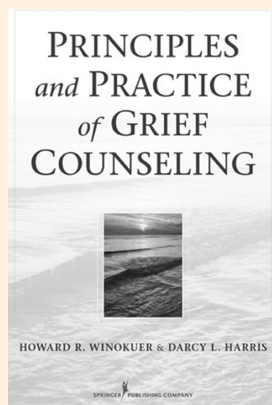


Book Reviews



Principles and practice of grief counseling

Howard Winokuer and Darcy Harris

New York: Springer Publishing Company
2012
242pp
£42.95
ISBN: 978 0 8261 0872 2

Howard Winokuer has spent over thirty years involved in the field of grief and bereavement. His experience in the field shines through in this timely addition to the literature on bereavement counselling, linking as it does basic elements of counselling practice with the needs of bereaved clients. Darcy Harris is based in Ontario, Canada where she is co-ordinator of the Thanatology programme at King's University College. She also maintains a private practice as well as presenting widely on topics related to grief and loss.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section is a short introduction to the basic elements of counselling practice. It also includes a brief history of bereavement theory, focusing in particular on the contribution of attachment, stage and phase models to our current knowledge of bereavement, as well as covering more contemporary theories such as dual process and Niemeyer's recent work on the importance of meaning reconstruction. From a counselling intervention perspective, the inclusion of psychological growth as a possible outcome in bereavement is noteworthy as for too long bereavement has been seen as a negative life event.

There is an interesting linking chapter in this first section where the authors allude to the grieving process as an adaptive response and not a form of pathology. This sets the scene for the second section in the book where specific counselling techniques are described that may be helpful to the bereaved. The goal of grief counselling therefore is 'to facilitate the unfolding of the healthy and adaptive aspects of the process' in the hope that this will enable the bereaved to recreate a life of meaning. The book highlights the importance of 'presence' in the counselling relationship as one of the key helpful features in bereavement support. It

highlights the different issues which can emerge in normal grief, more prolonged grief and ambiguous loss. The overview of counselling techniques specific to bereavement issues offer very good descriptions drawing on an obvious wealth of experience in this area. These range from narrative methods to the use of rituals and mindfulness as ways of coping with grief.

The final chapters deal with self care and ethical issues while the last chapter very usefully looks at current trends and issues and deals with topics such as the importance of highlighting resilience and recognising diversity in grief response.

This is a very useful introductory text both to new practitioners in the field of grief counselling as well as those who work with bereaved clients on a regular basis. ■

Helen Greally

Director of Psychology & Support Services, Cancer Care West



Grief and its challenges

Neil Thompson

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
2012
197pp
£14.99
ISBN: 978 0 230 27756 4

Grief and its challenges provides a broad overview of grief, not only describing classic and contemporary theories of grief but also setting them within a wider personal and social context. The book explores the application of grief theory beyond that of bereavement to loss events across the life course eg. divorce, miscarriage, moving house, natural disaster etc. It is also firmly focused on the implications for practitioners. This is aided by the illustrative case vignettes woven into the text and the 'points to ponder' at the end of each chapter.

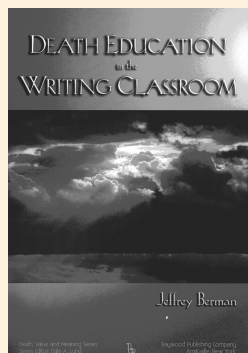
The book is divided into three sections: Part 1, 'Making sense of grief' explores loss and the reactions to it, addressing the biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of grief. Crisis, as a life turning point and trauma, as a psychosocial wound, are defined and

analysed. The wider social context of grief is also set out. Part 2, 'Grief and healing' affirms the normality of grief and the need, in most cases, only for informal support within the context of peoples' own social network. Nevertheless, help from a professional perspective is considered, and a holistic approach to effective helping described. Part 3, 'Grief without healing' addresses complications in grief, giving consideration to those factors which contribute to complexity, and the psychological and social problems which might result.

The description, which the author himself gives of the book, is as a 'gateway text'. This captures its intention to introduce themes which might invite more extensive reading and study, but it is also a comprehensive 'gateway' providing an eminently readable and accessible text which is extremely pertinent for students and practitioners, across health and social care services. I highly recommend this excellent book. ■

Linda Machin

Visiting Research Fellow, Keele University



Death education in the writing classroom

Jeffrey Berman

Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 2012
243pp
\$48.95
ISBN 978 0 89503 428 1

This book is an unusual hybrid. It combines a practical teaching manual with an extended case study and examples illustrating how young adult students (late teens to early 20s) can develop their expressive writing skills whilst reflecting on their own and other's experiences of love and loss. It refers extensively to Berman's earlier book *Dying to Teach – A Memoire of Love, Loss, and Learning* (2007), his account of his wife Barbara's death from pancreatic cancer and his personal response to that traumatic loss. *Dying to Teach* (ibid) is the sole required reading for Berman's course entitled 'Love and Loss' which he teaches at the University of Albany, New York.

