# REVIEWS



## GOOD GRIEF 2. EXPLORING FEELINGS, LOSS AND DEATH WITH UNDER 11s. A companion to GOOD GRIEF 1 for older children.

### Barbara Ward and Associates. Uxbridge: Good Grief. Available from Cruse—Bereavement Care, price £25 + £2.75 p&p.

I am a Schools Counsellor in Nursery, First and Middle schools. This work has made me realise how important it is that the exploration of feelings, loss and death should find a place on the school curriculum. Sadly many school communities are affected by the death of pupils. Children suffer the death of grandparents, parents and siblings. They suffer loss when their parents separate or divorce, when they are rehoused, or when members of their family are compelled to spend long periods abroad. Those who have been alongside grieving children know that their feelings have depth and intensity. The expression of grief, however, varies according to the child's age. Teachers who work with children who are at the magical stage of thinking, as well as those who have reached the concrete thinking stage, can find the prospect of exploring this area daunting. This pack offers them encouragement to follow that exploration.

The first section covers such issues as 'Stages of Grief', 'Grief in Children', and 'Difficulties in Grieving'. The material is grounded in the needs of the child; good references are made regarding the significance of the material to behaviour. I was especially pleased to read the section on 'Divorce and Separation' as this loss is perhaps the one which most often affects children in school. The suggestions and guidelines highlight such important issues as the need to be honest with children, and it gives helpful down-to-earth suggestions on how to support them. The pack recognises the fact that teachers of younger children often have regular contact with parents.

Section 2 consists of activities to share with children. They cover a wide range of skills designed, but not limited to, children under 11. They provide ways in which children can get in touch with their feelings - both positive and negative. They give opportunities for the nurture of empathic skills and the teacher is offered thoughtful suggestions to help her support the children and also take care of her own needs in this sensitive work. The ideas are illustrated with exciting examples of children's work, and there is a good selection of writings to use. These can be supplemented by the excellent book list. It is good to see reminders to let colleagues know what we are doing, to check for sensitive areas in children's backgrounds at the outset, and to use such techniques as de-briefing.

Section 3 is a fascinating collection of articles, including one by John Bowlby on 'Children Mourning Dead Parents', and another on 'The Value of Hospitalised Children's Artwork'.

On the practical level the pack is divided into useful short sections but the lists of contents have no page numbers and this can be irritating. This is a small criticism, however. The 'Good Grief' pack is already being used by teachers. The activities offered are set in the context of the National Curriculum. A colleague completing a project on death with nine-year-olds said, 'I couldn't have done it without the pack', and another described reading the pack as a 'gripping experience'. It is firmly rooted in the needs of children and the needs of schools, and is a most valuable addition to teachers' resources.

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## GIVE SORROW WORDS: WORKING WITH A DYING CHILD

### Dorothy Judd. London: Free Associaton Books, 1989. £12.99.

Dorothy Judd is a Child Psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic, and is also an Art Therapist.

The crux of this book is the account in diary form of Mrs Judd's work with a seven-year-old child dying of leukaemia. The rest of the book provides a review of psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic attitudes towards death in childhood, and contemporary attitudes towards communicating with the children about death. In the final section of the book, Mrs Judd discusses some ethical issues about the intensive treatment of life-threatening illness in childhood, and describes the effects of the death of a child on family and professionals.

For me, the most valuable part of this book was Mrs Judd's vivid account of her work with the dying child in a hospital setting, and all the difficulties and constraints that are placed on such work. In the rest of the book she draws widely on published work in the field, literary quotations and extracts from interviews with well-known experts working in this country with dying children. I felt that the literature reviewed was very helpful in clarifying our understanding of children facing death, but I felt the interviews quoted detracted from the rest of the text. Overall I would recommend this book to all those who are interested in working with dying children in hospital settings, and indeed for anyone engaged in liaison child psychiatry where the difficulties of attempting psychotherapeutic work in ward settings are frequently encountered.

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## CHILDREN WHO DON'T WANT TO LIVE

### Israel Orbach. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1988. £17.95.

The author, a clinical psychologist, has been involved clinically with suicidal children and adolescents for 13 years in Israel and New York and the cumulated wisdom gained by such experience informs this book throughout. His model is an eclectic one and he draws on object-relations theory, psychoanalysis and systems thinking, although he does not thoroughly integrate them and the book becomes something of a shopping list. He does not appear to be familiar with recent British research,[1,2] and the main reason for reading this book would be to pick up some useful therapeutic tips, particularly in family therapy with such children.

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1. Hawton K. Suicide and Attempted Suicide Among Children and Adolescents. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986.
2. Taylor EA, Stansfield SA. Children who poison themselves. British Journal of Psychiatry 1984; **145**, 127-135.


## CHRONIC ILLNESS DURING CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

### William T Garrison and Susan McQuiston. Newbury Park: Sage, 1989. Available in UK from Sage Publications, London. £22.95 hb; £10.95 pb.

This useful little book surveys what is a rapidly-developing new field, that of the psychological effects of chronic childhood illness on patient and family. Although much of the most recent work in this area has been done in the UK, this book concentrates on the pioneering work done in the USA only. Readers of this journal will be particularly interested in life-threatening illnesses but the authors, in the compass of a book of only 150 pages, have been somewhat over-ambitious and have included chronic but rarely life-threatening illnesses such as asthma, diabetes and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, as well as leukaemia, and other cancers, paediatric AIDS and other often fatal diseases. The extensive literature on adults is barely referred to and treatment interventions occupy a few pages. Nevertheless, the book is a useful addition to the sparse literature and complements Christine Eiser's on 'Chronic Childhood Illness'.

