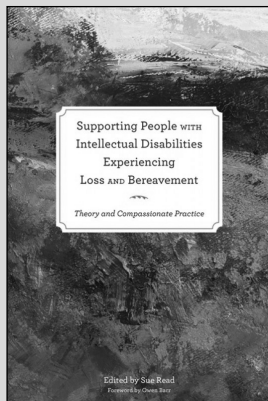


Book Reviews



Supporting people with intellectual disabilities experiencing loss and bereavement: theory and compassionate treatment

Sue Read (editor)

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
2014
280pp
£29.99
ISBN: 978 1 84905 369 3

Although people with intellectual disabilities (in the UK also known as ‘learning disabilities’) are often profoundly affected when they experience loss and bereavement, in practice most do not receive the recognition and support they need in order to cope well with their loss. The people around them often protect them from bad news or exclude them from exploring issues around death and loss. Carers and professionals often don’t know how to communicate about loss with people who struggle to understand words and abstract concepts. The available literature in this area is growing but slowly.

This book, edited by Sue Read, is therefore both welcome and timely. It succeeds in bringing together a wide range of authors, including international academic experts, practitioners and experts-by-experience (such as family carers and people with intellectual disabilities themselves). Between them, they present an eclectic overview of a wide range of relevant issues.

The book starts with a series of chapters that provide a theoretical background, explaining how issues around grief and mourning may affect people with intellectual disabilities. In an illuminating chapter, Dodd and Blackman describe the impact of complicated grief and how this can be addressed with people with intellectual disabilities. Another chapter addresses spirituality and loss.

This is followed by a practical section on how practitioners can work with people with intellectual disabilities who have been bereaved. Read explores creative ways in which carers can engage with people with intellectual disabilities who have communication

impairments. There are also chapters on resilience, advocacy, and key issues for professional care staff in community settings.

The final section addresses specialist issues, including loss and people with autism, loss in the secure environment, supporting children with intellectual disabilities and life-limiting conditions, and loss in end-of-life care. There is a particularly powerful and important chapter by Parks, a parent of a daughter with severe intellectual disabilities, about the impact of her daughter’s condition on family life.

I particularly liked the interweaving of both theory and practice in this book. All chapters are written in a lucid style, highly accessible to the non-academic whilst maintaining a sound evidence base. Issues are brought to life by case examples throughout the book.

Anyone who will come into contact with people with intellectual disabilities will need to know how loss affects them. I therefore recommend this book to carers, students and professionals in intellectual disability services as well as in generic health services and bereavement services. ■

Irene Tuffrey-Wijne

Associate Professor, St George’s University of London & Kingston University



The Forgiveness Project – stories for a vengeful age

Marina Cantacuzino
(editor)

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
2015
185pp
£16.99
ISBN: 978 1 84905 566 6

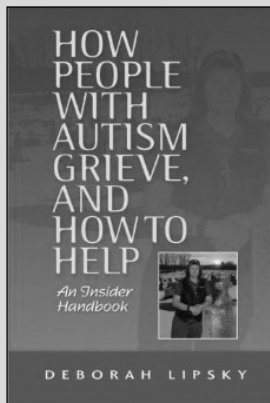
The Forgiveness Project is a collection of real-life testimonials that demonstrate the impact of forgiveness on ordinary people who have experienced traumatic incidents ranging from sexual abuse and family murder to institutional racism and terrorist activities.

I found that the introductory essay was laboured and as a portent of future reading a little off putting. However, it is worth persevering as the personal recollections that follow are powerful and in some cases harrowing. The stories are not judgemental, nor is there any bias towards issues of faith; I am not ashamed to admit that the strength and honesty of some of the writers led me to seriously question my own beliefs and opinions. Quite telling are the words of a daughter who met with her Father's killer 'Had we all lived each other's lives, we could have done what the other did', and a quote from Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in his foreword that '.. the process of forgiving does not exclude hatred and anger'.

From the bereavement support perspective, this book should be treated as valuable knowledge filler but not as a prescriptive guide to managing individuals affected by significant and traumatic events. It is a refreshing, positive and uplifting book that would sit comfortably on most bookshelves and I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to review it. ■

Keith Lane

Military Bereavement Project Officer
Cruse Bereavement Care



How people with autism grieve, and how to help: an insider handbook

Deborah Lipsky

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
2013
128pp
£12.99
ISBN: 978 1 84905 954 1

Books on death, bereavement and grief focusing on the needs of people on the autistic spectrum are few and far between and the few that there are come from the viewpoint of carers or professionals. This book is unique amongst them in offering a personal glimpse from someone who is herself on the autistic spectrum. Lipsky draws heavily on her own experience to explain the differences in how people with autism process grief, compared to non-autistic people.

The book is explanatory rather than interventionist in that it helps the reader make sense of the experience of bereavement from the inside, which naturally leads to suggestions for how to help rather than describing a list of techniques. Instead of providing a list of 'things to do',

Lipsky explains why certain behaviours arise and offers suggestions as to how these can best be managed. She describes in a very accessible way the logic behind many of the behaviours exhibited by those on the autistic spectrum following a death, behaviours that the non-autistic population frequently misinterpret.

Lipsky considers the common misperceptions and erroneous assumptions regarding the nature and experience of grief among autistic people that often arise when applying models of bereavement derived from studies of non-autistic people. She goes on to explain how and why accepted interventions developed for non-autistic people can sometimes be unhelpful. Whilst acknowledging that every individual is different, and will therefore grieve in their own way, she highlights the impact of characteristic modes of information processing, problem solving and emotional expression that can lead to difficulty and misunderstanding.

Lipsky addresses and provides clear explanations for behaviours such as seeming indifference to a death, lack of emotional expression, and a special interest in death. Stressing the importance of mindful communication, she advocates having a clear understanding of the bereaved individual and the way they process information and experience emotion before making assumptions as to how they can best be supported.

This book will not tell you exactly what to do for any given individual but it will help you understand why they are behaving as they are and will guide you into providing the most appropriate support for that individual. It is an honest and insightful book that offers a clarity of explanation that is both refreshing and extremely helpful for those either working with or living with individuals on the autistic spectrum who have been bereaved.

The size of this book and the speed at which it can be consumed belies the depth of understanding it portrays. Those who are interested in the subject area might also like to look at Helberts creative activity book which is very practical and informative but more of a resource from the standpoint of counsellor or therapist, or Faherty's interactive guide which provides concrete explanations of illness and death for those with autism or aspergers. ■

Katie Koehler

Assistant Director of Bereavement Services
Child Bereavement UK

Faherty C (2008). *Understanding death and illness and what they teach about life: an interactive guide for individuals with autism or asperger's and their loved ones*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons Inc.

Helberts K (2012). *Finding your own way to grieve: a creative activity workbook for kids and teens on the autism spectrum*. London: Jessica Kingsley.