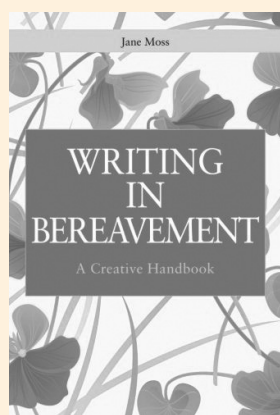


Book Reviews



Writing in bereavement: a creative handbook

Jane Moss

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

2012

264pp

£19.99

ISBN: 978 1 84905 212 2

Learning to manage feelings can either be a blessing or a curse, and is made much more difficult if you struggle to express yourself, or do not have a framework in which to explore those feelings without being overwhelmed. Writing is one way to channel those feelings but even then many people have found it difficult to know what to say and how to say it, how to start or even how to share it.

Jane Moss's *Writing in bereavement* is a breath of fresh air. She is both a creative writing tutor and a Cruse Bereavement Care volunteer, and runs a writing group for people who have been bereaved. It is aimed at people interested in facilitating creative writing, rather than directly for the bereaved themselves (although it could also be useful for the latter).

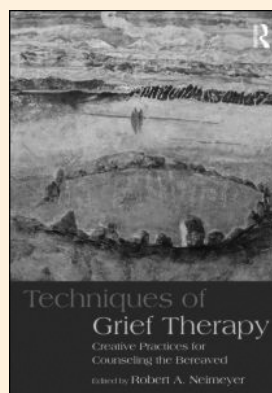
She describes the process of setting up a writing group, selection and resources, and uses fictionalised examples of a group (based on her own experience) in order to explain the process and reflect on the experiences of different members. She outlines the different techniques and structures of writing – from journaling to free writing, from acrostic poetry to the six word story, from haiku to the unsent letter – and gives examples of how they can be applied. At every stage she reflects back on the theory of bereavement support, whilst giving examples of work that might be produced, and how the facilitator may respond. Creating space to reflect by both the facilitator and the participants is the key word, and Moss gives plenty of support and advice on how to approach this.

The final chapters include practical resources and references, as well as a structure for writing sessions including setting up and running the first meeting. Even if

you are a writer with some experience, it is a very useful summary of the forms of writing and how they can be applied in this setting, and for those taking first steps in this kind of work it provides both the writing resources and a safe framework to offer people who are bereaved another way to explore feelings and emotion.

Janet Dowling

Bereavement Volunteer



Techniques of grief therapy: creative practices for counselling the bereaved

Robert A Neimeyer (ed)

New York: Routledge

2012

388pp

£28.99

ISBN 978 0 415 80725 8

Robert A Neimeyer is actively engaged in clinical practice as well as being a professor of psychology at the University of Memphis, and most people involved in bereavement counselling will have come across his extensive publications. His latest contribution is a dazzling addition to the practical application of therapeutic support for the bereaved. It is a book for anyone working in this area whether you are a newly trained counsellor or someone with years of experience because it offers a vast array of creative techniques to use with different age groups and in different settings.

The book is organized in an intuitive, thematic way where each section covers a different aspect of grief counselling including: 'Working with the body', 'Transforming trauma', 'Changing behaviour', 'Finding meaning', 'Renewing the bond', 'Integrating the arts' and 'Grieving with others'. It concludes with an often overlooked area 'Healing the healer' which focuses on how practitioners take care of themselves when caring for others.

Each of the ninety-four chapters tells you which clients the technique is appropriate for followed by a detailed description of the technique, a case example and concluding thoughts. It is highly practical and points out common pitfalls that can be avoided as well as providing sample worksheets and activities to be used both in and between sessions.

