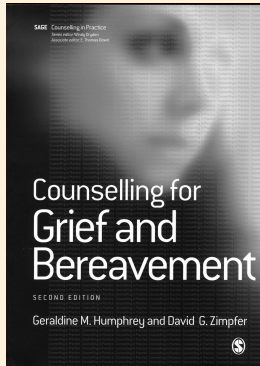


Book Reviews



Counselling for grief and bereavement Second edition

Geraldine M Humphrey,
David G Zimpfer

London: Sage, 2008
178pp
£22.99
ISBN 978 1 41923 566 1

This revised, second edition has been updated to include recent research findings and developments in bereavement and grief counselling theory and practice.

The aim of this book is to provide a framework to help counsellors to understand grief. Each chapter includes a theoretical discussion, practical tools and intervention strategies. Most of the topics are richly illustrated with case material.

Several important issues are addressed. Much attention is paid to the issue of resilience, which the authors explicitly prefer to a focus on the potentially damaging impact of loss. This focus reflects a recent trend in bereavement research and literature in general.

The book also addresses the dramatic impact a loss can have on the lives of children. Yet, throughout, the authors emphasise that, following all kinds of losses – even the most devastating ones – people can grow. They also stress how important it is that counsellors working with the bereaved try to mobilise and build on the strengths that the bereaved person has.

Practical guidelines for assessment are provided and, again, illustrated with case material and practical advice about interventions. However, more coverage could have been given to this important topic.

The group counselling chapter includes a comprehensive model for a bereavement support group. This is very relevant for those wanting to start such a group.

Grief and mourning always occur in a social context. This second edition introduces recent developments in the field of family therapy and its implications for working with the bereaved, again accompanied by helpful information about assessment and intervention. Recent developments in palliative care are described in a separate chapter that also

deals with anticipated grief.

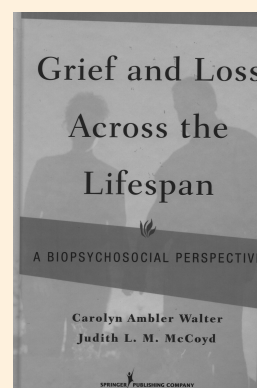
Another chapter on special issues discusses particular types of losses, such as loss to AIDS, suicide and homicide – but only very briefly, leaving the reader longing for more.

The authors are experienced counsellors who know what they are talking about. The book itself is not for beginners – it does not cover introductory information about principles and practices of counselling and readers are assumed to have some basic general knowledge about the work. Experienced, professional counsellors working with the bereaved can learn a lot from its extensive and intelligent content.

One final point – the authors have updated their discussion of complicated grief but this edition appeared before Prigerson and colleagues' most recent work, and this is not therefore included. ■

Johan Maes

Psychotherapist and grief therapist



Grief and loss across the lifespan

Carolyn Ambler Walter,
Judith L M McCoyd

New York: Springer, 2009
373pp
£46.95 hb
ISBN 978 0 82612 757 0

I must admit to qualms when I first read the title of this book. How can grief and loss in its many forms and over the entire lifespan be adequately covered in one book?

To some extent, these concerns remain after reading the book: much has had to be missed out. We are given only snapshots of each stage; grief theory in particular is given short shrift. The snapshots are helpful, but each begs to be followed up with further detailed reading.

The book offers a chronological journey from perinatal attachment and loss through to the losses experienced by

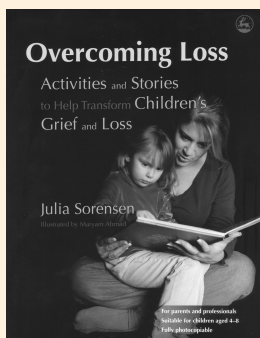
older adults. The broad stages of childhood, adolescence, working age and older age are further broken down. For example, perinatal loss is followed by infancy and toddlerhood, elementary school age and tweens and teens. This recognises the differences and changes unique to each age stage, rather than obliterating some of the nuances by considering childhood and adolescence as one homogenous group. The older age ranges are similarly divided and I particularly liked the fact that there is a chapter on older adults. Adulthood covers a huge span of years and older adults have very particular needs that can so easily be forgotten.

Each chapter includes case examples that capture the essentially individual nature of grief and loss – a welcome contrast to ‘one size fits all’ theories.

The book represents a significant advance because it looks at the issues from a bio-psychosocial perspective. To a social worker who has worked mainly in a medical and nursing environment, this is a great step forward. The book brings together medical, nursing, psychological and pharmacological terms and viewpoints – and that is how it should be if we are to work together in a multi-disciplinary way. A book that can be read by all the different professions within the helping/caring team is a useful resource and provides a model for other books in the future. ■

Judith Hodgson

Lecturer/practitioner in social work, University of Hull



Overcoming loss: activities and stories to help transform children's grief and loss

Julia Sorensen

London: Jessica Kingsley, 2008
144pp
£19.99
ISBN 978 1 84310 646 3

This book is a photocopiable resource for individual and group grief and loss work with younger children (aged four to eight years). It draws on concepts from social and emotional aspects of learning and provides tools that take a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) approach.

It is divided into four sections: the first encourages children to develop their feeling vocabulary, the second looks at normalising the experience of loss, the third uses a short story about a lizard who has lost three family members to demonstrate coping with death, and the fourth section outlines a brief (four-session) group intervention that draws on activities outlined in the rest of the book.

My first impression is that book is relatively lightweight. There are 140 pages but the writing is very large. Altogether, 15 photocopiable activities are described in the first three sections, and the final groupwork section draws on these.

In the introduction the author describes ‘the stages of grief [as] shock, denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and acceptance’, suggesting a linear progression. While she is not rigid about how people move through these ‘stages’, this categorisation suggests a narrow view of grief and how to work with it.

The activities in themselves could be useful in some circumstances, and I like the suggestion that you start by helping to create a safe place for you and the child to work in together. However the feelings work is more psycho-educational than therapeutic (it is structured as a learning exercise). Overall it strikes me that this approach will suit some children and carers or professionals, but not all.

As I read, I was unsure about the age range at which it is aimed, and only discovered at the end, when I looked at the back cover. Some of the activities on feeling words would not suit younger children unless they are unusually literate. The four-week group programme does not include a time frame, so it is unclear how long each session is meant to be or how many activities it might involve. If the groupwork is designed as an after-school activity, the speed of progress through its topics seems extremely ambitious.

I think there are more useful resources on working with loss. Shelley Gilbert’s Grief Encounter workbook (from www.griefencounter.org.uk) provides a more creative, expansive and flexible resource for working with bereaved children. Its target age range is eight to 15 years, but much of it can be used or adapted for younger children. The Winston’s Wish website (www.winstonswish.org.uk) is a valuable resource in itself and also provides a list of books for children sorted by age range. Margaret Collins’ book for children aged four to nine years, *It’s OK to be Sad* (2005), contains excellent material for classroom group work on loss. *Helping Kids Heal* by Rebecca Carman (2004) is an excellent toolkit for practitioners, has a more extensive list (75 in fact) of activities and is more varied and clearer in its approach. ■

Sacha Richardson

Director of therapeutic services, The Laura Centre, UK

Carman R (2004). *Helping kids heal*. Plainview, NY: Jayjo Books.

Collins M (2005). *It’s ok to be sad*. London: Sage.