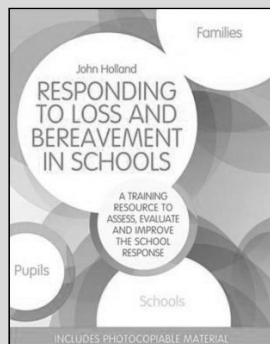


Book Reviews



Responding to loss and bereavement in schools

John Holland

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
2016
150pp
ISBN: 978 1 84905 692 2

Reviewing this book from the perspective of a child bereavement charity with 15 years experience of having a pioneering dedicated schools' support practitioner, I recommend this book as an essential resource for every head teacher in the country.

Holland's book provides a comprehensive approach to dealing with loss and bereavement in schools. Every school in the country will at some time encounter bereavement following the death of a pupil, parent or teacher – and yet, as Holland has discovered, only 15% of schools in the UK have a bereavement policy. Teacher training rarely covers managing bereavement and there is a tendency to think that every case is so rare and unique that the response will be reactive and 'ad hoc.' In fact, 1 in 29 young people are bereaved of a parent each year and many more experience the death of a grandparent, close relative or friend.

Schools play a huge part in the lives of children and support from schools can make a significant difference to how a child or young person copes with a bereavement. Holland illustrates the importance of planning and policy and talks of four key or 'golden moments' following a bereavement – times that are critical in how a child copes with their loss: receiving news of a death, the funeral, the return to school and change of class or school.

Holland then provides some very useful questionnaires for staff. Initially, a staff audit to consider how a school already plans to manage issues around bereavement. Then questions around bereavement and loss for senior staff – recognising the impact on staff with their own bereavement experiences on how they cope with supporting pupils.

The rest of the book provides a series of photocopiable resources for training. The key areas are death as a taboo subject, children's understanding of death, responding to the family, funerals, communication in school, the 'ripple effect', helping pupils and developing a policy.

Each training session is succinct and helpful covering setting the scene, an activity and reflections on the activity.

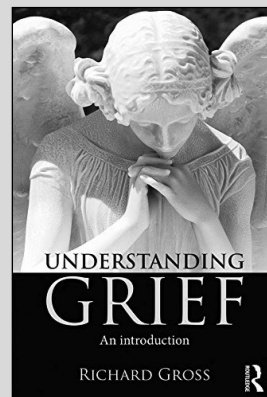
Working through the whole book would provide a school with a comprehensive and responsive approach to dealing with loss and bereavement – but given all the other issues staff need to consider in Inset training, this is probably unrealistic. However, the readily accessible session training topics would allow a school to prioritise the issues most relevant for their own situation.

Many schools look for support in a reactive way following a death. They then consider the need to develop staff skills and confidence so they are better prepared and can be proactive. This book will help schools at a critical time following a death as well as helping schools develop a policy to be prepared for any future event.

This book needs to be promoted in the field of education. It is a fantastic resource. ■

Helen McKinnon

Director, SeeSaw Grief Support for Children and Young People



Understanding grief

Richard Gross

Oxford and New York: Routledge
2015
220pp
£24.99
ISBN: 978 1138839793

This is a fairly short, but very dense book that covers the major grief models and theories as applied to adult grief, as well as situating grieving in its social, cultural and religious context. Different types of bereavement are discussed as well as wider issues such as death anxiety and post-traumatic loss, and everything is underpinned by reference to up-to-date research. Each chapter has bullet points at the beginning outlining what is to be covered and a summary at the end, and there are useful boxes, tables and figures in each chapter. At the end there is a helpful recommended reading and website list by genre as well as the usual references and index.

It is more of an overview than a critique of different models; the author's 'presence' in the book is very

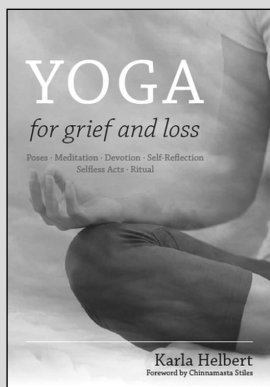
understated, which I really appreciated, as there is enough to think about without having to engage unduly with the views of the author. As an overview it is useful in itself as the reader can consider and compare different models and can, of course, follow the references to the original works for greater information. However this approach can also make for quite a heavy read and the content itself needs to be taken in slowly. I would imagine returning to specific chapters once the whole has been read.

Those who already work with bereaved people will find new ideas here as well as consolidation and refreshment of what is already known. I really enjoyed, *inter alia*, the focus on how childhood and adult attachment patterns impact on grieving, the chapter on cultural and religious aspects of death, the occasional references to literary representations of grieving, the ‘meaning making’ work of Neimeyer *et al*, Rando’s six ‘R’s Mourning Process and the references to Terror Management Theory. As many of the people who present for bereavement support have experienced difficult losses, the chapter on Complicated Grief is very useful.

