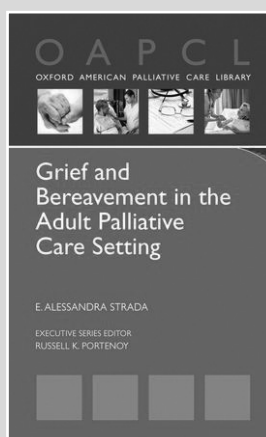


Book Reviews



Grief and bereavement in the adult palliative care setting

E Alessandra Strada

Granary, OUP USA

2013

pp126

ISBN 978 0 19 976892 9

£22.99

This book is a useful professional's guide to understanding grief and loss, from both a theoretical and practitioners' perspective.

It is divided into two sections. The first covers Definitions and Models. There are many variables affecting the grief process, and the reader is encouraged to refrain from making assumptions about a person's grief. Developmental aspects of grief including simple guidelines on aging and children's response to grief are considered. The author's clarity in describing intuitive, instrumental and dissonant grieving styles enables the reader to have an awareness of individual grief responses, and of the need to promote resilience. Section 1 also outlines grief reactions, and models of grief are explored.

Although the language employed at times is quite clinical, it provides a helpful guide to undertaking a grief assessment, and is particularly valuable in assisting practitioners in reflecting on the emotional and psychological experience of the patient and family prior to death, and in bereavement. Acknowledgment of the cumulative impact of multiple losses on an individual in bereavement is particularly useful.

Section 2: Clinical and Professional Considerations, considers grief assessment, psychosocial and psychological interventions, psychopharmacology for grief, and distress in palliative care teams. It reminds us that grief assessment

begins at the initial point of contact in palliative care, at the anticipatory stage. The reader is encouraged to consider the psychological presentation of the individual, in order to identify possible risk of complicated grief based on a number of factors.

It urges clinicians not to pathologise normal grief, but rather, to develop competency in separating normal grief from depression. The writer differentiates between 'screening', which allows an individual clinician to identify areas of concern and 'assessment' which is an ongoing process.

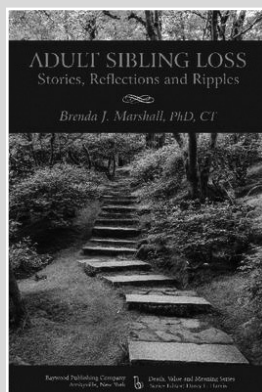
The section on Intervention focusses on psychological interventions, which are discussed in the context of supportive education, counselling and grief-focussed psychotherapy, and the use of medication in treating complicated grief is also considered.

The final chapter focuses on grief-related distress for staff working in palliative care teams, and the need for self-care. It explores compassion fatigue and the impact of both transference and counter-transference issues on staff working in palliative care. In addition, it highlights possible challenges to palliative care teams such as: the impact of organisational issues on staff morale; anger directed at the team from families; and 'difficult' deaths:

Overall, this is a very useful handbook for professionals to dip in and out of and gives a good overview of theoretical perspectives on grief. Its observations of potential stressors for staff working in palliative care are particularly acute, and would assist staff groups in addressing some pivotal issues in team development. It is easy to read, and I would recommend it to colleagues without hesitation. ■

Valerie Keane

Social Worker in Palliative Care



Adult sibling loss: stories reflections and ripples

Brenda J. Marshall

Baywood Publishing Company Inc
pp 146
ISBN 0 89503828 5
£28.95

This Canadian study explores the experience of loss of a brother or sister in mid-adulthood through the stories of four bereaved siblings. The book interweaves the author's own story with the experiences of three other women in the years (7, 8 and 11 respectively) since their siblings died. It is based on a narrative research project inspired by Dr Marshall's intense reaction to the loss of her younger brother and her surprise at the seemingly scant attention given to adult sibling loss in bereavement literature and support networks.