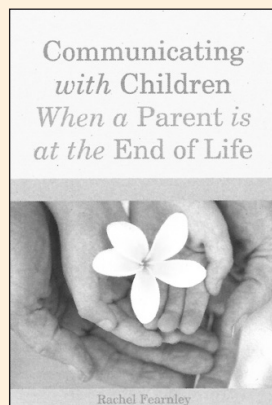
Anyone who has ever felt stuck with a client will find a way forward using the material collected here which

includes psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural and experiential approaches. There really is something for everyone in *Techniques of Grief Therapy*, which is hardly surprising since Neimeyer has gathered together some of the most significant contributors to grief counselling in the twenty-first century including Joanne Cacciatore, Therese Rando, Thomas Attig and Kenneth Doka.

The aim of the book, 'was to present a rich and representative smorgasbord of methods for engaging grief and its complications with greater creativity and awareness of alternatives' (Prologue xvii) and the book certainly attains this goal. It does more; it provides us with a banquet of ideas and techniques that will sustain us for a very long time.

Brenda Mallon

Author of *Death, dying and grief: Working with adult bereavement*



Communicating with children when a parent is at the end of life

Rachel Fearnley

London: Jessica Kingsley
2012
187pp
£19.99
ISBN: 978 1 84905 234 4

This book arrived on my desk on the day I was preparing a workshop about 'Supporting children when a parent is terminally ill'. What an asset it proved to be!

The importance of communicating with children is the central tenet of this book. In my learning from families one of the reasons that this often does not happen, and as a result children feel confused, scared and excluded, is that the adults in the child's world just don't know where to start. This book will go a long way towards professionals developing an understanding of how they can support and enable families to think about starting these challenging conversations. The perspectives of and the real challenges for the parents are carefully and sensitively considered.

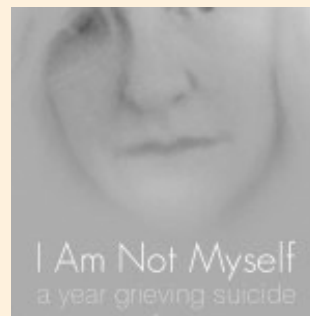
The development of the concept of the communication continuum is extremely helpful in thinking about children's involvement, understanding and the need for information. Crucially the importance of listening to children is stressed. The book is an excellent balance between theoretical concepts and practical strategies. It includes sections related to a wide variety of means of communication, including

the spoken language, creative mediums, books and play. The frequent use of case vignettes, 'practice points' and reflective exercises encourages the reader to actively engage with the book and apply it to their own work setting. These activities also encourage the reader to consider the emotional impact on themselves of engaging in this work.

The book is concise and clearly written. It is an essential resource for all professionals working in the palliative care field; in addition many of the principles could be applied to working with a child living with a parent with any form of illness or disability, or a child who is suddenly bereaved.

Dr Ann Rowland

Director of Bereavement Services, Child Bereavement Charity



I am not myself: a year grieving suicide

Julie Gray

Kindle edition via Amazon
pp60
2011
Kindle only: £1.53

The experience of bereavement is both familiar and highly individual, with personal variations on well-recognised themes. When the bereavement occurs as a result of suicide, the themes are darker, and with additional bass notes.

There is shock, of course, when a previously healthy person ends his or her life; and guilt, with the nagging doubts about things said and done, or more often unsaid or undone. Some themes are heightened after suicide, when there is anger ('How could he do this to us?'), puzzlement ('How can someone feel that bad without it showing?') and anxiety ('Have I inherited this vulnerability to depression? Have my children?').

The additional themes following death by suicide are linked: *isolation* and *shame*. When you lose someone to heart disease or cancer others sympathise, share *their* experience of loss, and offer support. But if you are bereaved by suicide, it can be hard for others to know what to say, or even whether to say anything at all, because there is still something hidden, something shameful, about this mode of death. We may no longer deny those who die this way a churchyard burial but all too often we subtly exclude the survivors from the support we freely offer those bereaved by natural causes.

