

sit-coms. He treads the balance between comedy and tragedy with aplomb, where you find yourself both appalled at the insensitivity of others and venting outrageous laughter at moments of complete idiocy such as the conversation he has with a company who demand that they want to see a copy of his wife's death certificate, and complain because he has sent them only a copy of a copy of the original.

I was most struck by the way he *names* small incidents that helped them, for example, of the 'power of holding hands' as he and his wife have exhausted the words to console each other. 'We sit for hours at home just holding hands when inspiration has dried up, when quiet is preferable to anything else....It says so much'. It is this ability to name and reflect on these small things that gives added value to the narrative and the support it may offer to our clients who often struggle to put into words how they feel. For someone in the throes of their own bereavement it is the *naming* of these moments that makes a difference. Someone else experiences this. Someone else has noticed this. There is a shared witness to bereavement.

After the death of his wife he is aware of the people around him and their responses to him. This ranges from the man who cannot even voice his condolences but feels he must try, stammering and unable to complete his sentences, to the friends who also struggle when 'there are only so many original things you can say to a bereaved person, only so many ways that you can commiserate without drowning in a sea of clichés'. His friends move on, but he is stuck in this 'alien, weird parallel world, with its own rhythms and strange patterns. It moves slowly. It suffocates. It is relentless'.

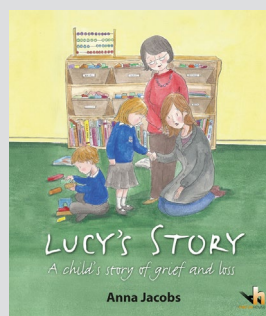
This is most powerfully demonstrated in the incident of the cardboard mummy. This part of his story has been circulating on Facebook for some months. His young daughter Romy was witness to the last hospital episodes, and was involved in the funeral process, even choosing the final clothes for her mother. Having spoken little of her loss, one day she asks that they make a cardboard mummy. Having been advised to 'keep talking, stay receptive' and 'to do everything they [children] ask in expressing their grief however weird or unexpected', despite his misgivings he goes along with it. As a private thing he is able to see how it benefits his daughter, but struggles when she wants cardboard mummy to be more public – going to the shops and displayed to her friends. As an adult he is embarrassed and fearful of other people's reactions and the judgements they make on him. But it's when she takes the cardboard mummy to school for 'show and tell' that he realises the value that it has for her, and how in her own way she has found the thing she needs to support her.

Finally, he describes how, after a year, he feels the need to find companionship. He explores the need to reach out to someone else and the fears that he is betraying his deceased wife. The dilemmas, fears, and hopes of the bereaved are

very well described and made accessible. I read this in an evening, sitting up to 2am to finish it. I don't do that very often. This is one memoir that I would recommend to my clients without hesitation. ■

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Lucy's story: a child's story of loss and grief

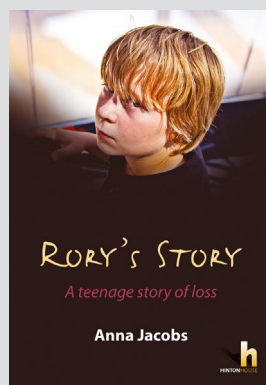
Rory's story: a teenage story of loss

Anna Jacobs

Buckingham: Hinton House
2014

Lucy's story 36pp and
ISBN: 978 1 906531607

Rory's story 51pp and
ISBN: 978 1 906531423
£12.95 Paperback



These two story books are written by Anna Jacobs who is a play therapist who works with bereaved children and teenagers. They are also linked to the workbooks *Supporting children through grief and loss: practical ideas and creative activities for schools and carers* and *Supporting teenagers through grief and loss: practical ideas and creative activities for schools and carers*¹ which were reviewed for *Bereavement Care's* Winter 2015 edition. Both story books have a similar format of story and questions that can be used as discussion points but these books approach them differently.

Lucy's story is targeted at primary school children and tells the story of Lucy whose father has died, and whose mother is struggling to cope. The school notices that there is a problem and encourages the mother to seek help. Along the way it shows good models of teachers' involvement, but also examples of how children can be confused by adults' explanations, for example, 'Mummy - where is heaven and when is Daddy coming back?' as well as young children trying to take on the role of carer to their parent. There

1 They were both published in 2015 by Hinton House in Buckingham and both are by Anna Jacobs.

are seven short chapters and plain line drawings. There is a section for teachers and schools on how to use the book, which also refers back to the *Supporting children through grief and loss* workbook. Practical advice is given on how to introduce the topic and some of the issues which may arise. Similarly, there is a section for parents and carers on using the book both for themselves to understand the issues the child may be experiencing, as well as preparing them for using the book with the child. There is also a section for bereavement services on how to use the book.

This is followed by 'chapter by chapter notes and discussion points' where there are key points to note for the adults using the book, and then questions to address with children in conversation. It is a book which would benefit the bereaved child to read with an adult. In the classroom, presumably the teacher would read it aloud and pause for discussion points.

Rory's story follows a teenage boy whose mother has died, how he feels unable to express emotion, coping with his school mates rejecting him and the confusion he feels when reflecting back on the events leading to his mother's death. The crisis comes when he runs away. The family, care services, school teachers and friends combine to help find him and then develop strategies to be more supportive of him.

The second part has a list of questions that are relevant for both teenagers in class as well as adults who want to

understand more about teenage perspectives on grief. The final part is notes for teachers on the theory of teenage loss and suggestions for schools to consider how they may respond to grief and loss issues in schools. This could be used with an individual teenager to read in their own time, but supported by an adult to discuss the issues raised. Otherwise it could be read aloud in the classroom for group discussion.

Both books are easy to read and flexible in their use. They would enable parents, teachers and carers to develop awareness about grief and explore how best to support the children and young people in their charge. The associated workbooks provide many resources to assist with this. I would comment that running away from home is not always the teenager's response to stress, and I think that it would be useful to also have a section exploring other risk taking behaviours that teenagers might use to try to cope, for example, self-harm, drugs and drink, or physical high risk activities. However, they are both valuable resources for supporting individual children and teenagers, enabling adults to be more supportive of them and facilitating schools to review their policies on grief and loss. ■

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