ABSTRACTS

Mothers now childless: survival after the death of an only child.

Talbot K. *Omega* 1996/7: **34**(3); 177-89

This article examines how a sample of 80 mothers reacted to the death between the ages of three and 21 of an only child. In addition, the author interviewed in depth ten of the participants. The findings suggest that motherhood becomes an integral part of the self: for some mothers, therefore, the loss represents a perpetual bereavement, while others find ways in which they can develop a new, meaningful identity while still preserving their child's memory and honouring their past life as mothers. The author describes this as the first study to examine and discuss the loss of the role of parenthood as well as the loss of the child.

Middle-aged son's reactions to father's death.

Moss SZ, Rubinstein RL, Moss MS . *Omega* 1996/7: **34**(4); 259-77

The authors discuss the reactions of 43 men who have lost their elderly, widowed fathers. In the Western world the pattern of grieving is based on the reactions to bereavement of women, who tend to find comfort in expressing and sharing emotions and in concentrating on their personal relations. Men, on the other hand, are socially and culturally expected to minimise their expression of grief, to be 'manly'. The authors identify four needs in men's bereavement: control, action, cognition and privacy. They conclude that, contrary to accepted beliefs, this attitude, far from being problematic, may help men to adjust to bereavement by adapting more quickly and by enhancing their self-esteem.

This is an aspect of bereavement which is rarely discussed, and the authors have performed a service through their comprehensive research and thoughtful approach.

The deceased child in the psychic and social world of bereaved parents during the resolution of grief

Klass D. *Death Studies* 1997: **21**(2); 147-75

Bereaved Parents is an American self-help organisation which was formed to help parents adjust to the loss of a child. Interaction between the bereaved parents enables them to integrate the dead child into their life and social network in a different way than was the case when the child was alive. By sharing their pain, by helping and understanding one another, and through practical activities in which they can talk about their dead children, these parents are able, in the author's words, 'to let go of the earthly child and keep the heavenly'. This is a moving and interesting article which describes a method of coping with parental grief that really seems to be effective.

Grief and the sexual relationship of couples who have experienced a child's death

Hagemeister AK, Rosenblatt PC. *Death Studies* 1997: **21**(3); 231-52

The authors believe that the death of a child may profoundly affect the sexual relationship of the parents. In this study they report the results of an investigation into how such a bereavement influenced the sexual behaviour of 24 couples. The majority of their subjects reported a break or decline in their relationship, for a variety of reasons: eg ' If sex means pleasure, now is not the time'; or 'We can't do this if it means making another child'. Conversely, other couples found intercourse comforting or an affirmation of life. The authors believe that, despite the limitations of their enquiry (the fact, for instance, that their subjects were all white, heterosexual and mainly middle class), grief counsellors may find their research useful in helping bereaved couples to normalise their sex life by giving them a sense of the experiences of other parents who have lost a child.

The challenge of evaluating a child bereavement programme.

Stokes J, Wyer S, Crossley D. *Palliative Medicine* 1997: **11**(3); 179-90

This interesting article discusses the work that has so far been carried out to evaluate the efficacy of child bereavement services. The authors base their study on Winston's Wish, a programme begun in 1993 by the Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust: it is available to all children between the ages of six and 14 who live in Gloucestershire and have lost a parent or sibling. The children go to camp in the Forest of Dean, while their parents attend a two-day residential course. The intervention involves an initial assessment, suitable activities at camp, and such post-camp help as the family may need. Evaluation of the help which is available to bereaved children is very limited in comparison with assessment of the services available to adults: programmes such as Winston's Wish can, the authors believe, help to redress the balance. BC

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

INDEX TO BEREAVEMENT CARE

Volume 16 Spring 1997-Winter 1997

Key: A = article Ab= abstract O = obituary R = review
No.1 = Spring issue No.2 = Summer issue No.3 = Winter issue

Alberry N (R); No 1: 11
Ancestor worship in Japan: dependence and the resolution of grief (Ab); No 2: 24
Attig T (R); No 2: 22

Bayliss M (A); No 1: 6-7
Beaumont J (Report); No 3: 36-38
Bell G (A); No 2: 22
Bereavement - a biographical approach (A); No 3: 27-29
Bereavement and Loss Training Manual (R); No 2: 22
Beyond bereavement support group meetings: exploring outside social contacts among the members (Ab); No 2: 24
Black D (Report); No 3: 36-38
Brown D (A); No 2: 19-21

