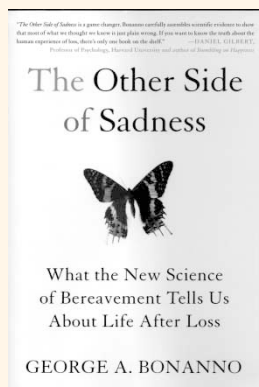


# Book Reviews



## The other side of sadness: what the new science of bereavement tells us about life after loss

George A Bonanno

New York: Basic Books, 2009  
231 pp  
£15.99  
ISBN: 978 046501 360 9

George Bonanno is one of the most important scholars in the bereavement field. His research of the last 15 years has covered many topics including positive emotion and laughter after bereavement, the adaptiveness and maladaptiveness of continuing ties with the deceased, cross-cultural differences in grief, emotional regulation, and ‘trajectories’ of emotional responses to loss. Yet, he is perhaps most well-known for his ground-breaking work on resilience. His message is simple: as one instance of people’s general human capacity to thrive in the face of adversity, most people have the capacity to endure the pain of loss remarkably well. Nevertheless, this message is so easily forgotten by bereavement academics and professionals working for and with the bereaved.

This seems logical: academics are mainly interested in ‘determinants of suffering’ following loss (me included, I have to admit) and professionals working for and with the bereaved are self-evidently concerned with the alleviation of their suffering. So it’s the suffering that attracts most of our attention – as a consequence of which we easily forget that most people recover rapidly from their pain, or experience little or no pain at all. Bonanno wants to make us aware of this and this book is among his latest in pursuit of this mission.

It’s a beautiful book that works on many layers. It is a popular science book that summarises key research findings from recent decades. For instance, Chapter 3 provides a readable overview of research on positive emotion

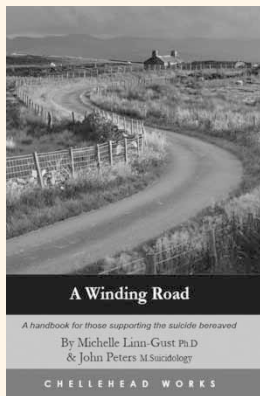
following loss, Chapter 5 discusses predictors of resilience, Chapter 7 addresses problematic grief (which is not neglected in the book), and Chapter 9 deals with continuing bonds. It is a book that reports the stories of various people confronted with loss, and their different ways of coping. The stories of Karen, Daniel, Sondra, and many others help us to understand the concepts of emotion regulation, resilience and continuing ties. And it is a personal story of Bonanno’s own experience of and struggles to deal with the death of his father. Chapter 6 uses these experiences and struggles beautifully to illustrate how losses can provide relief from previous stress. Chapter 11 uses these same experiences to explore the richness of Chinese bereavement rituals. In this same chapter, it is easy to identify with Bonanno’s hesitation over taking part in these rituals: ‘Maybe it was the fact that I was a scientist and practising in this ancient rite was like acknowledging the limits of science.’ Yet it is equally easy to identify with him when he describes the power of such rituals.

Can critical things be said about this book? They always can. Some of the research he cites raises new questions. For instance, emotional flexibility is important, but how is it that some people have the capacity to be emotionally flexible and others don’t? And not much is said about treatment. I sometimes felt a need for a more in-depth discussion of treatment issues (for instance, how can all this knowledge about resilience be translated in good preventive interventions?). Yet I am aware that this is because I am probably too much focused on problems and pain following loss. And that’s one thing I shouldn’t be. No one working with the bereaved should be. That’s the key message of the book.

By bringing together popular science, real stories of real people, and his personal story, Bonanno has succeeded brilliantly in conveying this important message.

### Paul A. Boelen

Assistant professor of clinical psychology, Utrecht University



## A winding road: a handbook for those supporting the suicide bereaved

Michelle Lind-Gust,  
John Peters (eds)

Albuquerque, NM: Chellehead Works,  
2010  
144pp  
\$15.00  
ISBN: 978 0 97233 183 8

**A**s the title indicates, this multi-contributor book is intended for people supporting those bereaved by suicide. The authors come from the UK, the US and Australia, and they manage to tread a fine line between academic rigour and clinical usefulness.

