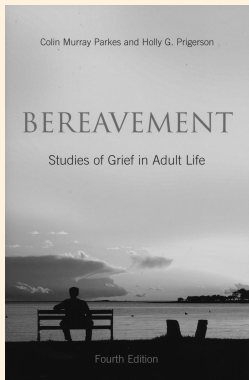


# Book Reviews



## Bereavement: studies of grief in adult life (4th edn)

Colin Murray Parkes and Holly G. Prigerson

London/New York: Routledge, 2010  
350pp  
£39.95 (hb)  
ISBN 978 0 41545 118 5

Almost four decades have passed since the first edition of this book (authored solely by Murray Parkes) was published in 1972. Over the years it has been a 'bible' for all those working in the bereavement field. Very few studies and books on this subject were available at the time; it was greatly needed and filled a theoretical and empirical vacuum.

Intended primarily for professionals, its rich writing style made it accessible to bereaved people and general readers alike. Thirty-eight years later, bereavement care has developed into an evidence-based discipline with strong theoretical underpinnings; numerous books and empirical and clinical studies have been published. Yet the fourth edition of this classic retains all the freshness and originality of the first, and remains a superlative source of evidence, expertise and knowledge for professionals and non-professionals alike.

There are 17 chapters in the new edition, organised in the same way as the previous editions. Each chapter opens with a relevant quotation, drawn from a wide range of literary sources – fiction and non-fiction. These quotations not only reflect the many facets of bereavement (human, universal yet individual, cultural, religious as well as scientific); they also demonstrate the breadth of the authors' scholarship. New chapters cover trauma, continuing bonds and complications of grief, bringing the book up to date with the state of the art in bereavement theory, research and practice.

Despite the passage of time, observations that were a hallmark of the first edition remain as relevant as ever. Notably, the research on widows that formed the heart of the first edition has not lost its relevance to our understanding of the effects of a major bereavement. Along with the description of the process of 'typical' adaptive grief, the book deals with atypical (complicated) grief responses and their possible causes. Parkes' research (at London and Harvard), together with that of Prigerson and colleagues at Yale (the Yale Bereavement Study), bring the reader up to date with recent developments, including a section on the neuropathology of grief, the various manifestations of complicated grief and the characteristic symptoms of the most frequent, Prolonged Grief Disorder.

## The fourth edition of this classic retains all the freshness and originality of the first

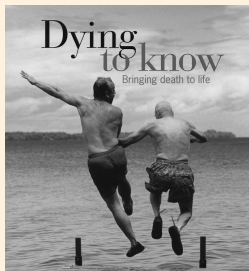
The final chapter deals with mass catastrophes, both natural and man-made. Parkes writes from his extensive personal experience of providing bereavement consultancy following mass disasters, including 9/11. He points out that the help offered to the individual does not differ from that given in other situations involving loss and trauma. This is an important and pertinent chapter.

The depth of theory, research and clinical information makes this book essential reading for all who work in the bereavement field. Prigerson has brought her expertise in modern research methods and statistical analyses to the joint project, resulting in a book that is up-to-date, authoritative and enriched by the intergenerational combination of an elder and a younger member of the tribe.

I hope that readers and colleagues will be awarded with many more editions of this important work. ■

**Ruth Malkinson**

Adjunct senior lecturer, Tel Aviv University



## Dying to know: bringing death to life

Andrew Anastasios

London: Hardie Grant Books, 2010  
60pp  
£9.99  
ISBN 978 1 74066 553 7

This idiosyncratic book was first published in Australia by Pilotlight, an ‘agent for social change’ organisation, and is now available in a UK version. The founder of Pilotlight is self-styled social innovator Jane Tewson, also known in the UK as a co-founder of Comic Relief.

*Dying to Know* is intended as a ‘catalyst for change, a new way to spark conversations and connect people’. It is more of a graphic book than a text book. Its 60 pages contain a lively mix of illustrations, quotations, questions, bald statements and statistics about death, grief and bereavement. It is accessible, easy to read and very professionally presented. The subjects range from talking to children about death to death in the hi-tec 21st century; from planning your own funeral to organ donation. It even includes an ‘emotional will’ enclosed in a pocket inside the back sleeve, where people can write personal thoughts and messages to complement the impersonality of their formal will. Some of the pages are childishly simplistic; others are grittily frank.

It is this breadth of style that makes it difficult to know quite where to locate this book in the bereavement literature. *Dying to Know* seems at first glance to take a reassuring approach to death: ‘It’s OK, there’s nothing to be scared of here.’ Turn to another page, and you are told how long a body takes to burn, that most of the mercury in the earth’s atmosphere comes from cremated tooth fillings, and that a greener way to be buried is vertical, to save space – less palatable information for the death-shy.

It may look like a child’s book (thick card cover and lots of pictures) but the information about impotence and the sexual anxieties that can occur with terminal illness and its treatment are not what I would consider age-appropriate for children.

