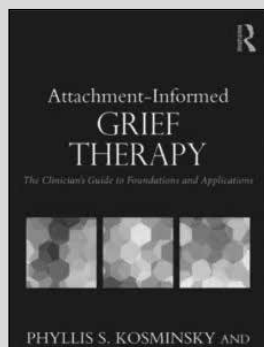


# Book Reviews



## Attachment-informed grief therapy

Phyllis S Kosminsky and John R Jordan

New York, London: Routledge  
2016  
202pp  
£24.99  
ISBN: 978 0 415 85721 5

In this highly readable and thought-provoking book, Phyllis S Kosminsky and John R Jordan invite grief therapists to reflect on their practice with bereaved clients through the lens of attachment theory. They present a fascinating and coherent synthesis of how the latest developments in attachment theory and research intersect with interpersonal neuroscience, contemporary models of bereavement (in particular the dual process model and continuing bonds), traumatic loss and aspects of psychotherapy practice.

More specifically, they explore with clarity and compassion the additional challenges and risks of complicated grief reactions faced by those clients whose early experiences of insecure attachment have left them without a strong capacity, increasingly evidenced by neurological research, to emotionally re-regulate and generate new meanings out of their experiences, skills essential to a healthy and flexible adaptation to loss and bereavement.

The authors describe, compellingly and using a good range of case material, how grief therapists who are sensitive to their clients' attachment orientation and aware themselves of their own attachment process can function as a crucial 'transitional attachment figure', offering clients a 'secure base' from which to explore their grief and learn to self-regulate.

An appreciation of attachment, they argue, enables the therapist to 'titrate' their response to the client appropriately, for example devoting more time initially to building trust with an avoidantly attached client. I found this emphasis on attachment considerations within the therapeutic relationship in Part III of the book particularly welcome.

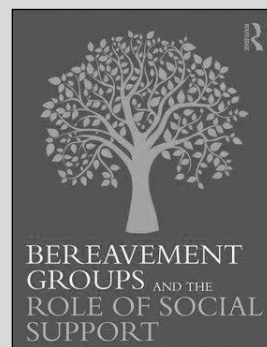
The authors are clear they are not proposing a new model of grief therapy but rather offering a useful perspective on our work as grief therapists, particularly with insecurely attached clients and/or those with

experiences of traumatic bereavement. At times whilst reading, I found myself wanting to guard against the risk of viewing individuals' attachment styles as monolithic or deterministic and would have welcomed an exploration of cultural diversity within attachment and bereavement experiences. I would have also liked the authors to say more about the wider context in which early attachment patterns develop beyond the mother-infant dyad.

Nonetheless, *Attachment-informed grief therapy* presents not only a solid theoretical basis in attachment theory as it interweaves with neuroscience, bereavement, psychotherapy and trauma studies, but also a stimulating framework to reflect on how attachment plays out in practice in the therapeutic relationship when working to support bereaved clients. I would highly recommend it. ■

## Fiona Turnbull

Volunteer bereavement counsellor and trainee psychotherapist



## Bereavement groups and the role of social support

William G Hoy

2016  
Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge  
224 pp  
£24.99  
ISBN: 978 1 138 91689 0

'Amazing', is the only word Hoy states he has ever found to describe what is possible within a bereavement support group. Whilst conveying infectious enthusiasm for this type of support, the author nevertheless provides a carefully balanced account.

The real value of the book lies in the fact that, not only does it provide practical insights concerning bereavement groups and the role of social support in a non-prescriptive manner, but also integrates an extensive blend of research and theory. This differentiates it from other books on groupwork. Although Hoy is based in the US, the text is of relevance to readers internationally. Classic and contemporary literature is drawn from different countries, and attention is paid to multiculturalism. Critically, Hoy makes reference to bereavement support groups being

overwhelmingly white, historically, thus providing a degree of bias in existing research available on groupwork (although there are some exceptions).

