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“ The way we understand ourselves and the world we live in and the philosophical or meaning systems we draw upon, can be disrupted by loss. ”



Bereavement and Spiritual Care

by Christopher Hall

Historically grief has been seen primarily as a process of confronting and working through the emotional impacts of a loss.

Other dimensions of grief, such as its social and cognitive impacts have tended to receive less attention, but perhaps the most overlooked are the spiritual and religious dimensions of the loss, which are often neglected in both the research literature and in clinical practice. More recently, the importance of finding or reconstructing meaning in the wake of a loss has been identified as being of critical importance. The way we understand ourselves and the world we live in and the philosophical or meaning systems we draw upon, can be disrupted by loss. Bereavement may prompt an examination of our belief systems in order to answer the questions prompted by this event. This scaffold of meaning may be able to accommodate and hold this event. At other times this scaffold of meaning may be found wanting and demands an effortful engagement and reconstruction. These efforts may result in this scaffold of meaning being reshaped and strengthened, or the frameworks

of previously held spiritual beliefs and meaning may collapse under the weight of the loss.

The International Workgroup on Death, Dying and Bereavement states that “spirituality is concerned with the transcendental, inspirational and existential way to live one’s life” (1990, p. 75). While spirituality is very personal, religion is more communal. The word “religion” means “that binds together” and “that which ties things into a package”. Religion says “Here is a set of beliefs that forms a coherent whole, take it as your own” (Doka, 2011). Miller (1994), writes that religion is a set of beliefs and practices shared within a group of people, whereas spirituality is inherently individual, personal and eclectic.

With two-thirds of Australians claiming that a spiritual life is important to them and 33% praying or meditating at least weekly, how do we respond to and address the yearning that many clients have to reconcile their experience of loss within their spiritual and religious frames of reference? With nearly one quarter of Australians believing in God or a spirit,

higher power or life-force (Kaldor, Hughes & Black, 2010), how can we provide spiritual support to the bereaved client?

Bereavement researchers consider religious faith as “one of the most frequently used and effective means of coping with death” (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993, p. 32). A recent review of the role of religion and spirituality in adjustment following bereavement found they generally had a positive impact on adjustment to bereavement (Wortmann & Park, 2008). However many bereavement practitioners have little specialist training in spirituality. Practitioners may be reluctant to enter into conversations involving religion or spirituality, with some taking the view that these conversations are best left to clergy, pastoral carers or other members of faith communities. The reality is that clients will determine the timing, location and the person with whom they will share their spiritual concerns. If we ignore spiritual concerns, clients may feel that this is an area outside the scope of bereavement care. True holistic care requires that spiritual concerns are acknowledged, validated and addressed.



We can start by engaging the client in an exploration of their spiritual history through the use of a tool such as the FICA (Puchalski, 2006). This acronym represents:

Faith or Beliefs	What is your faith tradition?
Importance and Influence	How important is your faith to you?
Community	What is your church or community of faith?
Apply and Address	How do your religious and spiritual beliefs apply to your health? How might we address your spiritual needs?

Does the bereaved person identify with a particular faith tradition? Do they belong to a faith community? Do they actively practice that faith by engaging in public and private rituals and practices? How important is their faith system in making decisions?

Moving beyond religious affiliation we need to explore when and where does the bereaved person feel most spiritually connected. What practices do they utilise when they're anxious, lonely or distressed? Where do they find meaning and hope? What frames of reference inform their spirituality such as karma, fate or punishment? What are the actions, prayers, words or music that provide spiritual comfort? Rituals, which can provide a sense of comfort, meaning and connection, can also be explored. For clients who do not have particular rituals we can work with them to create "meaning-full" ritual (Hall, 2003).

The frequently reported experience of sensing the presence of the deceased should also be explored. Many clients may be anxious about sharing these experiences because of a

fear of been judged as 'crazy'. Actively inquiring into these extraordinary experiences can be a source of comfort and meaning. The bereaved will frequently draw upon existential, spiritual, and religious frameworks in order to make sense of these all too common experiences (Benore & Park, 2004).