Part 1 tells how her life changed after her brother's sudden death from a strep infection in 2006 and explains the research background and methodology. She examines the complicated and irreplaceable nature of the sibling bond yet notes the scarcity of research into adult sibling loss: a loss that is often not acknowledged as significant and thus may be considered as disenfranchised (Doka, 2002; Wray, 2003). Part 2 narrates each of the three women's stories, including poignant reminiscences and reverberations with the author's personal experience. Part 3 presents themes running through the stories. These include a profound sense of loss, having to protect parents, changes in relationships within the family, changed attitudes to parenting, and feeling a different person. Parts 1 and 3 relate the narrative to bereavement theory, especially ideas of grief as a process of relearning the world, reconstructing meaning, and making a new place for the deceased loved one in the surviving person's life.

I recommend this book as a refreshing read for adults bereaved of a sibling and for those supporting them. Readers may wish to compare it with American author T.J Wray's *Surviving the death of a sibling – Living through grief when an adult brother or sister dies*. Wray's book was similarly motivated by the death of her brother and weaves in personal experience with empirical research data. More prescriptive than Marshall's, it is framed around Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief, including advice for coping with each stage. Within the UK, there appears to be a scarcity of research into adult sibling loss, however, the London-based journalist Justine Picardie has written a moving

account of her grief in the years following the death of her sister from breast cancer (Picardie, 2001). ■

Sue Wayne

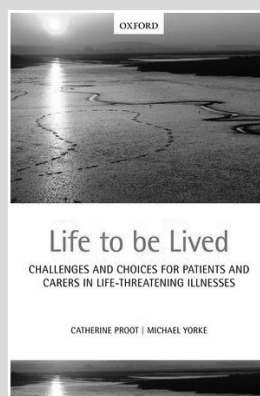
Bereavement Volunteer

Doka K (2002). Introduction. In K Doka (ed) *Disenfranchised grief*. Champaign, IL: Research Press, 5-21.

Kubler-Ross E (1969). *On death and dying*. New York: Macmillan.

Picardie J. (2002). *If the spirit moves you: life and love after death*. London: Picador.

Wray TJ (2003). *Surviving the death of a sibling: living through grief when an adult brother or sister dies*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.



Life to be lived: challenges and choices for patients and carers in life-threatening illnesses

Catherine Proot and Michael Yorke

Oxford University Press
2014
pp 176
£24.99
ISBN: 978 0 19 968501 1

This is a thought provoking book which confronts terminal illness and death in a way that enables professionals and trained volunteers alike to understand the challenges faced by patients and their carers. The title reflects a positive approach to dying that is refreshing, without being unrealistic, as the authors consider the question 'How do people face life-limiting illness and death?'

Its strength lies in the testimonies of those who have been close to people nearing the end of life as a result of terminal illness, and from the patients themselves. It highlights the power of the human spirit, and the need for care and understanding at a time of great change and disruption in life. Dying has become over-medicalised in western society, and the book is a good reminder of the importance of seeing the patient and their family as unique individuals, often with conflicting needs. It looks at how to 'be there' for those struggling to come to terms with what is happening. It also helps to address some of the taboos still surrounding death and dying.

In the tradition of narrative research, the accounts are moving and describe the thoughts and feelings of those involved (including the professionals) in a way which resonates with the reader. As a result of their openness and

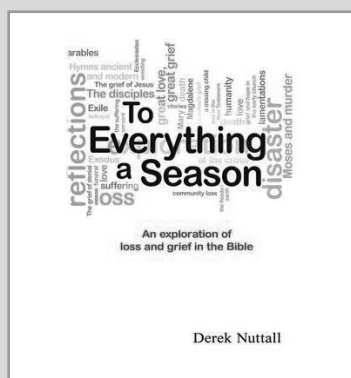
the sensitivity of the authors in the supporting commentary, their impact is profound.