Gross does not explicitly give ideas for how to work with bereaved people but much can be inferred, particularly perhaps for those who do assessments, and the book would be invaluable in that respect alone. It is certainly a book for practitioners as well as for those in training, and, given that so many lay writers still start and end discussions of grief with Freud and Kübler-Ross, also for anyone who wants to be informed about current thinking around grief. ■

Judy Debenham

Child Bereavement Practitioner, St Christopher’s Hospice



Yoga for grief and loss

Karla Helbert

London: Jessica Kingsley
2015
320pp
£15.00
ISBN: 978 1 84819 204 1

The power of this book lies in the author, Karla Helbert. As a bereaved mother Helbert knows the intense pain of grief. She conveys this in a vocabulary that can only belong to those who have experienced the death of a child. ‘Destroyed’, ‘broken’, ‘powerless’ are words which all capture the world of the bereaved parent.

It is within this context that Helbert steps the reader through the different paths of yoga and its application to

bereavement, always acknowledging what the individual journey entails for the bereaved person. Each chapter provides a clear, comprehensive account of the varying, but interrelated orientations of yoga. Helbert’s yoga teachings are the tools she provides to invite the reader to look at ways of managing the intolerable pain of grief.

The authority with which Helbert speaks is never absent. She allows the reader to feel the cycle of grief, its trauma and chaos, through to an eventual adjustment and acceptance. Helbert encourages the reader to enter into the feelings of grief. There is no denial of the pain, yet at the same time she gives some powerful messages of hope and transformation. Helbert believes that we can be whole again and that by entering into the pain we learn to let the grief be what it is. She shows us that through this process some possibility of stability can be found.

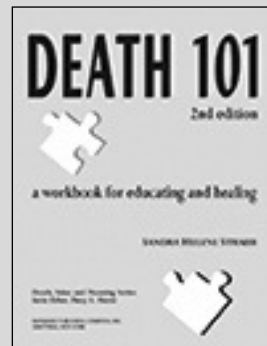
Helbert clearly outlines some yoga practices that may work to ease the journey of grief. I like the way these suggestions are presented within each chapter as meditations or exercises in different italics. The use of bullet points also makes this very accessible, but in no way prescriptive. Helbert invites the reader to handpick their own tools for managing grief. This is an empowering and creative process in itself.

Helbert highlights how yoga can allow us to hold opposing thoughts. We can be with our grief and at the same time live a connected, meaningful life.

I would recommend this book to yoga teachers and anyone managing bereavement and loss – even if only to extract one practice or statement at a time that may support a step towards self care, compassion and some sanctuary from the turmoil of grief. ■

Jenny Baulkwill

Child Bereavement Practitioner, St Christopher’s Hospice



Death 101 (second edition)

Sandra Helene Straub

Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company Inc
2015
256pp
ISBN: 978 0 89503 886 9

Death 101 is a primer aimed at raising the profile of death within our community and attempting to belay the myths about death: ‘by discussing death you will not invite it.’

It is a comprehensive workbook for use by individuals or as part of a group exploring different aspects of death

and is aimed at both trained support workers (doctors, nurses, counsellors, volunteers and care givers) and bereaved people themselves. The core belief is that 'many of life's problems stem from an inability to confront the inevitability of one's own death'. The book addresses personal attitudes towards death and dying, cultural responses, the effects of dying in the health care system, issues that arise when family and friends die, and the dying process itself. There is a chapter on the roles of care givers and a summary of the different models of grieving and tasks of mourning. It discusses the role of compassionate therapies that have a holistic approach, and the impact of different causes of death.

The exercises and activities are numerous, and I would imagine picking and choosing them rather than diligently working through each one. It's a useful resource for activities with groups or individuals, or even for personal development. It provides some information, and the activities are intended to develop your own answers to the questions.

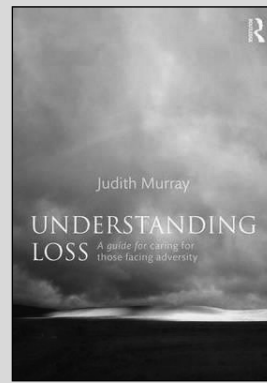
Because of the nature of the book, I think there would be value in working through it with a 'study buddy' or in a small group, to discuss the impact and implications that arise from completing the activities. For example one of the questions is 'What answers would you give to a child who asks you about death and about what will happen when you die and they die?' It is left to the reader to answer it without further input or resource to explore it. It is valuable to have the question raised (it's not uncommon in practice) but I know that some people would find it troubling to address the question directly, and peer support would enable the question to be explored, rather than brushed aside as a question too difficult to answer.

The chapters on medical ethics and resources reflect the US emphasis of the book, and users in the UK would need to explore local values, forms and resources.