Ten Strategies For Enhancing Spiritual Care

- 1 Each person has a spiritual dimension that must be considered along with the emotional, cognitive and physical components of grief.
- 2 Cultivate curiosity in the bereaved persons spiritual and religious worlds, giving spiritual questions both time and attention.
- 3 Spiritual needs can only be determined through a thoughtful review of spiritual beliefs, practices, experiences and needs.
- 4 Listen, acknowledge, support and affirm the clients spiritual concerns.
- 5 Spirituality has many elements and forms of expression. It may be religious or secular; private or public; and seek expression through symbols, rituals, practices, art, prayer or meditation. Consider: which of these forms of expression is the best fit for the bereaved person?
- 6 Assist the bereaved in making sense of the loss through the exploration of questions such as - How have you made sense of the death? How do you interpret the loss now? What philosophical or spiritual beliefs contributed to your adjustment to this loss? How has this experience affected your view of yourself or your world?
- 7 Explore extraordinary experiences that the bereaved may have had, including sensing the presence of the deceased and dreams.
- 8 Develop knowledge of the spiritual resources and caregivers available in the wider community. This should include knowledge of faith traditions and cultural practices.
- 9 Ensure that spiritual care is reflected in the workplace through a written statement of philosophy and that appropriate training and time is available for staff to develop expertise in spiritual care.
- 10 Consider your own spirituality as a bereavement practitioner. What opportunities do you have for expressing and enhancing your own spirituality?

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Autumn 2013 edition of *Bereavement Practice for Clinicians and Service Providers*. I hope this finds you well and the rewards of your work are unfolding for the year. My hope is that this edition will offer you tools to enhance your work and renew your curiosity for learning.

This edition takes as its theme spirituality, and bereavement, a subject not often explored. Christopher Hall, Director of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement looks at the relationship between meaning making and spirituality, and the significance of communal connection in religious beliefs. Various strategies for enhancing spiritual care have been outlined in this context.

The book review, *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counselling the Bereaved*, edited by Robert A. Neimeyer, is a collaboration of interventions with the bereaved that draws from both research and grounded practice techniques (Well worth reading, I have certainly taken away some pearls of wisdom that have enhanced my insight).

We are also excited to announce that Robert A. Neimeyer will be delivering a series of workshops for the Centre in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney in July this year. See page 5 for further information.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a safe Easter holiday period and some good chocolate for those who indulge. I am looking forward to continued connections with you throughout the year and very much welcome any feedback that assists us in delivering relevant information to you in this publication. Take good care of yourselves.

Warm regards,

Jenny Field, Senior Bereavement Counsellor and Volunteer Coordinator
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Abstracts

Sourced through PubMed.gov

A review of spiritual assessment in health care practice.

Med J Aust. 2007 May 21;186(10 Suppl):S60-2. Rumbold, BD.

“The recent surge of interest in links between spirituality and health has generated many assessment approaches that seek to identify spiritual need and suggest strategic responses for health care practitioners. The interpretations of spirituality made within health frameworks do not do justice to the way spirituality is understood in society in general. Spiritual assessment should not impose a view or definition of spirituality, but should seek to elicit the thoughts, memories and experiences that give coherence to a person’s life. Spiritual assessment tools should not be used without adequate exploration of the assumptions made. Assessment processes need to be adequately conceptualised and practically relevant.”

[Click here to access the full text article](#)

Formal and Informal Spiritual Assessment

Asian Pac J Cancer Prev. 2010 Apr;11 Suppl 1:51-7
Puchalski, CM.

“Spirituality is increasingly recognized as an essential element of health. A novel model of interprofessional spiritual care was developed by a national consensus conference of experts in spiritual care and palliative care. Integral to this model is a spiritual screening, history or assessment as part of the routine history of patients. Spiritual screening can be done by a clinician on an intake into a hospital setting. Clinicians who make diagnosis and assessments and plans, and make referrals to appropriate experts do spiritual histories. In spiritual care, board certified chaplains, spiritual directors and pastoral counselors are the typical spiritual care referrals. Board certified chaplain do a spiritual assessment that is a more detailed assessment of religious and spiritual beliefs and how those impact care or patient’s healthcare decision-making. There are several screening and history tools. One history tool named FICA, was developed by a group of primary care physicians and recently validated at study at the City of Hope. This tool is widely used in a variety of clinical settings in the US and Canada. The spiritual history tools allow the clinician the opportunity to diagnose spiritual distress or identify patients’ spiritual resources of strength and then integrate that information into the clinical treatment or care plan.”

[Click here to access the full text article](#)



Reflections of a Bereavement Practitioner

Keren Ludski has been working in the field of bereavement since 1998, and established her private practice, Peace of Mind, in 2002. She is a qualified and experienced professional educator, counsellor, counselling supervisor, VET assessor and trainer, facilitator and speaker.

What has brought you to this field of work?

In 1998 my third child died of SIDS. I found it very difficult at the time to find the right kind of support for me. There seemed to be plenty of counsellors and psychologists around, but not many who really dealt with grief and loss (especially loss of children) and not many that I connected with. Part of my road to recovery was realising that this was a field of work that I wanted to contribute to.

How do you bear the sadness you witness or people share with you?