A useful appendix (worth reading first, pp 221–230), provides an outline of the course and the written assignments Berman sets for his students. Themes such as 'Writing about how an Experience of Love or Loss has changed a Classmate', 'Posttraumatic Growth', and 'Write as if You Were Dying' provide triggers for students' writing and form the basis of discussion in the class.

When students' writing is read out loud in the classroom, Berman's approach to offering feedback is focused on improving technical skills (including spelling, grammar and punctuation), but alongside this the class is encouraged to discuss each other's responses to the assignments and to reflect in journals and essays on their understanding of the often difficult and sad subject matter. Berman brings his expertise in the twin disciplines of literature and psychoanalysis together in his facilitation of the often difficult and sad subject matter.

It is clear, as the course progresses, that many of the students find the topic challenging – indeed many mention that friends and family have questioned their choice of course – but Berman's themed approach provides a framework through which they can learn in a mutually supportive way. The result suggests a model of how death education can be integrated into the classroom.

Extended examples of students' writing (published with their express consent, in some cases anonymously) make moving reading and provide insight into their personal growth during and after the course. Berman's own reflections and those of his teaching assistant (often with refreshing humour) provide insight into the tutor-facilitator's experience.

While aimed at the educator rather than the counsellor or therapist, this book sits alongside the work of Pennebaker (1990, rev. 1997), Neimeyer (2001) and Bolton (1999) in arguing a case for the value of writing as a means of expression in bereavement, and in enabling people to understand and adjust to loss. Berman does well to preserve boundaries, given the very personal nature of the subject matter from his own point of view. The focus on his own experience, through the use of *Dying to Teach* at the heart of his teaching approach, suggests that this may be his own way to achieve meaning making (Neimeyer 2001) following his wife's death. Whether this is the case or not, his students seem enriched by the experience of the course which several describe as life changing.

Readers interested in using writing and other creative techniques as part of bereavement support, or who are interested in the therapeutic value of creativity as a means of self expression in grief work, will find Berman's approach fascinating and stimulating. ■

Jane Moss

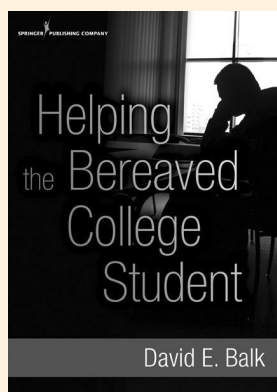
Writer and Cruse bereavement volunteer

Berman J (2007). *Dying to teach, a memoire of love, loss and learning*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bolton G (1999). *The therapeutic potential of creative writing – writing myself*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Neimeyer R (2001). *Meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Pennebaker J W (1990 rev 1997). *Opening up – the healing power of expressing emotions*. New York: Guilford.



Helping the bereaved college student

David E Balk

New York: Springer Publishing Company
2011
253pp
£43.50
ISBN: 978 0 8261 0878 4

From years of working with young people, and expertise in bereavement, the author seeks to assist grieving college students and the campus professionals who support them. His extensive research concludes that between 22 and 30% of students on a typical American campus are in the first 12 months of grieving the death of a family member or friend – a significant proportion, frequently hidden and unsupported. Death of a loved one at this age (18–23) when already struggling with their own identity and life's meanings, challenges their assumptive world. Balk acknowledges that grief is hard for others to accept, tends to be ignored, and students often grieve alone. This disregard can mean anything from disruption of studies to permanent mental health problems.

It is divided into four main parts, with a total of 13 chapters, each having a succinct summary. Part 1 contextualises today's student with what we know about bereavement and its effects. Major models and theories of bereavement (ie Worden's tasks, Stroebe's dual process, Klass and Silverman's continuing bonds, Bonanno's 3 trajectories) are drawn on, with emphasis on finding personal meaning in a world without the deceased.

Part 2 looks at research results from studies of this 'hidden' population of bereaved students, family resources and the impact of bereavement on personal and academic lives. It begins to examine what bereaved college students actually need by collating what they have found helpful or difficult or wished was available.

Part 3 explores how the campus can be responsive and proactive to aid 'recovery' and to assist student retention and achievement rates. Balk discusses what students actually experience ie the longevity and intensity of grief, and how they behave. He cites the value of attentive listening, interventions tailored to intuitive grieving (support groups) or instrumental grieving (educative workshops), peer counselling and the place of spirituality.

The final part offers hope for the future and encourages closer collaboration between researchers and practitioners to promote more effective campus policies and procedures which can proffer the springboard for change.