The introductory chapters, written by the two editors, provide background information about suicide in the world today and its impact on individuals and families. These are informative and well worth reading. There follow short chapters on the impact of suicide on children and adolescents (by Michelle Flood) and the workplace (by Emily Duvall). Only four pages, by John Peters, are devoted to cultural dimensions. These hardly enable us to take more than a cursory look at this large subject.

The remaining two thirds of the book are taken up with aspects of care. These fall into three categories: descriptions of services, advice on how to set up other services, and case studies to illustrate the problems that arise.

Among the services we read about is Standby, an Australian, community-based, 24-hour crisis response programme for people bereaved by suicide. A brief history is given of its spread across Australia. This is followed by an account of how the 'Survivor Movement' developed out of the work of the Suicide Prevention Center in Los Angeles, together with a brief description of its work. Neither of these accounts tells us much.

John Peters gives useful practical details on how to set up a support group and a telephone helpline. Pam Dean describes and illustrates a form of art therapy using coloured buttons to help children bereaved by suicide, and Michelle Linn-Gust argues that pets can play a valuable role.

None of the methods of intervention described here have passed the test of systematic evaluation and we should expect little guidance on how to choose between them. No mention is made, for instance, of the research comparing bereavement groups for suicide survivors with social groups. This found that people who attended the bereavement groups expressed less anger and reported less social isolation on follow-up than did those attending the social groups (Constantino & Bricker, 1996).

Among the personal accounts, 'Mary' writes four lengthy emails from Northern Ireland that give a vivid account of her struggles over the course of a year as she comes through the process of grieving the death of her lover. Tracy McLeod writes her own account in the form of a conversation with her dead son. In both cases the stories end with the beginning of new, promising relationships.

From Michelle Flood we learn what helps and what definitely does not in a case study showing the impact of various professionals and neighbours on Laura and her family after her brother died by suicide. Another painful lesson comes from Mark Haith's account of his own experience when, as a junior nursing assistant with no prior training in a mental hospital, he was expected to identify the body of a patient who had died by suicide, to support the family, and to give evidence at the inquest. Unfortunately the book gives little other guidance to professionals on how they can help themselves and each other after a patient dies by suicide.

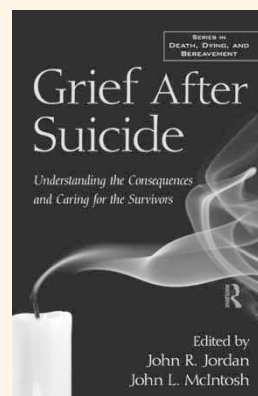
By and large this well-produced book will be of interest to all who care for suicide-survivors, but it cannot seriously compare with the depth of understanding and consistency of Alyson Wertheimer's classic text (2001, 2009).

### Colin Murray Parkes

Consultant psychiatrist/Life president, Cruse

Constantino RE, Bricker PL (1996). Nursing postvention for spousal survivors of suicide. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 17(2) 131–152.

Wertheimer A (2001, revised 2009). *A special scar: the experiences of people bereaved by suicide*. London/New York: Routledge.



## Grief after suicide: understanding the consequences and caring for the survivors

John R Jordan,  
John L McIntosh (eds)

London/New York: Routledge, 2010  
574pp  
£24.95  
ISBN: 978 0 41599 355 5

**L**ike *A Winding Road*, this is a multi-contributor book about people who are bereaved by suicide. It is, however, a very different and much more substantial and demanding book. Whereas *A Winding Road* has ten authors, only one of whom comes from the US, and runs to 140 pages, *Grief after Suicide* has 47 authors, 35

of whom come from the US, and has 544 pages. It updates the earlier volume by Dunne, McIntosh & Dunne-Maxim (1987).

