EDITORIAL

With this issue, *Bereavement Care* enters its 15th year of publication. It was planned, in 1982, as a forum for discussion and education for professionals and volunteers who help bereaved people. Over the years we have published research from all over the world, accounts of innovations and good practice, reviews, notices and reports of conferences, a lively correspondence column, and much else of importance to all who wish to attain a level of excellence in their work in this field. We believe we have achieved what we originally set out to do. Now, as well as many individuals and organisations in the UK and Ireland, we have subscribers in the USA, Canada, South America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Asia, Israel, and many other countries in Europe.

Until now, we have alternated issues devoted to bereaved children and adolescents with those on bereaved adults. However, readers have pointed out that in some years there is only one issue about adults and, since adults are more likely to be bereaved than children, many counsellors would prefer a mixture of content in each issue. We have acted on these comments and trust that, from now on, readers will find material relevant to their work in every issue. We welcome response from readers and would be grateful for suggestions for topics which we have not yet covered.

Dora Black
UK

Children's participation in rituals



Atle Dyregrov

Atle Dyregrov *PhD*
Director, Center for Crisis Psychology, Solheimsvik, Norway

Rituals mark transitions in life, confirming our identity within our social and cultural group and regulating human interaction. They are stable but not unchangeable: they represent our collective memory or inheritance, but are gradually transformed over time. The last decade has seen an increasing flexibility, with rituals spontaneously developing or being adapted to meet important social or emotional needs.

RITUAL FUNCTIONS FOLLOWING DEATH

Viewing the dead body and attending the funeral serve important religious, social and psychological functions. Rando[1] describes clearly how rituals provide bereaved people with a shared, spiritual meaning for death which they can integrate with their belief system. They mark a public separation between the dead and those who survive, and confirm membership of a social group. Through rituals a social network can show the support and care which is so important for the bereaved family. This process unites a group because participants are reminded that if anything should happen to them, they will be helped in the same ways. When rituals are shortened or take place in private, the natural societal support mechanisms are impeded.

Rituals give form and a safe framework in a chaotic situation, and are especially important after a sudden death when family members may experience added practical, social and emotional difficulties. While there may be uncertainty about what to do in these cases, they can allow for rituals adapted to the individual circumstances, which facilitate a natural expression of longing and grief.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As with adults, rituals help children to come to terms with the death of a loved one. By participating in the *rites de passage* of their community, they learn that they are not alone, and that they are supported by traditions and rituals that help give understanding, comfort and meaning to their loss. In his article, Dyregrov, a Norwegian clinical psychologist whose handbook[1] has inspired many, gives us practical guidance in preparing children for viewing the dead body, attending funerals and other rituals which will be immensely helpful to counsellors, funeral directors, doctors, social workers and priests advising the families of the newly-bereaved.

Dyregrov explains how bereaved people can devise their own unique rituals and describes some. Readers may also wish to use rituals therapeutically in their work with families and may find Imber-Black and his colleagues' book[2] useful. Arngrimsson[3] describes how a crisis team helped devise a ritual to allay an after-school centre's distress following the accidental death of a 12-year-old. Please write to us with examples of rituals which you have found useful in helping adults or children to progress in their mourning.

1. Dyregrov A. Grief in Children. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley, 1991.
2. Imber-Black E, Roberts J, Whiting R (eds). Rituals in Families and Family Therapy. New York, USA: Norton, 1988.
3. Arngrimsson B. Community crisis resolved by a mourning ritual. *Bereavement Care* 1984; 3(2): 18-24.