The text is clear and easy to read, well referenced, with helpful chapter headings and contents. The chapters are divided into five parts covering 'The patient experience', 'The impact on family carers', 'The professional carers and their roles', 'Boundaries and resources', and 'The next step'. There are some relevant quotes throughout and the use of metaphor is revealing.

This book has particular relevance for those working in palliative care, but is also useful for those working in bereavement care. Its approach is both sensitive and confronting of our own mortality. ■

Wendy Laughlin

Bereavement Volunteer



To everything a season: an exploration of loss and grief in the Bible

Derek Nuttall

United Reformed Church
2011
pp 158
£13.50
ISBN: 978 0 85346 279 8

Derek Nuttall served as Director of Cruse Bereavement Care from 1974 to 1990. From 1967 to 1974 he was the pastor of the church at Aberfan and helped organise bereavement support following the 1967 disaster. Awarded the MBE in 1990 for his work with bereaved people, he later worked as chaplain of the Thames Valley Hospice whilst a minister in Windsor. These experiences lie behind this book.

The book is best read as a resource for group study. Derek Nuttall reflects on all the major references to grief and loss in the Old and the New Testaments and draws out their significance for readers exploring loss and grief in today's world. In most chapters he draws significant parallels with contemporary issues such as preparatory grieving, paying respects, funeral choices, parental and sibling grief. His purpose 'is not to write a commentary but to use [these narratives] as background material for reflections on grief'. He also cautions that 'faith in God and the truths of the Bible are misunderstood if it is thought they provide conclusive answers to the problems of grief and loss'.

In the Old Testament the bereavements of individual people are well analysed: Abraham with the death of his

wife Sarah, and with the attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac; Moses as murderer; the experience of Naomi and Ruth. The finest discussions are those of David – 'great love, great grief' – and of the suffering of Job.

Whilst 45% of the book discusses loss and grief in the Old Testament, Nuttall writes with his surest touch when he reaches the New Testament. 'Community loss – the grief of Bethlehem' ponders the massacre of the Innocents by King Herod. It echoes the experience of Aberfan's families: 'Experience of community disasters has taught that care needs to be personal for its people and social for its coping as a community'. In 'Mary Magdalene – losing and letting go', Jesus restores self-worth to the woman assumed to be a prostitute. Recognising the risen Jesus, she seeks to embrace him and Jesus' words ('*Noli me tangere*') stimulate a discussion on 'letting go' of the dead so that a new relationship can begin. The focus on Jesus' mother Mary prefigures the longer discussion of Jesus' attitude to his own death, for Mary is portrayed in Scripture as one who realised from her Son's earliest years that a violent death was his particular destiny. Anticipated grief is a current issue in bereavement studies.

How might Jesus' experience of loss in his own earlier life have helped to mould his own attitude to death? Nuttall's attitude is not the pessimistic one of Albert Camus in *The Fall* – that Jesus experienced his own guilt, having been rescued whilst the Innocents were massacred – but more that defined by His relationship to His cousin John the Baptist, murdered by Herod after Salome's dance. Jesus' reaction to receiving the news of John's death stimulates a discussion of the role of funeral rituals in grieving. Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem prompts a reflection on the role of tears and 'permission to grieve'. Jesus' foreknowledge of his own death also sparks a reflection on how we ourselves may prepare others for our dying, and for helping our survivors to cope in our absence.

I feel that the author seems restrained in his own religious convictions – surprising because they provide such a strong basis for hope in and after death – but this may be because he doesn't wish to limit his audience. I wish, too, that he had been less reticent about his own experiences. I have enjoyed studying this book though I could wish, first, that the publishers had provided an index and a fuller bibliography and, second, that the author had named the authors from whom he has drawn the major bereavement theories which he favours. But, that said, it has been a privilege for me to commend a study by a man who has played such a key role in promoting care for the dying and support for the bereaved in the United Kingdom for nearly half a century. ■

Peter C Jupp

Camus A (1956). *The Fall*. London: Penguin Modern Classics