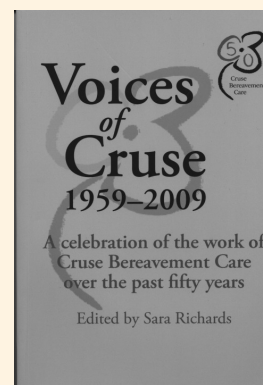
I would highly recommend this book to hospice managers, palliative care social workers and social work lecturers and also to any professional interested or involved in end of life or palliative care – although it is mainly focused on cancer care.

In conclusion the book enhances the debate already started about what palliative care social workers contribute to end of life care and challenges future development of the profession, particularly in research and education. ■

Pam Firth

Head of family support, Isabel Hospice

Beresford P, Adshead L, Croft S (2007). *Social work, palliative care and service users: making life possible*. London/Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.



Voices of Cruse 1959-2009

Sara Richards (ed)

London: Cruse Bereavement Care, 2009
192pp
£10.00
ISBN 978 0 90032 124 5

The many supporters, beneficiaries, staff and volunteers of Cruse Bereavement Care will surely take pleasure in this fascinating celebration of its first 50 years. Cicely Saunders often remarked that 1959 was a particularly good year for those interested in the care of dying and bereaved people – her own series of articles on Care of the Dying appeared in the *Nursing Times*; Peter Marris' monograph on *Widows and Their Families* (Marris, 1958) was just published and, most notably, this was the year that Margaret Torrie started the Cruse Clubs for widows and their families.

Judged by the diverse contributions to this volume, Cruse has become a somewhat unusual national charity in the British context. It began at the grassroots and seems never to have lost touch with its origins. It has consolidated and progressed, even 'modernised', in the contemporary jargon, yet it has

never submitted to the more egregious excesses of the modern charitable industry. As a result it retains a sense of the low key, the spirit of voluntary service and a healthy repudiation of what Max Weber called 'bureaucratization' and 'routinization'.

This is in no way to diminish its many achievements. Margaret Torrie quickly gathered around her a clutch of senior academics and clinicians who, from the early days, recognised the worth of the organisation and its ability to contribute to the emerging field of bereavement studies. Colin Murray Parkes was notable among these and his contribution to Cruse resonates throughout this volume.

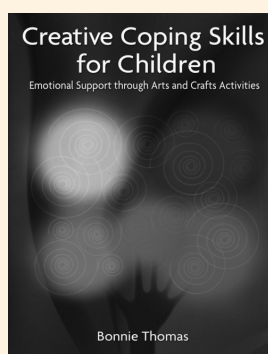
Sara Richards has put together a remarkable array of contributions from diverse sources. I particularly enjoyed the accounts of the early staff and volunteers who trace the development of Cruse from its beginnings in the Torrie home to separate office accommodation, paid leadership and a systematic programme of development that now covers most of the country. There are accounts from bereaved people, case studies of local services and in-depth sections on Margaret Torrie, Colin Murray Parkes, Dora Black and Derek Nuttall.

This celebration of Cruse exudes a sense of modesty. Never triumphalist, it is a worthy record of 50 years of (often unsung) achievement and an admirable guide to the work of the organisation today and the many individuals and families who benefit from it. Highly recommended. ■

David Clark

Director of University of Glasgow, Dumfries Campus

Marris P (1958). *Widows and their families*. London: Routledge.



Creative coping skills for children: emotional support through arts and crafts activities

Bonnie Thomas

London: Jessica Kingsley, 2009
£18.99
190pp
ISBN 978 1 84310 921 1

This book contains numerous fun, creative and engaging activities for parents and professionals to help children understand and cope with feelings and difficult life events. It is aimed at children aged three to 12 but, if introduced appropriately, some of the activities could be used with older

children. It can be helpful for older children, particularly those with traumatic backgrounds, to engage with a more child-like part of themselves through play and art therapy techniques.

Young people can find it difficult to put words to difficult feelings and problems and many of these activities provide useful ways of externalising emotions and expressing and managing them through play, art or writing. The author emphasises that learning to understand and cope with feelings cannot just come from a book but will also depend on what children learn from how the adults around them express and deal with their own emotions.

As a practising therapist, I feel the real value of this book is in providing and inspiring creative and interesting activities for engaging and working with children. It also reminded me of the importance of being imaginative and playful in my work. I particularly liked ideas such as The Stomp Box – a safe, contained space into which a child can put all their worries and then 'stomp' all over them. The Pirate's Survival Guide also provides a very helpful way for beginning conversations with children about living in more chaotic life circumstances such as poverty, instability and parental addiction. It was good to see activities designed to give children concrete reminders of all the different resources in their emotional coping kit. Some of the sections on activities for unstructured time and healthy living felt less relevant to a therapist, but I could see how they could be useful to parents or to other professionals.

On a practical note, the author gives tips on how to acquire the materials for activities cheaply, which is helpful in this time of limited budgets. The pages are well formatted to allow for easy photocopying and the author recommends creating a child's individual coping book from the contents.

The author sets herself the difficult task of writing for both professionals and parents and I am not sure she has entirely achieved this. Some parents and some professionals may require additional explanations and guidance about some of the activities in order to know how and when they could be useful to children. Also, the content and ideas are a little simplistic at times. Similar books, such as *Breaking the Silence* (Goldman, 2001), provide similar creative activities but may be more helpful for children with more complex and severe difficulties as they provide a theoretical background and therapeutic rationale for activities. ■

Catriona Matthews

Child clinical psychologist

Goldman L (2001). *Breaking the silence: a guide to help children with complicated grief, suicide, homicide, AIDS, violence and abuse* (2nd ed). London: Routledge.