Included are songs, poems and stories from people who have been bereaved, and the mix of personal experiences with practical approaches gives it a balanced feel. As a bereavement counsellor there are plenty of resources to explore sharing with a client, and as a trainer there are many opportunities to help stretch, stimulate and stymie a group who want to be more aware of issues about death in our everyday work. ■

Janet Dowling

Bereavement Volunteer



Understanding loss: a guide for caring for those facing adversity

Judith Murray

London & New York: Routledge
238pp
2016
ISBN: 978 1 138 82946 6
£29.99

This dense and well-researched book is written by an Australian academic from a nursing and teaching background, whose recent work has focussed on bereavement and the universality of loss. This is a book therefore for those who are interested in all aspects of loss, not only the losses occasioned by bereavement.

Judith Murray pulls together the aspects of loss that are more often treated discretely and highlights nine common themes, creating an overarching framework to structure the phenomenon of loss and grief. Her guiding principles are respect, understanding and enablement and her compassion, warmth and inclusive approach run like a thread through her writing.

The first half of the book includes a useful summary of the different models of grief, including a section on neuroscience, and stresses the individuality of every loss and the need for integration versus resolution. She paints a three-dimensional picture of grief whereby developmental age, trauma, spirituality, chronic sorrow, amongst other factors are added to theories and models of mourning to create a psychology of loss.

The second half of the book, the 'Enablement' section, may be of more interest to practitioners and there is a great deal here for bereavement workers to consider. The Ten Questions of Loss provide a framework, rather than a diagnostic tool, to help the listener understand the world of the client. There are many useful pointers for those setting up a service as well as for supervisors. To my mind this is one of the great strengths of the book; too often diagnostic models or theories are described, compared and contrasted but guidance towards helpful interventions is not given.

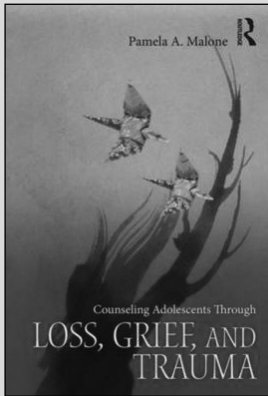
Although this is principally a book for those who help adults, I was glad to see that the needs of children and adolescents facing loss are considered. It is a reminder that loss affects the whole family and no one is exempt. The short description of Dignity Therapy sparked my interest as did the author's compassionate approach to substance use and the references to post-traumatic growth and the descriptions of trauma and peri-trauma.

The structure of the book is very accessible; there are many diagrams and tables and each chapter is summarised with references given at the end. However the text size is quite small and in its entirety isn't a particularly easy read;

I'm not sure it would be accessible to readers unfamiliar with academic texts although it could certainly be used for reference. Much of the content will be familiar to bereavement workers but the consideration of loss in all its aspects gives a new perspective and thus the book will be of service to all those who care for others. ■

Judy Debenham

Child Bereavement Practitioner, St Christopher's Hospice



Counseling adolescents through loss, grief and trauma

Pamela A Malone

New York and London: Routledge
166pp
2016
ISBN: 978 0 415 85704 8

This book aims to support anyone who comes across adolescents coping with grief, loss and trauma. Everyone knows adolescence is a turbulent and challenging time – for the young people themselves as well as those closest to them. When loss is thrown into this melting pot, it can be very difficult to see how best to offer support.

Malone provides a very helpful guide to the nature of early adolescence – 10-14 years and late adolescence – 15-18 years. She considers each period in terms of physical, social, emotional and cognitive development and provides useful summary tables of the key issues in each of these areas.

This book considers 'loss' in the broadest sense – bereavement is the key area, but there is acknowledgment that adolescents may struggle with loss following divorce of parents or the end of a relationship. Malone offers very helpful indicators of risk factors for adolescent reactions to

loss but balances this with protective factors. Consideration of these issues will help anyone working with adolescents.

Four key chapters in this book are: consideration of gender differences, what grieving adolescents need, the use and impact of technology and social media and therapeutic activities for working with adolescents.

Boys and girls are different. They respond to loss in different ways and it is important to understand their needs and the best ways to support them. Malone provides sensitive and helpful guidelines for working with boys and girls in a way that responds to their grieving styles – intuitive or instrumental.

The chapter on what grieving adolescents need talks about family connections, support from friends and peers, psycho-education and symptom management and reduction. We know young people want to feel in control and to understand what they are going through. The information here will help anyone working with adolescents develop their confidence in this challenging but very important work.

The chapter on use and impact of technology and social media provides an insightful picture into life for adolescents of today. Most of those of us working with young people are 'digital aliens' and we are working with 'digital natives'. We need to understand the risks of social media but also recognise the value of the sense of connection adolescents now have through social media. Malone's discussion of the benefits and risks is very helpful. She goes on to consider the impact of social media on continuing bonds and Facebook as a virtual grave marker.

Other resources I would recommend for working with bereaved adolescents are Helen Fitzgerald's *The grieving teen*, and Earl A Grollman's *Straight talk about death for teenagers*. ■

Helen McKinnon

Director, SeeSaw Grief Support for Children and Young People

Fitzgerald H (2000). *The grieving teen – a guide for teenagers and their friends*. Simon and Schuster.

Grollman EA (2000). *Straight talk about death for teenagers*. Beacon Press.