In recent years there has been an enormous amount of research into this topic and a great increase, in the US, in the number and variety of services now available to help those bereaved by suicide. For the serious researcher and clinicians seeking evidence for their practice, this book will be essential reading.

The first section is a comprehensive survey of the impact of suicide on family, friends and professional caregivers. As a professional who has, in the course of a long career as a psychiatrist, lost several patients to suicide, this reviewer would have found the non-judgmental sympathy and understanding expressed in Chapter 5 very helpful. In these circumstances, professional caregivers inevitably blame themselves, as do the families but, far from drawing them together, the shame drives them apart. Just when the family needs the professional's support, the professional's fear of blame causes them to back off.

There follow eight chapters about the principles of care that should govern our interventions. This includes an excellent review by Sands, Jordan and Neimeyer on how to help families examine the meaning of the suicide to both the person who has died and the survivors. Suicides all happen for a reason and, while we should never blame the family, it is a mistake to assume they are not caught up in the same dynamic in which the suicide took place. It may take time and patience to disentangle this complex web but the new meanings that then emerge can be rewarding.

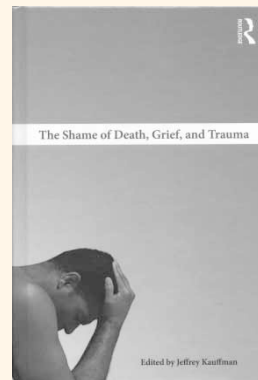
This is followed by an enlightening account, by Jordan, of groups for survivors. Despite the large number of research papers that are reviewed here, Jordan is forced to conclude that '...it is not yet possible to state that support group interventions have been scientifically established as an effective intervention for suicide survivors'. This does not, of course, mean that they are ineffective or that individual help for individual problems is ineffectual, but it does present a challenge to researchers and clinicians.

The rest of the book is devoted to describing 13 American projects for survivors of suicide and five reviews of care in other countries (Hong Kong, Australia, Norway, Slovenia, New Zealand and Belgium). Most of the projects are linked with their respective national suicide prevention programmes, which gives families bereaved by suicide opportunities for creative involvement.

All in all, the editors have done a good job in gathering together leading researchers and clinicians to produce a well-organised account of continuing developments in this important field.

### Colin Murray Parkes

Consultant psychiatrist/Life president, Cruse



## The shame of death, grief and trauma

Jeffrey Kauffman (ed)

New York: Routledge, 2010

215pp

£24.95

ISBN: 978 0 41599 748 5

In his introduction to the book Jeffrey Kauffman says he does not intend to present a unified theory of shame, but to make the case that 'shame is a common and pervasive feature of the human response to death and other loss, and, in this context to give an account of some of the many meanings of shame and some of the many ways in which shame works'.

The book accomplishes this goal with chapters that discuss theoretical aspects of shame from a variety of perspectives. These include personal experience, theoretical perspectives intertwined with personal narrative, combat stress, the narcissistic injury of death in the context of Western society, reflections on the shame of grief from a hospice worker, shame and death in cultural contexts and masks of shame and death, both current and in various cultures and across the ages.

In the first two, theoretical chapters, the pioneering work of Erik Erikson is referred to, and in the final chapter Susan Roos talks about the 'shame implicit in the social meaning and chronic sorrow of disability'. Roos mentions people, such as President Kennedy, who have been public about their family's experience of disability, reflects on her own experience as the mother of two disabled children and mentions that both Erikson and Arthur Miller were the fathers of sons with Down's syndrome whom they institutionalised and disowned.

This is a book that can leave the reader feeling unexpectedly uncomfortable. Rosenblatt, for example, notes: '...it would not be surprising that shame is a relatively taboo topic in the United States, because there is potentially great shame in thinking about the death and misery the country has produced around the world' (p. 130). The book is written primarily by US writers who bring in more cross-cultural and anthropological aspects than is sometimes the case.