Clearly written and presented, this book contains numerous real scenarios, but compared to say, 'Facing

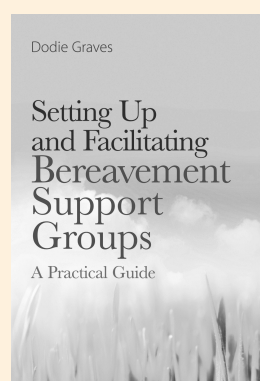
Grief' or Gilbert's 'little' book, is probably too fact laden and of less immediate value for students themselves to dip into. It is though, a comprehensive handbook for professionals which draws together a wealth of research, examines what bereaved students need and offers constructive strategies for change. ■

Heather Price

Bereavement Volunteer

Gilbert I (2010). *The little book of bereavement for schools*. Wales and USA: Crown House Publishing Ltd.

Wallbank S (2003). *Facing grief – bereavement and the young adult* (3rd ed). Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press.



Setting up and facilitating bereavement support groups – a practical guide

Dodie Graves

London: Jessica Kingsley
2012
£18.99
ISBN: 1 8490 5271 9

In the current tough economic climate many bereavement agencies may find it more cost effective to work with groups of people rather than individually.

The author admits that groups can sometimes be intimidating, both for facilitator and participant, so good preparation is essential. The reader is taken through a discussion on a range of different groups, so that from the outset it is very clear what type of group is to be run, the aim of the group and who it is for. Nothing is overlooked here – from selection criteria, group size, and timing, to refreshments.

We then explore the actual facilitation – volunteers or professionals, the role of facilitators and what make a good facilitator – interestingly what emerges more than anything is the importance of the facilitator having already explored their own bereavement issues. It is recommended that there be at least two facilitators for every group, for a number of reasons, and that they each have some experience in listening skills and in group management. Supervision is advisable for the leaders between every session.

As anyone who has run a bereavement group is aware, it is not only the subject matter which can pose difficulties, but also the interpersonal dynamics. Here the author gives us numerous practical tips on checking in and out, being respectful, using humour, managing dominant group members, handling silences, working with reluctant participants, and managing strong emotions.

Sensitive subjects are not shied away from such as suicide risk, cliques in and outside of the group, touching and hugging, religious beliefs, sexuality and loss of a sexual partner.

Each chapter is interspersed with snapshots of real scenarios – these illustrate actual happenings in a group and/or suggested wording for tricky situations. There is also a case study of a closed group and another of an open group. Even present are specimens of helpful paperwork including an excellent example of a list of ground rules.

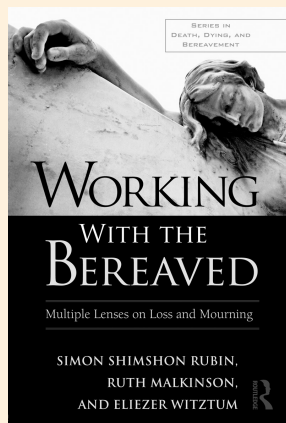
There is a deliberate absence of theoretical approaches to group work. The focus is on practical matters and in this respect it has many similarities to *The Red Book of Groups* though the latter does not specifically mention bereavement groups and is more to do with what goes on in groups rather than leading them.

This very readable book is an excellent practical guide for anyone thinking of setting up a bereavement support group. ■

Heather Price

Bereavement Volunteer

Houston G (1990). *The red book of groups: and how to lead them better*. Rochester Foundation.



Working with the Bereaved: Multiple Lenses on Loss and Mourning

Simon Shimshon Rubin,
Ruth Malkinson, Eliezer
Witztum

New York: Taylor & Francis Group
2012
83pp
£19.99
ISBN: 978 0 415 88166 1

The authors of this book have many years of experience of dealing successfully with the aftermath of challenging loss situations including sudden, traumatic and violent death. They present a structured and coherent framework for approaching work with clients who are bereaved based on their Two Track Model of Bereavement (TTMoB). This looks at how clients respond to loss situations on two tracks – bio psychosocial functioning (how natural functioning has been affected) and relationship to the deceased (how their relationship with the person who has died changes).

The authors begin in Section I by stating their approach to bereavement interventions – that of trying to help

clients find, and choose, life after loss. This is followed by reviewing current perspectives on bereavement including key themes such the importance of interpersonal relationships and the potential for significant change following loss. Section II provides a detailed and thorough explanation of the TTMoB. Useful case studies are included which help the reader to understand how the TTMoB can be used in actual bereavement situations. Of particular note is the chapter in this section which deals with the interface of trauma and bereavement.

Section III looks at how insights from the TTMoB can be integrated with various therapeutic approaches including psychodynamic, cognitive behaviour, letter writing and family systems theory. This is a very useful section for practitioners, which is again well served by relevant case study examples.

The last Section (IV) looks at the broader horizon in which loss takes place and includes an excellent chapter on socio-cultural aspects of grief. The section also touches on practical issues such as dealing with emergency situations following a loss (eg. potential suicidality), and the importance of self-care for practitioners.