In her short memoir, available on Kindle via Amazon, Julie Gray explores this territory from a highly personal perspective. She is American, now settled in Israel, but her

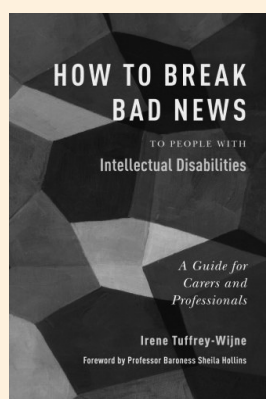
experience transcends boundaries. Her much-loved brother Pete killed himself after what appears to be a long struggle with under-treated depression. In what is at times a very raw first person account, she covers the year following his death, concluding that:

‘it’s a special kind of hell, losing someone to suicide. My brother is free, but we who remain are wounded forever.’

It does not matter that the section on resources is brief and US-focussed, because the main resource is the author’s honesty and directness. Sharing this experience, and how it changed over the course of the year, may have helped her navigate her own grief: but it also has a wider value. It shows others who are similarly bereaved that they are not alone, that the questions they ask themselves have all been asked before, and ultimately, that this grief which dare not speak its name *can* be borne.

Stephen Potts

Consultant psychiatrist



How to break bad news to people with intellectual disabilities: a guide for carers and professionals

Irene Tuffrey-Wijne

London: Jessica Kingsley
2012
189pp
£14.99
ISBN 1 84905280 8

Working with someone with intellectual disabilities can be challenging enough – trying to balance their level of comprehension and emotional response. When bereavement or anticipated death enters the frame many people are at a loss at how to proceed, not least when their own experience may influence their responses and there can be an instinct to protect others from bad news.

It’s not an approach to be taken lightly, and the opening words of the author’s acknowledgements give some indication of how much thought and preparation have gone into this – ‘seven years of research and reflection’. Based at St George’s, University of London, the author has drawn on the experience of colleagues, carers and people with intellectual disabilities and gives clear guidelines of how to approach the task. The guidelines can also be found at www.breakingbadnews.org.

The book is structured in five parts, and covers a wide range of bad news situations including bereavement and

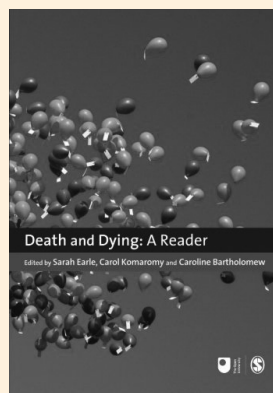
anticipated death. It is also relevant for working with change – a trip that has been cancelled, a day centre closing down, or maybe parents’ divorce. Part one is background information on intellectual disabilities and the existing resources for breaking bad news. Part two describes the new guidelines and principles underpinning it. Part three goes into more detail on the guidelines and how they can be used in practice. Part four gives practical examples, and how it’s important to respond to personal circumstances, abilities and needs. The final part is the appendix which gives a quick overview of the guidelines, some examples of questions to use, as well as a summary of issues about mental capacity and other resources.

The author deals with the subject with sensitivity and respect. It’s a very structured, patient approach, and allows the reader to pause and reflect on the teaching points, and at times to feel challenged by the content. She is very clear about how to manage the information sharing – breaking it into chunks, and then delivering it at the pace the individual feel comfortable with. She gives many examples of how people with intellectual disabilities have been enabled to receive bad news, and I was most touched at the man who was dying from cancer who was supported to visit a hospice to do a small voluntary job there, so that when his time came to enter the hospice himself, he was already familiar with the staff and surroundings and so felt more relaxed there.

This is an excellent book. It is thought provoking, and well-structured. It enables the reader to develop better insights into the impact of receiving bad news, not just for people with learning disabilities, but also in mainstream life. It deserves a place on everyone’s bookshelf.

Janet Dowling

Bereavement Volunteer



Death and dying: a reader

Sarah Earle, Carol Komaromy, Caroline Bartholomew (eds)

London: Sage
2008
276 pp
£23.99
ISBN 1847875106

As the title promises, *Death and Dying: A reader* is an excellent compilation of earlier and more recent studies and articles on death and dying – but as a Cruse volunteer and trainer, I was disappointed the

area of bereavement, grief and mourning received so little attention.