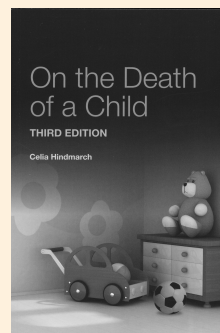
Jane Tewson says she ‘wanted to create something that was emotional, active and fun, as well as about helping people’ (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/7428351/We-prepare-for-birth-why-not-prepare-for-death.html>).

Any book that encourages people to think about their death while they are still alive and able to do so, that promotes the uniqueness and the normality of the grieving process, that attempts to lift the lid on a taboo subject merits praise.

The book is indeed endearing, poignant, clever, fascinating, and thought-provoking. But fun? I didn’t find it so. Its refreshingly upfront and unsentimental approach to the subject of death could be a useful element in any public information campaign to encourage people to think and talk about death. However I definitely would not recommend using it with bereaved clients. This is a book for the living – in my opinion, pictures of coffins and skeletons, whatever their context and intent, are inappropriate material for those who are struggling with the reality of loss. ■

### Trish Staples

Cruse bereavement volunteer



## On the death of a child (3rd edn)

Celia Hindmarch

Oxford/New York: Radcliffe Publishing, 2009  
254pp  
£24.99  
ISBN 978 1 84619 403 0

‘I didn’t see that I had anything in common with younger parents who had lost a baby. But when I have heard such parents talking in a group I recognise the same pain. I feel so sorry for those parents. At least we had our son for 19 years.’ So says Dave, a bereaved father quoted in *On the Death of a Child*. In this revised third edition, the author shows – through interviews, case studies, and reference to the literature – how challenging the death of a child is.

People who can compare the loss of a parent, a spouse and a child invariably describe their grief for the child as the most painful, enduring and difficult to survive, no matter how old the child, or whether he or she died during birth or through illness, accident or suicide. Not only is it heartbreaking for the bereaved parents; Hindmarch reminds us that friends and even health and social care professionals who have been involved in the care of the child can sometimes struggle to cope when confronted with the loss.

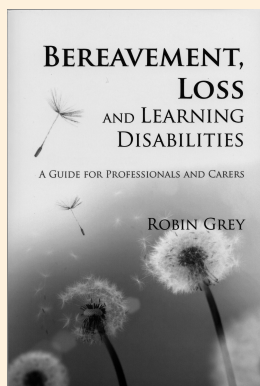
The book has three sections: theory and practice, good practice guidelines, and bereavement support. It supplies background information about the effects on parents of losing a child, and guidelines to professionals on what to say, what to do, how to behave and when it is time to be quiet and listen to the real experts: the bereaved parents themselves. This third edition also includes an entirely

new chapter covering developments in bereavement theory since the previous edition was published, such as Stroebe and Schut's dual process model of bereavement, and new theories on intervention.

In the last chapter, parents tell their admirable stories of loss, hope, meaning and resilience. The key message is clear: that which does not kill you can make you stronger. ■

### Daan Westerink

Journalist/Lecturer in bereavement, Hogeschool Utrecht



### Bereavement, loss and learning disabilities: a guide for professionals and carers

Robin Grey

London: Jessica Kingsley, 2010  
176pp  
£18.99  
ISBN 978 1 84905 020 3

There are so few books on this very important subject, so it is wonderful to see a new publication. Robin Grey is a new voice amid the small group of practitioners and researchers who have been working in recent years to highlight and address some of the complexities of supporting people with learning disabilities through bereavement.

The book is written by an experienced practitioner who has firsthand experience of this issue. It is accessible and welcoming to readers who may be put off by more academic texts. Its aim is very clearly to guide others supporting bereaved people with learning disabilities. Unfortunately, however, it does not build on much of this recent work – for example, Dodd and colleagues (2008), Dowling *et al* (2006), Read and Elliott (2007), and Blackman (2008) – and therefore doesn't offer much that is particularly new.

The issues are discussed in the context of current health and social policy and legislation, highlighting both the positive and negative elements of some of these developments. But Grey uses the 'stages model' of grief, which is unwieldy and long outdated. This is a missed opportunity to introduce the dual process model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) and/or biographical models (Walter, 1996).

The book certainly offers good practical advice – for example, the importance of consistency, being clear with language and recognising changes in behaviour as communication. Grey grapples with some of the very real complexities of the grieving process for those with learning

disabilities, and learning points are helpfully summarised at the end of each chapter. There is a particularly useful section on assessing risk following a bereavement and how this can be linked into the Care Planning Approach. I was, however, disappointed to see no mention of the Palliative Care for People with Learning Disabilities (PCPLD) Network in the chapter on palliative care, as this has pioneered and hugely developed work in this area over the last decade and continues to support people with learning disabilities, their families, carers and other professionals.

Grey is clearly passionate about his subject; a deeper investigation of the current literature would enable him to build on his evidence experience in delivering care. ■

### Noelle Blackman

Deputy chief executive, Respond

Blackman N (2008). The development of an assessment tool for the bereavement needs of people with learning disabilities. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* 36 165–170.