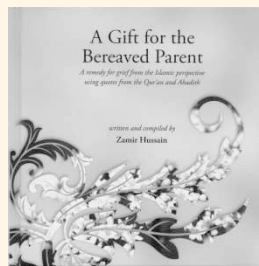
The major flaw in the book is that, other than acknowledging the importance of attachment in grief and making a couple of references to the work of Colin Murray Parkes, it does not cover the work currently being done on complicated/prolonged grief. There is no recognition that attachment issues are salient in creating vulnerability to prolonged grief disorder, which is being proposed for inclusion in DSM V (Prigerson *et al*, 2009). A chapter on

attachment, shame and prolonged/complicated grief would have been an important addition to a book that is otherwise of greater relevance to clinicians and academics alike.

### Mary LS Vachon

Psychotherapist/Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Prigerson HG, Horowitz MJ, Jacobs SC *et al* (2009). Prolonged grief disorder: psychometric validation of criteria proposed for DSM-V and ICD-11. *PLoS Med* 6(8) e1000121. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000121



### A gift for the bereaved parent

Zamir Hussain

London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, 2010  
56pp  
£4.95  
ISBN: 978 1 84200 117 2

Zamir Hussain is a Muslim chaplain working in a children's hospital in Birmingham. She has had extensive experience of dealing with, counselling and supporting bereaved Muslim parents following the death of a child. In this book she has drawn on her experience and knowledge, specifically from an Islamic perspective, to create a simple and very effective resource for bereaved Muslim parents.

The book is very well designed with a soothing motif running from the cover through the pages, and beautiful Arabic calligraphy to complement the artwork. The author has carefully chosen and collated most of the traditional verses from the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book) and Ahadith (sayings from the Prophet Muhammed) associated with grief and bereavement. These are exceptionally important for any Muslim seeking solace and comfort from their faith. The verses, sayings and incidents of the Prophet will be a great source of help to a Muslim parent at this very difficult time.

The book is very thoughtfully interspersed with the 'parent's inner voice' – in the author's own words and gleaned from her work as a Muslim chaplain – expressing the feelings and thoughts of a bereaved parent.

The 'parent's inner voice' talks about the internal discord and tensions likely to arise in the heart and mind of a Muslim parent coming to terms with the death of their child. On the one hand, they have lost their most beloved possession, the treasure of their life, and are filled with tremendous pain; on the other hand, their belief and faith in God has always taught them that all things, including

human beings, belong to God and will in time return to Him. The voice speaks to God, explaining this deep love for the child while accepting His will, and praying to Him for strength and forbearance. Having counselled many Muslim parents myself, I believe the 'parent's inner voice' has captured and described real feelings to which a parent will be able to relate.

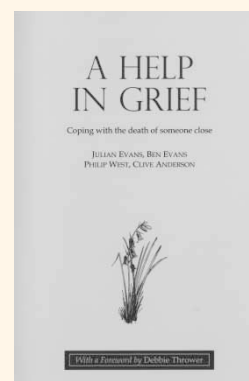
A few of the 99 names (attributes) of Allah (God) have been added on some pages, illustrated in beautiful Arabic calligraphy with the English translation, reminding the reader of the importance and benefits of calling upon God at this difficult time.

This is a very welcome book, filling an important gap in bereavement support. There are not many books that bring together so much material in one publication.

I would recommend this book to any bereaved Muslim parent seeking comfort from their Islamic faith. It is an excellent short book that can be kept in the bedside drawer and constantly referred to following bereavement. The religious content is suitable for all types of loss and bereavement and is not restricted to the death of a child.

### Yunus Dudhwala

Head of chaplaincy and bereavement services, Newham University Hospital NHS Trust



### A help in grief – coping with the death of someone close

Julian Evans, Ben Evans, Philip West, Clive Anderson

Basingstoke: Patula Books, 2010  
146pp  
£4.95  
ISBN: 978 0 95419 4473 4

A Help in Grief aims to provide practical advice on coping with the death of someone close. It aims to cover practical and emotional perspectives – to guide the reader through practicalities, and to normalise the disturbing experience of grief.

