The two-month postpartum visit to the hospital

Eight to ten weeks after delivery the couple return to the hospital for a meeting, where they are told about the findings of the autopsy and any other investigations which have been performed. They have a discussion with the obstetrician and/or the paediatrician who previously handled their case. Usually the social worker, and a nurse or a midwife familiar to the couple, attend this consultation. We talk to the parents about their present physical and physiological status and their possible need for further support. A few need to be referred to a psychologist for further therapy. Possible investigations and schedules for visits in the next pregnancy are planned. They are encouraged to return before a new pregnancy if they have any doubts.

The next pregnancy

In the next pregnancy we notice a remarkable difference in the reactions between group participants and non-participants. Those who attended the group are generally much more balanced, they accept the plan for control during the pregnancy and usually follow it. The non-group members are much more anxious. They often contact the hospital and demand a lot of extra investigations confirming the normality of their pregnancy, and still they are very worried.

Anni Hansen has written two books in Danish about this project, 'A Grief Invisible' and 'When the Grief Becomes Visible', published by Bog Fan, St. Kongensgade 61 A, 1264 Copenhagen K, Denmark. A 30-minute video is also available in Danish and English. Write to Ebbe Larson, TV-2 Fyn, Ramsherred 10, 5700 Svendborg, Denmark.

BOOK REVIEWS

GRIEF IN CHILDREN
Atle Dyregrov. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1991. £12.95 pb.

Atle Dyregrov's 'Grief in Children' is a book with a tripartite mission: to present two decades of research and clinical experience on the effect of grief in children; to explain for adults the needs of the bereaved child; and to suggest what they can do to help. All three are covered impressively in this volume.

The secret of the book's success lies in the author's decision to opt for a 'handbook' style to tackle his subject. Like the best examples of this approach, the book pares down a wealth of material to the essential information the reader wants to know. In this case the author addresses the common questions and anxieties that face parents and professionals in dealing with bereaved children.

Dyregrov's writing is clear in its description, and explicit in its advice, and demonstrates that the daunting task of helping a child through grief is both manageable and rewarding.

He is not shy to tell you what to do but is sensitive to the worries and reservations that adults have in communicating with children about death—in particular that their intervention may cause more harm than good. For example, chapter six is devoted to decisions about the involvement of children in the rituals following death—funerals, viewing the body, etc.—issues that can prove particularly stressful for adults. I found the author's advice was commonsense and persuasive. He recognises the beliefs and prejudices that all of us carry regarding the role of children in 'adult' events and sensibly gives equal space to considering how parents can include their children at these occasions and to advising those parents who clearly feel they cannot involve them.

The book covers all aspects of children's experience of bereavement, from the earliest reactions through to handling the news of the death at the child's school. I found the detailed account of grief reactions given at the start of the book a useful résumé, as Dyregrov is very good at linking our understanding of age and developmental factors in children to their needs in coping with loss.

For a short book—it is only 116 pages—the author still manages to find space to consider complex bereavement experiences, including children's responses to sudden death from suicide, sibling death, and when children are witness to the murder of a parent. He draws on a range of theoretical perspectives, eschews jargon and challenges the assumptions that we adults are apt to make about children and their responses to death.

I am full of praise for the thought that has been given to the preparation of this book but perplexed at the failure to include an index. The whole book lends itself towards dipping back into the text for information as and when you need it. Not making this as easy as possible seems a puzzling oversight.

This book will, I am sure, become required reading for all those touched by the care of bereaved children.

DAVID PENTECOST
Family Therapist, U.K.

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THIS IS OUR CHILD

A. Cooper and V. Harpin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. £7.50 pb.

This book is a collection of contributions written by parents, and two teenagers, describing their experiences of illness and treatment. The experiences described include giving birth to a child that has died, the births of a premature child, a child with congenital heart disease, a child with Down's syndrome, the experiences of a child developing severe handicap, leukaemia, aplastic anaemia, or a neuroblastoma, or having cystic fibrosis. The two teenagers describe their experience of leukaemia.

I found this book so readable that I read it through in one sitting. The accounts are movingly written. Each of them reminds us of how illness in one family member affects the whole family. The devastating effects of learning that a hospital admission or treatment has had to be postponed due to lack of beds is described. We are reminded how depressing it is for anyone (but, perhaps, especially for a child) when they find themselves being treated in a dark, cold, unwelcoming room.

My main criticism of the book is that, by aiming to be 'helpful to all health professionals working with children and their families', as well as 'of help and support to parents and children', it may fall between two stools. The title and cover are, I would suggest, more likely to appeal to the non-professional reader. Having said that, this book would be a good focus for initial discussion in a parent and/or staff group. It is sensibly priced and can be recommended for all those who are working with children and their families.

MARTIN NEWMAN

Senior Registrar in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

DODGER

Libby Gleeson. London: Puffin Books, 1992. £2.99 pb.

Mick, a 13-year-old Australian schoolboy, is a 'dodger' in two senses. On the one hand he finds it difficult to settle to school discipline, and on the other hand he is perfect for the part of the Artful Dodger in the school production of 'Oliver'. The book tells the story of his struggles to decide whether to take the part and his new teacher's strong belief in him, against all the evidence. Some of it is told through the letters written by his teacher to her friend. This is a clever device, which will be appreciated by young readers in spite of the use of some adult phrases like 'moral dilemma' and 'self-image'.

The underlying poignant theme is Mick's unresolved grief over his mother's death three years earlier. His sadness and anger are triggered at various points as we gradually learn what happened. Mick was left to 'take care' of his mother when his father was away working as a long-distance lorry driver. He had not been told how ill she was. She became worse and went to hospital and died. Mick felt let down, lied to and responsible for what happened. He was not allowed to see her body, or to go to the funeral and shut himself away, refusing to talk about it. Afterwards he was sent to live with Nan because his father was so often away.

All this gradually emerges through the events surrounding 'Oliver'. In the most dramatic incident Mick overhears the hated sports master running him down in a staff meeting. He goes back to the classroom and hurls furniture about, smashing a model made by the class. His teacher never stops believing in him and sensing his great need of help. In the end the Artful Dodger is a huge success the teacher wins Mick's confidence and he is helped to 'let it all out'.

The school background is convincing, the characters well drawn and the ups and downs of a school production well described. This book may well 'ring bells' for bereaved young teenagers, particularly because it is a good school story and not all about grief.

MARY BENDING

Cruse Counsellor, Bucks

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