Casdagli (R); No 1: 10
Challenge of evaluating a child's bereave ment programme (Ab); No 3; 40
Child bereavement in Humberside schools (A); No 1: 8-10
Children Mourning, Mourning Children (R); No 2: 22
Children's concept of an afterlife (A); No 2: 16-19
Cline S (R); No 2: 23
Critical review of the concept of pathological grief following pregnancy loss (Ab); No 1: 12
Current Widowhood (R); No 3: 39

Dealing with Bereavement (resource pack) (R); No 1: 10
Death and Bereavement (R); No 3: 39
Deceased child in the psychic and social world of bereaved parents during the resolution of grief (Ab); No 3; 40
Doka K (R); No 2: 22
Dolman K (A); No 3: 29-31
Domestic killing: the perpetrator's need to grieve (A); No 3: 29-31
Drage T (A); No 2: 22

Elliott B (A); No 1: 2-5
Explaining death to children (A) No 3: 31-33

Facing Up (resource pack) (R); No 1: 10
Families and Loss (video) (R); No 3: 39
Fifth International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society (Report); No 3: 36-38
Frangoulis S (A); No 2: 16-19
Fuller J (R); No 2: 24M

Garfinkel L (R); No 2: 22
Gobey F (R); No1 10
Goldman L (R); No 2: 23
Goodall A (A); No 2: 22
Gould A (R); No 1: 11
Green J (R); No 2: 10
Grief and the sexual relationship of couples who have experienced a child's death (Ab); No 3; 40
Grief, Bereavement and Change (resource pack) (R); No 1: 10
Grief Game (resource pack) (R); No 1: 10

Healing Grief (R); No 1: 11
Hemmings P (A); No 3: 31-33
Herzstein M (Report); No 3: 36-38
Holland J (A); No 1: 8-10
Hopkins K (R); No 3: 39
How We Grieve (R); No 2: 22

In the Midst of Winter (R); No 2: 23
Ironside V (R); No 1: 11

John's Book (R); No 2: 24
Jordan N (A); No 2: 16-19
Jupp P (A); No 2: 21

King M (A); No 2: 14-15

Lansdown R (A); No 2: 16-19
Life and Loss: a guide to help grieving children (R); No 2: 23
Life Goes On (resource pack) (R); No 1: 10
Lifting the Taboo(R); No 2: 23
Living Awake (R); No 2: 23
Living beyond Loss: death in the family (R); No 2: 24
Lopata HZ (R); No 3: 39
Loss of a twin (A) No 3: 33-35

Maasdorp V (Report); No 3: 36-38
McGinty R (A); No 3: 29-31
McGoldrick M (R); No 2: 24
Middle-aged son's reaction to father's death (Ab); No 3; 40
Mothers now childless: survival after the death of an only child (Ab); No3; 40
My long road to Japan: a journey through grief after a death at sea (A); No 1: 6-7

National Funerals College (A); No 2: 21
Natural Death Handbook (R); No 1: 11
No one Saw my Pain (R); No 2: 22

Parkes CM (Report); No 3: 36-38
Paternal bereavement in older men (Ab); No 2: 24
Phillips K (R); No 2: 23

Rees D (R); No 3: 39
Responses to loss and bereavement in HIV (Ab); No 1: 12
Rudman A (R); No 3: 39

Searly Y (R); No 2: 10
Separation or internalisation when a loved one dies? (A); No 2: 19-21
Sexual needs of those whose partner has died (A); No 1: 2-5
Slaby A (R); No 2: 22
St Catherine's Hospice (R); No 1: 10
St Margaret's Somerset Hospice (R); No 1: 10
Steffes D (R); No 3: 39
Strong I (R); No 2: 10

Torrie M (R); No 2: 23
Towards an experiential theory of bereavement (Ab); No 1: 12

Using tranquillising medication after bereavement (A); No 2: 14-15

Walker G (R); No 2: 23
Walsh F (R); No 2: 24
Walter T (A); No 3: 27-29
Ward B (R); No 1: 11
Warner J (A); No 2: 14-15
'We've had the same loss, why don't we have the same grief?': loss and differential grief in families (Ab); No 1: 12
What do we tell the children? (R); No 2: 23
When Someone Dies: help for young people coping with grief (R); No 3: 39
When Someone Dies: how schools can help bereaved students (R); No 3: 39
Wise before the event: coping with crises in schools (R); No 1: 11
Woodward J (A); No 3: 33-35 BC

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