This book nonetheless offers extensive knowledge and information concerning issues related to death and dying, incorporating relevant literature and research that will provide students and practitioners in this area with current reflection and theory, in addition to promoting further critical thinking and research.

Divided into five sections, the first part focuses on the meaning of death, exploring how individuals grasp the concept of death within the contexts of medical settings, legal systems, sociological demographics, technology, and spiritual beliefs. The second part of the book examines global, social and ethnographic perspectives relating to end-of-life care issues, with a particular focus on individuals and organizations involved. The third part concurrently explores several moral and ethical dilemmas that emerge in this area. Attention is given to the role of the family, and children's rights and autonomy are challenged. It includes some difficult questions and interesting, if provocative, discussions.

The fourth part of the book investigates rituals following a death, and is quite a pot pourri of articles and research, from grief theory to grandparents' grief, from roadside memorials to genocide in Rwanda, and from the impact of cremation to online memorialisation. The fifth and final part of the book analyses some of the issues arising from researching the areas of death, dying and bereavement. If these are still taboo subjects and research participants considered vulnerable, how can researchers facilitate sensitively designed yet empirically reliable studies that will be respected and valued by other professionals? Attention is also paid to the maintenance of the researcher's well being, and to the relevance of research in this area for practitioners and fundholders.

Death and Dying: A reader accompanies another book by the same authors called *Making Sense of Death, Dying and Bereavement*. These are the set books for the Open University undergraduate course 'Death and Dying' (K260). This book has a lot to offer to the right readers: knowing something of the politics, sociology, philosophy, and medical practices bereaved people may have witnessed during their loved ones' illnesses and deaths can hopefully only enhance my work. But ultimately volunteers such as me must not feel any shame in favouring popular bereavement-specific texts and more easily assimilated material.

Trish Staples

Bereavement Volunteer



Borrowed narratives: using biographical and historical grief narratives with the bereaving

Harold Ivan Smith

New York: Routledge
2012
299pp
£29.99
ISBN 978 0 415 89394 7

Harold Ivan Smith is a 'preacher' who grew up in Indiana listening to his farming grandfathers tell stories. He is a rich story teller, who speaks of being encouraged in his ideas by such key grief experts as Rabbi Earl Grollman, Ben Wolfe and Robert Neimeyer. Early on he felt his calling to the ministry and was told by his father that if he wanted to become a preacher then he better 'do good in history in school because preachers have to know history' (p x).

Smith says that from his early years he was always interested in 'the rest of the story' which led to his interest in historical figures and how their grief experiences influenced their lives. He has a particular interest in the grief of American presidents and first ladies and tells rich stories of the grief histories of such famous figures as George Washington, who might never have been president if Martha's first husband had not died leaving her the wealthiest widow in the colonies; Abraham and Mary Lincoln; Theodore Roosevelt, who died of an embolus a few days after his first Christmas after his son, Quentin died in the war; Eleanor Roosevelt, who learned just after Franklin's death that he had been with the mistress he had promised to give up 27 years previously; Jack and Jackie Kennedy who became closer to each other as they grieved their infant son, Patrick's death, shortly before Jack was killed; and George HW and Barbara Bush, who played golf the day after their daughter died, because her father urged her to exercise after spending weeks in a hospital room and 'I, for one, was numb' (B Bush, p128).

He also discusses the grief of other prominent figures including Nelson Mandela; Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis; JK Rowling; Corazon Aquino; Condoleeza Rice, whose experience of telling President George W Bush about airplanes crashing into the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001 was impacted by the memory of her best friend being killed in the bombing of their Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama when they were 11; the King family; and CS Lewis, whose story I found particularly compelling.