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## STORYMAKING IN BEREAVEMENT: DRAGONS FIGHT IN THE MEADOW

### Gersie A. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1991. £21-95 hb.

This is an interesting but frustrating book. However, the disappointment is not without value since, if this book is placed in the library of workers concerned with bereavement and other forms of loss, it will promote thought and discussion.

I approached it with eagerness because I have an abiding love of myth and story. The author is right to remind us that 'myths and related stories describe essential human experiences which, requiring the use of the imagination, reconcile and give voice to fantasy and reality'. In a worthwhile struggle, she attempts more than can be achieved; perhaps this was inevitable and the attempt is enriching nevertheless.

For example, in the early chapters, the author tries to write on separation and mourning, and coming to grips with mortality, in terms which she hopes will apply to any readers, since all of us suffer loss and grief at some point in our lives. The trouble is that, in attempting to embrace all experience, she oversimplifies and generalises.

Then, her selection of myth and legend is idiosyncratic. Often, there is a curious distance between the story chosen and the text which illustrates it. Perhaps a stronger book would have had more stories and less supporting text. I think we may lack the living interaction between a charismatic teacher and those who wish to learn and

develop skills. The author is Dutch, and her poetic imagination perhaps also has been hindered by writing in a second language. It is a common problem that the great myths, legends and poems suffer at the hands of translators and that it is difficult to write poetically other than in one's native tongue. Thus, there is a frustration in reading this book instead of being able to meet the author face-to-face.

For the same reason, I am not sure about the teaching exercises which end the book. These are carefully structured and laid out and require group work for their evaluation. This, again, is a reason for suggesting that the book be available in the libraries of relevant professionals; it would be better as a focus for group work than for individual study.

Finally, at one point only in the book did tears spring to my eyes, as a few, deceptively simple words touched a core in myself: Robert Burns' 'Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!/Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!/Thine be ilka joy and treasure, life, enjoyment, love and pleasure'.

We should indeed 'give sorrow words'. This book is a small step along a difficult road.

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## BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN. LEADER MANUAL AND PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

**Beth Haasl and Jean Marnocha. Muncie, Indiana: Accelerated Development, Inc. Distributed in UK by Gazelle Book Services, Lancaster, 1990. £8.50 pb. (Leader Manual).**

Children who have suffered catastrophe feel very alone, and it seems to help them to meet others in the same situation. Yule[1], for example, found that the children who survived the Zeebrugge ferry capsize in 1987 were able to share their experiences in a way which was therapeutic and which they hadn't been able to do at home because of their fears of upsetting their parents. I found in my family intervention study with bereaved children[2] that many of the children were reluctant to let their surviving parent know the extent of their distress because they felt understandably protective of their remaining parent. So I approached this book with some anticipatory pleasure, hoping it would be of help to bereavement counselling services wishing to set up support groups for children.

The authors work at a hospice in the USA and have extensive experience of leading brief groups for bereaved children. Here they describe the groups which last for five weekly 1½-hour sessions and are firmly structured with each one having a programme that encourages the children to express their grief through drawings, puppetry, and talking. They visit a 'funeral home', bring objects that remind them of their 'loved one' and write letters to themselves. The participant workbook is designed to be a permanent record for the child to take home. The authors claim the groups are helpful for children from five to 15 but there is no attempt at any evaluation of efficacy.

Although mention is made of the development differences between children, they are not detailed and there is no attempt to tailor the activities in the groups to take account of these differences. The early part of the book details the personal characteristics of the leaders, but fails to mention training or experience with children. The section on children's grief reactions is also a shopping list with no attempt to introduce a developmental or time perspective. Curiously this section suggests 'caretaker techniques' for dealing with each response. This is presumably intended to help parents but the authors do not say how they would impart this advice, as parents are not catered for at the same time as the children's group—an obvious omission.

The style is didactic throughout and the Americanisms grate on a British ear: 'to offer children a nonthreatening opportunity to share about their loved one' (p. 61) and 'journaling as a way of coping with grief' (p. 69) were two choice ones. It is assumed that all children have been to the funeral and, while this may be desirable, the assumption could not be made, certainly in this country.

I cannot recommend this book as a blueprint for running groups for bereaved children. Those who would like to do this would get more help from Ward and Houghton[3] and Kitchener and Pennells[4].

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## VIDEO

**Angels don't have headlights: children's reactions to death in the family (VHS). Obtainable from: Documentaries for Learning, 74 Fenwood Road, Boston, Mass. 02115, USA. $50 + postage.**

This 25-minute video has been made primarily for American paediatricians to teach them about children's reactions to a death in the family and to encourage them to talk to children about their feelings. Mostly, experts talk *about* children, or paediatricians talk to adults *about* children but there are a few sequences with older children in which they talk about what it feels like when a sibling or grandparent dies—no-one is bereaved of a parent. All the children are from ethnic minorities (black or Asian) and the therapists are white. I watched this in the hope that I could use it to illustrate to a lay audience what bereaved children feel as I could not use my tapes of patients which were restricted to professional viewing only. However, with one exception, the children are so inarticulate and the therapists make so little use of play and drawing materials to help the children communicate that there was little of help to me. However, it might be of use in teaching doctors about ways of helping parents to deal with children's behaviour.

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*Bereavement Care*, 1992 (p.15)

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