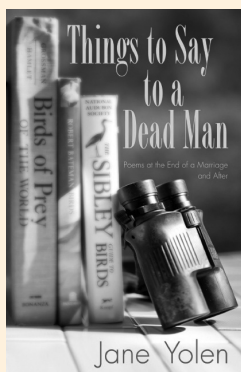
This is a comprehensive and practical book, which although at times can be very detailed, will nevertheless be a valuable addition to anyone working in the field of bereavement. For lecturers and students, it describes a practical and useful grief model that sits comfortably with Worden's Tasks (2009), and Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process (1999). One of its main strengths is in the practical application of the TTMoB and here the book will be of great appeal to practitioners in the field. ■

Breffi McGuinness

Training and Development Irish Hospice Foundation Bereavement Services

Stroebe M and Schut H (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: rationale and description. *Death Studies* 23(3): 197–224.

Worden W (2009). *Grief counselling and grief therapy – a handbook for the mental health practitioner*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.



Things to say to a dead man: poems at the end of a marriage and after

Jane Yolen

Duluth: Holy Cow Press
2011
60pp
£10.20
ISBN: 978 0 9833254 0 6

Jane Yolen is well known as a writer of fiction for adults and children and for retelling traditional stories. This collection of poems was written in response to her own experience of the death of her husband. It is in four sections representing a five year timeline of her grief – ‘The Dying’, ‘The Dead Man’, ‘First Year’ and ‘And After’.

I found it a collection of very moving poems, which captured the minutia of the grieving process. The small details that books on grief may gloss over, or miss out entirely, are reflected in these poems. Her first poem is ‘Things to say to a dying man’, and takes the reader into those moments of sitting by the bed trying to give reassurances, with small glimpses of the outside world impinging on your senses. ‘Parts of speech’ captures the dilemmas of talking about a loved one and how even the simplest of phrases can take on a new and confused meaning as you struggle to come to terms with a pending death.

The poems addressing the death of her husband are equally insightful, both sharing her own feelings but touching on the universality of the everyday experience of a pillow that still carries the scent of a loved one, or of the impact of the first time it rained on the grave. The focus is on preserving small memories and the first year is summed up in the lines of the poem ‘Two months later’:

‘Do not help me to forget
Help me to remember.’

Which is again reflected in the final section, in the poem ‘Grief is not’:

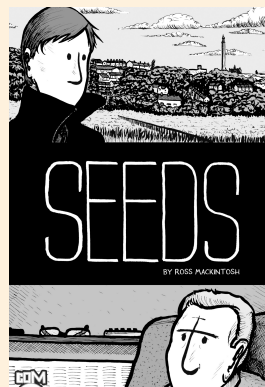
‘Grief is not unwelcome here,
For it reminds me of how much I have lost
And how blessed I was
To have so much to lose.’

This is a collection of poems that is easy to read, which does not overwhelm the reader with the author’s own grief, but offers balanced insights into the grief process, as well as a moving testament to the dilemmas of grief. It works well as a tool for bereavement counsellors to understand the bereavement process, and for sharing with clients to enable them to recognise the universality of the small things that

they may feel only they have experienced or witnessed. It also works well as a reminder of things to say to the living. ■

Janet Dowling

Bereavement Volunteer



Seeds

Ross Macintosh, Benjamin Shahrabani and Eddie Deighton

London, England
Com.x
84 pp
2011
£6.99
ISBN : 978 0 9832238 0 1

‘Seeds’ is a comic book graphic novel that is a solemn, thoughtful retelling of the real life experience of people coming to terms with bereavement, carrying with it a promise that this sensitive subject will be dealt with in a respectful way in this format.

Dialogue is minimalist, with the force of the story carried through the simple black line illustrations. Many of the faces do not have mouths. Initially I felt this to be quite eerie, then realised that as the story progressed, that the open ended nature of the pictures and expressions enabled me to relate and bring in my own emotions. The simple repeat of a tennis ball motif in different frames became a stark reminder of the humanity that was being portrayed and the power of memory. I was moved following one sequence of pictures, when the author is woken in the early morning, and asked to go to his parents’ house to assist his mother ‘“help” his father into the shower’ after an overnight incident. With sensitive framing, and few words, the dilemma of becoming a parent to your own parent, as they are dying, is expressed.

This would be a useful book to use with older children and adults experiencing bereavement, who find a graphic novel format more to their reading taste. For other adults, the ‘novelty’ of a graphic novel addressing such a subject in an intelligent way may be intriguing, and thus more open to engage and exploring the issues.

It’s a true life account (always the more powerful), minimalist in its application of emotional overtones but with the illustrations open to personal interpretation and exploration by the reader. It could also form the basis of discussion group material in a school or bereavement group setting.

Janet Dowling

Bereavement Volunteer