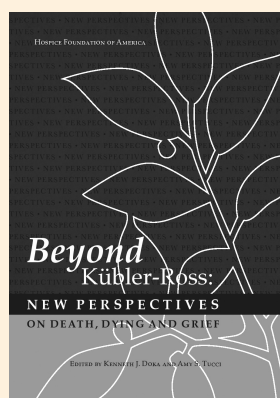
Smith borrows stories of the lives of famous people and their 'seasons of grief' in his work with the bereaved

and suggests that others do the same in their work with bereaved people and their lecturing about grief. He suggests that ‘borrowed narratives are resources that can make a difference in an individual’s grief experience, and perhaps, alter the ultimate integration’ (p1). The book has lots of practical suggestions for reading, researching, lecturing and using borrowed narratives in clinical situations.

The book will be of value to those new to the field who may not yet have their own selection of narratives to tell, as well as those with years of experience who may find that drawing on the narratives of historical figures can help individuals in their own meaning-making in their time of grief.

Mary LS Vachon PhD, RN

Psychotherapist in Private Practice, Professor of Psychiatry



Beyond Kübler-Ross: new perspectives on death, dying and grief

Kenneth J Doka, Amy S
Tucci (eds)

Washington: Hospice Foundation of
America
2011
250pp
\$28.95
ISBN 1893349136

This book’s title is a testament to the enduring legacy of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ pioneering work. She led a revolution that broke through barriers between persons at various stages of end-of-life experience and their health-care workers and family members. In some ways, however, Kübler-Ross has been too successful. Her heuristic stage model of end-of-life coping has become reified and its own gospel. What is needed to balance such reification is exactly what the editors of *Beyond Kübler-Ross: New Perspectives on Death, Dying and Grief* bring to us – readable, engaging, and helpful information provided by experts and leaders in the field. Their contributions are contained in three sections: ‘New perspectives on death and dying’, ‘New perspectives on grief’, and ‘Implications for practice’.

The book opens with an introductory discussion by Kenneth Doka that briefly reflects many of the changes that have taken place in the ways that grief and bereavement

are understood today. Part I on death and dying opens with two chapters by Charles Corr which provide the reader with a clear outline of strengths and limitations of Kübler-Ross’s stage and anticipatory grief and mourning’ and evaluate how their use can facilitate or impede our understanding and practice. Doka’s chapter ‘Task models and the dying process’ include Kübler-Ross’ work, but present the contributions of more recent theorists. Doka concludes his chapter addressing the appeal of stage models over task models and reminding us all of how complicated living, dying, grieving and living on after loss really are.

Section 2 opens with David Balk taking a bird’s eye view to consider the stages and tasks implicit and explicit in the work of Freud, Lindemann, Bowlby, Worden and Kübler-Ross. Next he turns to the trajectories of loss associated with Bonanno, the Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement advanced by Stroebe and Schut, and constructivist approaches ably presented by Neimeyer. He concludes with the continuing bonds perspective of Klass, Silverman and Nickman that found such a receptive hearing in the field almost from the moment it appeared.

Tedeschi *et al*’s thoughtful chapter ‘Positive transformations in response to the struggle with grief’ provides the reader with a focused look at positive avenues and areas of growth that characterize some persons’ experiences, and how these come about. Paul Rosenblatt’s ‘Beyond Kubler-Ross: What we have learned about grief from cross-cultural research’ reminds us how important it is to be able to add the cultural lens to our attempts to understand the trajectory of loss and bereavement.

Section 3 begins with Colin M Parkes’ chapter ‘Complicated grief in the DSM-5: Problems and solutions’. Louis Gamino’s chapter ‘Putting to rest the debate over grief counseling’ traces the history of the controversy and the questions regarding the benefits and risks of intervention. Robert Neimeyer contributes the closing chapter to this book. Moving easily from his role as theorist and researcher, Neimeyer presents the clinician reader with a number of conceptual and practical tools that suggest sensitive ways of assisting griever move towards their desired goals following loss.

In conclusion, we found this to be an eminently readable book and a wonderful addition to many a library. It is suitable for students, health-care professionals, grief counselors and psychotherapists who wish to understand the state of the field of bereavement today.

Ruth Malkinson and Simon Shimshon Rubin

Authors, *A Clinician’s Guide to Working with the Bereaved*