This has certainly been a real learning process for me. I have implemented many strategies over the years to offer myself a degree of protection from other people's sadness with mixed results. When I sit with clients now, I know that it's ok for me to be sad, as I'm witnessing people at their most vulnerable. At the end of the day however, I remind myself that this is their story, their grief — it is not mine. Using a strategy to ground myself enables me to let go of their sadness.

How do you support yourself when client stories or circumstances resonate with you?

I believe that it is imperative in this field of work to have both a personal and professional support network. My professional support network allows me the forum to debrief on a regular basis. This, in conjunction with my regular supervision, allows me opportunity to delve within myself and really spend some time working with what's going

on for me. My supervisor is also great in helping me develop strategies to deal with transference and counter transference issues. My personal support network constantly ensures I separate work and personal time and therefore establishes boundaries that are so necessary in this field. I've learnt how important self care is and I ensure that I continuously make time for myself to exercise, do yoga and walk my dog.

How do you help people understand the complexities of grief and bereavement?

I always start by normalising their grief process. I find that by normalising their grief experience, I'm opening the door for them to share whatever is going on in their minds. I find that there is always a place for psycho-education within the session and this allows me to gently educate my clients on the journey that is loss and grief. By giving them information (not too much that it becomes overwhelming) clients are able to gain some insight as to what may lay ahead for them. I also constantly remind them that it is a highly personal journey and people do it in their own way.

What is the most challenging aspect to your work in grief and bereavement?

I think the most challenging aspect of this job is that we cannot fix it. I do not have a magic wand that I can wave and take away their pain. I cannot bring the dead person back. I cannot put their life back together for them. The reality of the situation makes it a very humbling experience for me.

What do you find most rewarding in your work?

The most rewarding part of my work is being able to sit as one with a client, allowing them to share their deepest thoughts, no matter how strange they think they are. The ability to normalise their experience, thereby removing their belief that they are 'freaks' or 'abnormal', is an aspect of the job that I actually love. Providing an environment where they are safe to share all aspects of their experiences with the deceased is something that I'm incredibly passionate about.

What three pieces of advice/insight would you give to those working in the field of grief and bereavement?

1. Establish a solid support network.
2. Ensure that you have worked through your own grief experiences.
3. Leave the 'fix it' mentality at home.

What are some ways you have engaged in self care in this intense field of work?

I find journaling incredibly beneficial. It gives me the opportunity to be honest and open in my thoughts around my interactions with clients. I can then take the insight I have received from my journal and discuss it in supervision. I have also made myself a priority. If I am not feeling strong, healthy and nourished then I will have nothing to give to my clients. I therefore book out times in my diary for exercise and yoga. I also ensure that I have some time for me at the end of the workday before I step back into mother mode.

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is pleased to present:



Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD

University of Memphis - USA

Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counselling the Bereaved

Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney July 2013

As contemporary models of bereavement have become more nuanced and empirically informed, so too have the practices available to grief counsellors and therapists. Dr Neimeyer's workshops offer in-depth training in several of these techniques, nesting them both within the

therapy relationship and in the context of current theories and research that provide flexible frameworks for intervention. Making extensive use of actual clinical videos as well as how-to instruction in the use of numerous therapeutic tools, participants will discuss and practice several methods for helping clients integrate the reality of the loss into the ongoing story of their lives, while also reconstructing their continuing bond to their loved one.

Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD, is Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, where he also maintains an active clinical practice. Since completing his doctoral training at the University of Nebraska in 1982, he has published 25 books, including *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved* and *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society: Bridging Research and Practice* (both with Routledge), and serves as Editor of the journal *Death Studies*. The author of nearly 400 articles and book chapters, he is currently working to advance a more adequate theory of grieving as a meaning-making process, both in his published work and through his frequent professional workshops for national and international audiences.

Event Details

PROGRAM ONE:

Processing the Event Story of the Death

PROGRAM TWO:

Accessing the Back Story of the Relationship

DATES:

Melbourne:

8th & 9th July, 2013

Brisbane:

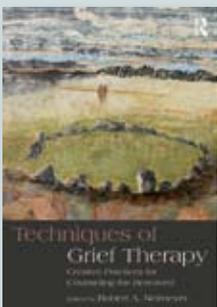
11th & 12th July, 2013

Sydney:

15th & 16th July, 2013

These workshops can be done consecutively, as part of a two-day program, or separately as individual workshops.

[Click here for further information and to register to attend.](#)



Book Review

Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counselling the Bereaved

Edited by Robert A. Neimeyer (2012)
408pp. Routledge, ISBN: 9780415807258
AUD: \$59.00 (RRP \$67.00)

Robert Neimeyer's latest text, *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counselling the Bereaved*, comprises mindful collaborative explorations of grief work, which honour the conceptual and empirical work of fellow workers in the field.