Hoy draws on 16 years' experience, formerly directing a hospice-based bereavement counselling program. Additionally, he includes qualitative findings from his LEAP (Leader Experiences, Attitudes, and Perceptions) study. LEAP participants include nurses, social workers, chaplains, psychotherapists, and peer volunteers having experienced loss themselves. They reflect on best practice, serving in roles as group leaders/facilitators, program co-ordinators, and clinical supervisors.

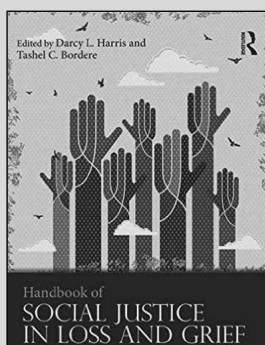
The author includes the 'Compass model' he developed, based on an adaptive process comprising: remembering, reaffirming, realising and releasing. This he has more recently revised to incorporate a fifth process: renewing. The model is a useful addition to the facilitator's 'toolbox'.

Issues covered in the book include: responding to challenges in groups; supporting children and teens; dealing with complicated grief in the support group; spiritual resources, religion and belief systems; and the various forms groupwork takes, including the growing concept of online peer support. The index does not do justice to the numerous topics highlighted, but an impressive list of references is included, should the reader wish to further explore any subjects covered.

Attention is drawn to group leaders recognising the boundaries of their own competence, and realising when to refer on. Hoy emphasises that groups are not appropriate for everyone, and describes the relevance of careful assessment. This benefits not only a potential group member but the group as a whole. Crucially, Hoy places the bereaved person as the expert, with a group belonging to its participants rather than the leader. ■

### Marion Wilson

Bereavement Volunteer and PhD student



### Handbook of social justice in loss and grief

Darcy L Harris and  
Tashel C Bordere (eds)

New York: Routledge  
2016  
294pp  
£75

ISBN: 978 138 94992 8

In this book the editors explore issues of social justice and diversity to make a powerful argument for the need to consider more carefully how gender,

ethnicity, culture, class and religion all affect people's access to appropriate support and care as they cope with death, dying, loss and grief. Readers are invited to reflect on structural, political and social issues and power relationships as they affect the experiences of individual people. Understanding how current assumptions, lack of awareness, prejudice and marginalisation have impacts in all contexts around death and dying is essential in moving towards more equal and inclusive societies.

This is a substantial book. The editors write from backgrounds in USA and Canada, as do authors of more than half of the chapters in the volume. Perspectives from other countries are well represented however, and there are three chapters from the UK context. The editors set the scene with personal accounts of their own routes to interest in social justice issues, and introductory chapters about social justice conceptualisations and critical enquiry. Twenty chapters follow, arranged in four further parts. The first part addresses issues related to social status, policy and practice, looking at inequities between countries and groups; the effects of materialism and capitalistic values on human experience in the context of care; and discrimination and marginalisation of ethnic groups.

The next parts focus on particular groups of people, including First Nations Peoples, and African Americans receiving end-of-life care, and individual experiences in various social contexts, including the medicalisation of grief and experiences of patients and professionals in health care delivery. There are valuable chapters about experiences of women prisoners and people with intellectual disabilities as they deal with loss and grief, and a critical look at social expectations on bereaved people. The last and longest part of the book is concerned with practice implications. Chapters range across meaning-making, spirituality, creative approaches, rituals and different forms of advocacy, and discuss compassion in the context of response to injustice.

Authors of the chapters are experts in their own fields, and blend scholarship, personal experience and rich case material in ways that make the writing interesting and accessible. At the end of each chapter is a short summary of the meaning of four or five key terms included in the narrative, and some questions for readers' reflection, both of which make the volume a valuable resource for teaching, as well as self-development and advocacy. The book makes a novel and important contribution to academic teaching and professional training across medicine, nursing, social work, counselling and bereavement support, and has a place in libraries spanning fields of social policy, sociology, death studies and human rights. ■

### Anne Corden

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