

Extracts from Cruse Bereavement Care Spring 2008

Does social support help with marital bereavement?

Can support from family and friends lessen the feeling of loss and grief?

Wolfgang Stroebe, Professor of Social Psychology, Department of Social and Organisational Psychology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands

It is almost a truism that social support from family and friends buffers individuals against the painful grief that generally follows bereavement. Surprisingly, both in previous reviews of research and in the two studies reported here, there is little empirical support for this assumption. The author argues that this pattern is consistent with assumptions from attachment theory. However, practically all of the research has been conducted with western samples. The fact that two recent studies conducted in Asia found evidence for buffering effects (probably restricted to support from children) raises the possibility of cultural differences in the role children can play as attachment figures.

Michael in the clouds

Talking to very young children about death

Patsy Way, Systemic Family Therapist, Candle Project, St Christopher's Hospice, Sydenham, London

Many adults, including professionals, hold a view that very young children cannot fully cognitively comprehend the meaning of death and that it is thus unnecessary, and possibly even damaging, to talk to them about someone close who has died. This article suggests that this developmentalist view does not take account of the many other ways in which children can connect to loss. Using a case study based on a Candle Project intervention, this article illustrates how very young children can join in concrete play activities that help their understanding of what has happened. It is argued that excluding young children from explanations and remembering practices may potentially create distress, confusion and long-term problems.

Crisis intervention in Finland

Support after traumatic bereavement at the Vantaa Crisis Centre

Päivi Muma,, Director, Vantaa Crisis Centre (Sosiaali- ja kriisipäivystys), Vantaa, Finland; ; Anne Jokinen, Psychologist, Vihti Family Counselling Unit, Nummela, Finland

A crisis intervention model has evolved in Finland consisting of teams of social workers and psychiatric nurses based in major urban developments, forming a national network. This article looks specifically at the 24-hour service provided by the Crisis Centre in the city of Vantaa, focusing on the work done there with those bereaved by disasters. The Centre's team offers a wide variety of immediate psychosocial and practical support for victims, including debriefing, assessment, referrals and liaison with the police and other local health, welfare and crisis organisations. It also supports survivors in viewing the bodies of those who have died and in planning funerals.