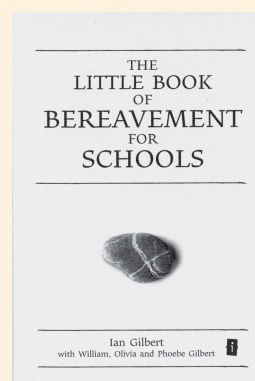
Dodd P, Guerin S, McEvoy J *et al* [AQ1] (2008). A study of complicated grief symptoms in people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 52(5) 415–425.

Dowling S, Hubert J, White S, Hollins S (2006). Bereaved adults with intellectual disabilities: a combined randomized controlled trial and qualitative study of two community-based interventions. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 50(4) 277–287.

Read S, Elliott D (2007). Exploring a continuum of support for bereaved people with intellectual disabilities: a strategic approach. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities* 11(2) 167–181.

Stroebe MS, Schut H (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: rationale and description. *Death Studies* 23 197–224.

Walter T (1996). A new model of grief: bereavement and biography. *Mortality* 1(1) 7–25.



### The little book of bereavement for schools

Ian Gilbert, with Olivia, William and Phoebe Gilbert

Camarthen: Crown Publishing, 2010  
77pp  
£8.99  
ISBN 978 1 84590 464 7

This book is exactly what it says on its tasteful cream cover – little, about bereavement and for school staff (and other professionals). It has been expanded from an original 15-point A4 sheet compiled by Ian and his three children following the death of his wife and their mother. The children are aged nine, 13 and 18, and each writes with authority based on personal experience about

what worked for them and what didn't in the days and months after the bereavement.

The 15 points provide the headings for each chapter. Each chapter is short, clear, concise and to the point – never covering more than three pages.

The no-nonsense approach speaks directly to schools: ban gossip about the death; say something – so much better than saying nothing; provide the child with a safe space at school; acknowledge how exhausting grief can be; talk to the surviving parent; be mindful of anniversaries, and keep open the channels of communication. It tells schools to give their full attention to bereaved children, provide a room near reception for breaking bad news, be vigilant on Mother's Day, train at least one staff member in grief work and teach other children how to cope with grief (their own and that of others).

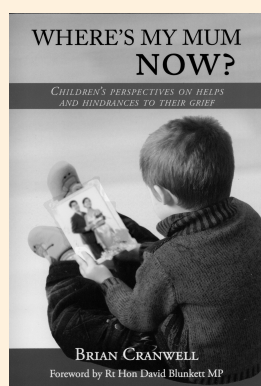
The book does not break new ground; there are other publications saying much the same things in slightly different ways. It is not an activity book or manual – for those, try Goldman's (2006) *Children Also Grieve* and Wells' (1988) *Helping Children Cope with Grief*. Its appeal lies in its commonsense approach built on personal experience, making it no less invaluable for any school. ■

### Heather Price

Cruse bereavement volunteer

Goldman L (2006). *Children also grieve: talking about death and healing*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Wells R (1988). *Helping children cope with grief*. London: Sheldon Press



### Where's my mum now? Children's perspectives on help and hindrances to their grief

Brian Cranwell

Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse UK, 2010  
86pp  
£5.00  
ISBN 978 1 44909 139 2

The author, a retired clergyman, has been a bereavement support worker for 20 years, 15 of them working with bereaved children. His belief that too little attention had been given to the views of children themselves, despite the wealth of academic research and studies in the literature, resulted in this book

– the fruit of a research study he conducted, interviewing children about their bereavement experiences.

It is, reportedly, the first UK study to collect data on their grieving processes directly from children whose parent has died. The book reports these findings, together with the wisdom gained from his years as a bereavement counsellor and as a minister.

The content of the book and the construction of the chapters is excellent. It covers in great depth the bereavement journey, beliefs, feelings and concerns of bereaved children and those facing the death of someone close. Cranwell devotes a chapter to each aspect of a child's bereavement experience, starting with the language used to talk about death and bereavement. Other chapters cover anticipating a death, funerals, returning to school and receiving help. Each chapter is illustrated with the anecdotes and experiences of bereaved children and those working with them.

The chapter on funerals confronts head on the question of whether children should or should not attend. Here again, the issue is covered very well, using children's own views and experiences. It points out that funerals bring the same benefits for children as they do to adults – the benefits of being included and supported in a collective ritual of grief, and the opportunity to say goodbye. What matters is that the child should feel they have made the decision themselves.

The chapter on returning to school is similarly sensible: returning to school is important because it represents a constant in a life that may have been thrown into chaos by the bereavement, but it can also be a very unhappy place, as bereaved children are often bullied by their peers. Cranwell suggests this may be because other children fear that a similar disaster could happen to them. This chapter also discusses how teaching staff can be alert to the potential for bullying, and how to recognise symptoms of grief and behaviours caused by grief anger.

Much of what is said in this book is already known, but maybe only to those who work in bereavement. A larger study that included other bereavement agencies, not just the clergy, would have provided a wider perspective on children's bereavement experiences. Nevertheless, this book would be extremely helpful to all those in contact with bereaved children – those working in a professional capacity and parents and carers.

As Louise (aged 10) points out on page 3: 'Adults don't help when they don't listen to children's opinions. They make decisions for them when they don't know.' ■

### Wendy Rayner

Cruse bereavement volunteer