“It's not about what grief therapy does for someone but rather what clients and therapists do with techniques” (p3)

As Neimeyer acknowledges in the prologue, because grief is so universal, grief therapy can be easily mistaken as a 'simple' journey. To the contrary however, this book explores and embraces the tapestry of deep and intricate interventions that various skilled therapists have engaged to support persons experiencing grief in all facets of its complexity.

As a whole, the various techniques offer pathways to explore grief in ways that acknowledge the unique ways with which humans express their lived experiences. Consideration is given to both techniques that facilitate insight into the ways our body expresses grief, the role of dream and flashbacks, the possible role of medication with prolonged depression symptoms, ways to integrate and internalise relationships with the deceased, and techniques for working with trauma, to name a few.

I would strongly recommend *Techniques of Grief Therapy* to anyone in the helping professions. It is organised in a manner that makes it easy to locate appropriate techniques and outlines a range of both practical interventions and creative techniques to support the work you do. The careful attention to the grief trajectory and various techniques that safely support exploration and understanding, provide a valuable toolkit in bereavement work. It doesn't matter whether you are new to the field or a seasoned clinician wanting to renovate your techniques, you will be sure to find new and rich ideas for consideration within this text.

Jenny Field

Senior Bereavement Counsellor and
Volunteer Coordinator,
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

This book, along with a range of other useful resources, can be purchased from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.

To order this text, please call the Centre on 1800 642 066 or email info@grief.org.au



Our Services

Newsletter enquiries

For all enquiries about this publication, please contact Jenny Field on (03) 9285 2100 or email j.field@grief.org.au

Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) operates a statewide Specialist Bereavement Counselling and Support Service for Victoria. This program is supported by the Victorian Government Department of Health and has counsellors located across metropolitan Melbourne, in regional areas (Grampians, Gippsland, Hume, Barwon South-West, and Loddon Mallee) and in areas affected by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. For further information, call (03) 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Support groups

ACGB operates a range of support groups, including groups for adults, children, bereaved partners, loss of a parent and many more. For further information call (03) 9265 2100 or email support@grief.org.au

Practitioner Consultancy Service

This service provides free information, consultation and support for practitioners who are working with bereaved clients experiencing complex and prolonged bereavements. To access this service call 1300 858 113 during business hours.

Education and training

ACGB offers quality education and training opportunities for health professionals, students, volunteers and any other individual or agency desiring to enhance grief and bereavement knowledge and practice. Education and training programs are offered as seminars, workshops, short and long courses, conferences and customised training. For full details of all programs and services offered go to www.grief.org.au/education

Bereavement Courses

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, as the largest provider of grief and bereavement education, is offering a number of research-informed, high-quality courses including post-graduate training program, the Vocational Graduate Certificate in Bereavement Counselling and Intervention (nationally accredited). For more information contact the Centre on (03) 9265 2100 or email courses@grief.org.au

Customised training and consultancy

ACGB offer a range of customised training and consultancy services that provide research-informed, high quality professional development programs that meet the specialist training needs of organisations, groups and individuals. For further information contact the Centre on (03) 9265 2100 or email education@grief.org.au

Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement

Published by ACGB three times per year, this journal encompasses both academic and applied aspects of grief and bereavement and is a ranked journal with the Australian Research Council as part of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative (www.arc.gov.au) To find out how you can subscribe to this journal, call (03) 9265 2100 or email griefmatters@grief.org.au

Internships

ACGB has a limited number of placement opportunities for experienced counsellors seeking to advance their knowledge and skills in bereavement counselling. For further information contact the Centre on (03) 9265 2100 or email info@grief.org.au

Membership

Access a range of benefits through the ACGB membership program. An enhanced membership option, reciprocal membership with the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC), is also available. For more information about membership options and benefits go to www.grief.org.au/get_involved or call (03) 9265 2100.

Donations

Donations over \$2 are tax deductible and allow ACGB to continue to provide services including bereavement counselling, support groups, newsletters, events, education and training. To make a donation, visit www.grief.org.au or call (03) 9265 2100.

We value your feedback

If you have feedback about this publication, or any of the services delivered by the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement we'd love to hear from you. Contact us on (03) 9265 2100 or email info@grief.org.au

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Pastoral and Spiritual Care. Bereavement Care Program. Bereavement Care Program. The purpose of Bereavement Care is to support patients, families and staff members in their process of grief and at all stages of dying: before, during and after death. We are committed to helping patients and families find space and resources for healthy grieving, and to educate and support staff members who provide care to those patients and families. Grief and Bereavement Resources - English Grief and Bereavement Resources - Spanish. For more information on Bereavement Care at Children's Health, please contact: