Mind mapping

with bereaved adolescents

AGE RANGE
teenage to adult

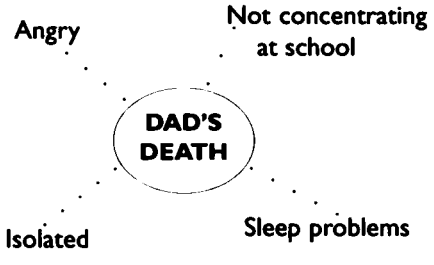
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When adolescents suffer a bereavement, the experience can be simply overwhelming. Their world is torn apart and their hopes and dreams for the future shattered. Adolescence is a time of great change and adaptation for young people, as they enter a different way of being and have to adjust constantly to changes in relationships within both family and peer groups. Academic pressure may be at an intense level, and planning for the future may be both exciting and stimulating.

When adolescents seek support after a bereavement, it can be because the adults around them have recognised changes in behaviour, often negative changes. Being helped to think in a structured way about what is happening around them can be both frightening for them and, at the same time, an enormous relief. In setting up a contract of work with people of this age, it is particularly important to chose a suitable venue, a relaxed, comfortable and non-threatening environment where they can feel safe.

With some young people the overwhelming nature of their loss becomes obvious during initial sessions, as the struggle to make sense of their feelings begins. An adolescent may present with a whole series of concerns with many areas overlapping, making it difficult to see a way forward.

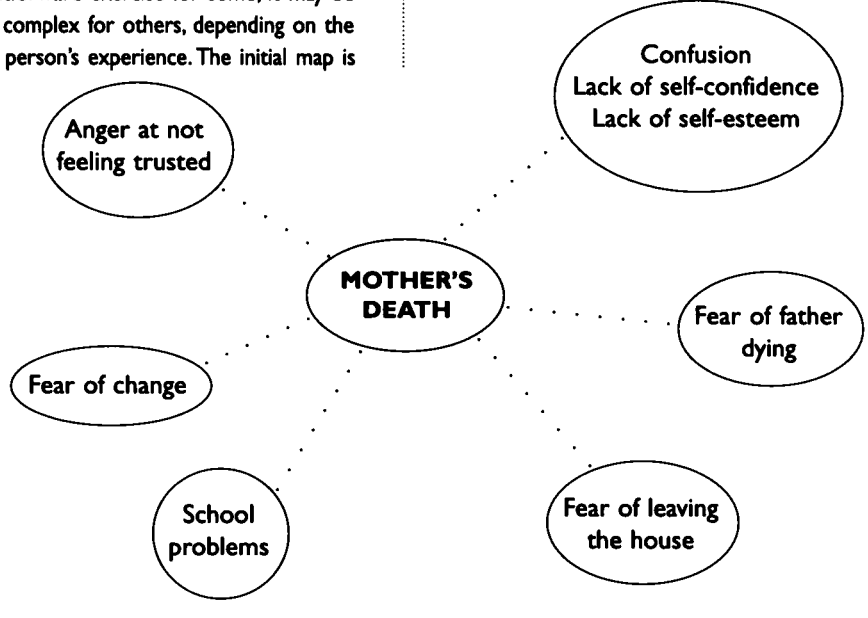
Mind mapping is a technique many young people have found helpful and which readily engages them in the therapeutic process. It encourages them to look for some sense of order which allows them to proceed with the work. To begin the process it is often a good idea to reflect with the young person on the loss which has caused them to seek help, which can then be plotted on paper to form the central body of the mind map.



The next stage is to help the young person identify for themselves the issues relating to the central theme, which are impacting on their present day life. The experience of loss and abandonment can spill over into other areas of life such as school, relationships with family members and social life. These can then be plotted around and linked to their central theme of loss. Although this can be a relatively straightforward exercise for some, it may be highly complex for others, depending on the young person's experience. The initial map is usually compiled over one or two sessions. It could then be used for a short series of, say, six sessions or for a much longer period, sometimes as long as 12-18 months, being updated as the work progresses

The mind map provides something tangible to hold on to and introduces the opportunity of separating and prioritising issues. Putting problems in writing allows young people to feel less overwhelmed and reassures them that they can indeed be in control. Later they will be able to recognise areas in their life which they feel have improved and those which need further work, so the mind map becomes useful for reviewing work together. Overall it can give a real sense of achievement and a greater level of self-esteem, strengthening young people to face the everyday tasks of daily life in a world which, for them, has significantly altered.

The mind mapping technique is not new and will be known to many of you; however it is helpful to recognise that it is adaptable to different areas of work. It can be designed to suit different age groups, and may serve a dual purpose for bereaved families, as a working tool for the adults and also as an effective means of developing an open conversation with their children. BC



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Children and Death. 17th King's College Centre for Education about Death and Bereavement Conference. Ontario, Canada. May 17-19 1999, with pre-conference workshops on May 16-17. Apply to John Morgan, 266 Epworth Avenue, London, Ontario, Canada N6A 2M3. ☎ (519) 432-2000.

Bereavement Forum Workshops. Hampshire, UK, 1999. 15 Jan: Art Therapy and 'The Sting of Death', led by Richard Fuller; 6 March: Psychodrama with Bereaved Families, led by Barbara Quin; 12-13 March: Running Bereavement Therapy Groups, led by Christine Kalus, Ruth Summers; 21 May: Humour in Hospices, led by Ben Renshaw. Contact Marion MacGregor, The Rowans, Purbrook Heath Road, Purbrook, Waterlooville, Hampshire PO7 5RU, UK. ☎ (01705) 250001.

The Compassionate Friends. 30th Anniversary Gathering. 29-31 January 1999. Birmingham, UK. Application to Jim Pringle, 17 Barton Crescent, Billingham, Stockton-on-Tees TS22 5HJ, UK.

PTSD MasterClass Series. In-depth, limited numbers workshops (am), and master classes for a wider audience (pm), 1999. London, UK. 20 January: Lionel Bailly; 19 February: Bessel van der Kolk; 15 March: Atle Dyregrov; 20 May: Sandy Bloom; 18 June: Stuart Turner. Further information from Mole Conferences, Mole House, 47 Tidy Street, Brighton BN1 4EL, UK. ☎ 01273 242634.