The book is good because it is an undemanding read and would be useful to people who may not have grieved before. It is also very inexpensive. But it could be much better.

Because it is written by four men – a father and son, a GP and a minister – the book has several distinct voices. The benefit is that the reader can dip into their stories with relative ease – but perhaps at the expense of continuity.

The different perspectives of each contributor are also interesting. However the voice is invariably male – although the writers do indicate that they have had input from female colleagues.

I had expected a more reflexive read – several chapters start promisingly with a description of the moment the writer discovered that he had become bereaved. I feel that a great opportunity was missed, in that the writers did not extend those accounts further. There was a tendency to shift into didacticism: ‘You/they might feel...’ I wanted to know how the writers had felt – what was their lived experience?

I do find it useful to read reflexive, autobiographical accounts to help me understand my own evolving autobiographical disentanglement of what it is to be me. When I am grieving, I find it useful to read how someone else has coped. So it was disappointing that the ‘personal reflections’ were so insubstantial.

The dual process framework for understanding grief has been around for a while now, so I was a little dismayed that this recent book still uses the terminology of ‘phases of grief’. I can’t think of many examples where a bereaved person has derived comfort from this concept.

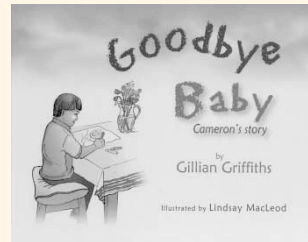
The practical advice section on what to do after a death is helpful – although it risks becoming outdated rapidly, and most of the information is contained in the government publication *What To Do After a Death*.

The problem with trying to write a catch-all book on bereavement is that all bereavements are unique. In seeking to incorporate all the colours, the artist ends up with brown. Arguably the writers would have produced a better, truer book by telling the real story of their grieving. Or they should have kept the focus of the book on normalisation. Or they should have written a manual on the practical aspects of dealing with death.

As it stands, the book is OK but not great. I am sorry to be writing this because I do think the authors are very sincere about their subject. But to achieve this little book’s potential, they will have to risk a little more of themselves, and emerge from the theory and the didactic. I hope they revise it at some point.

### Phil Clarkstone

Manager, Greenwich Cruse/Counsellor



### Goodbye Baby: Cameron's Story

Gillian Griffiths

Illustrations by Lindsay MacLeod  
Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press,  
2010  
13pp  
£6.99  
ISBN: 978 0 71520 940 0

This book for younger children is about a family bereaved by stillbirth. It describes how young Cameron excitedly awaits a new addition to his family. Then his mother has to go into hospital, and returns without the baby. The book is about how to explain to Cameron what happened, and how his questions were answered.

This is a beautifully illustrated book. Its length is about right for reading to a small child (aged 3–6 years), or for an older child (seven years onward) to read for her or himself. These ages of course may vary depending on the child’s developmental age. I personally feel it would be more beneficial if children read it with an adult, so their questions or anxieties can be explored and answered.

There are some very good touches and details. I particularly like the way Cameron’s upset feelings – mixed up and angry – are highlighted, to prompt further exploration and discussion with the young reader who may be feeling similar, confused and confusing emotions. There is just enough detail about what has happened to the baby child, and the questions children are likely to ask are incorporated sensitively into the story.

The pages describing what children can do to remember the baby could be very helpful to a bereaved family – the book suggests, for example, making a scrapbook to hold the sympathy cards, drawing a picture of what the baby might have looked like, planting a tree and placing a flower. Having something practical to do to express grief can be very helpful to the child and the whole family.

The book does have a strong Christian theme – the repeated references to a Christian heaven in the sky means it may not be relevant to people of other faiths and those who do not share these beliefs. The book would have a more universal appeal if it had been less prescriptive about where the ‘special person’ goes after death, whether a child chooses to call it ‘heaven’ or (for example) a favourite holiday place.

### Wendy Rayner

Cruse bereavement volunteer