

Book review

Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner,

J. William Worden, *New York, NY, Springer, 2018 (5th edition), pp. xv + 293, ISBN 978-0-8261-3474-5, ebook ISBN 978-0-8261-3475-2, \$75, £59*

Grief, bereavement and loss are inevitable experiences in the human condition. Grieving over death and loss is an essential and vital process that most people are able to experience and emerge from in a healthy manner. Grief is multidimensional, transformational and a unique experience for people experiencing it. Grief is pressed into the service of death and dying (Kubler-Ross, 1989) but can also be experienced in divorce, termination of work, lost expectations and even lost dreams. Studies of grief conventionally focuses on emotional loss but also have physical, cognitive, behavioural, social, cultural, spiritual and philosophical foundations. The only certainty is that life will end and we will die, so it is interesting why everyday understanding of death and grief lags behind what is contained within this book.

There is much of interest in reviewing Worden's work. The book is in its fifth edition, providing testament to its value, organisation, format and ease of reading for seasoned and new practitioners seeking an introduction to issues surrounding death. Recent adjustments in the current content of the book include 'cyber mourning', complicated grief, updated information on grief and depression, and reflective discussion pieces for each chapter. This is supported with instructor's manual, PowerPoint deck and test bank of useful exercises.

The chapters are well-organised moving from 'Attachment, loss and the experience of grief', through 'understanding the mourning process' and its mediations, 'facilitating uncomplicated grief', 'complicated grief' and its resolution, 'special types of losses' and 'grief and family systems'.

Chapter One, concerns attachment theory and 'normal grief's' feelings, physical sensations, cognitions and behaviours. Chapter Two, examines the mourning process to accept the reality of the loss, to process the pain of grief, to adjust to a world without the deceased and to find a

way to remember the deceased. Chapter Three surveys the mediators of mourning (who, what, how, where, when).

Chapter Four facilitates 'uncomplicated' grief with individual Grief Counselling, whereas Grief Therapy is the specialised techniques of intervention for a successful resolution. The ten principles of Grief Counselling and useful techniques are discussed in Worden's assured style. *Counselling in Groups*, and 'Facilitated Grief through Funeral Rituals' evaluates the effectiveness of Grief Counselling.

Chapter Five considers abnormal grief reactions in complicated grieving and the need for Grief Counselling. Models of complicated mourning (chronic, delayed, exaggerated, masked) aid diagnosis in the mourning process.

The specific therapeutic techniques and procedures of Grief Therapy, for resolving complicated mourning, occupy Chapter Six. These contribute to Worden's evaluation of the effectiveness of Grief Therapy. Special types of loss such as suicide, violence, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), miscarriages, stillbirths, abortion, anticipatory grief, HIV/AIDS are discussed in Chapter Seven. The primary focus of the majority of the book is on grief reactions from an individual and relationship perspective. Chapter Eight shifts the focus to consider the impact on context such as the family. The penultimate Chapter Nine is the special challenge, for mental health workers, of their own losses, feared losses, personal death awareness, unresolved conflicts and the recognition of counselling's limitations. The final chapter concludes with issues of training in Grief Counselling with twenty vignettes that address the range of complex grief issues.

An evaluation of the strengths of the work are the accessible discussions on the practice of counselling and therapy. The range, scope and depth of discussion will give bereaved individuals, hope and understanding in experiencing loss.

There is much to be found here for the contribution to the practice, art and discipline of social work such as the multifaceted and multilayered experience of death and loss, grief counselling supporting individuals, and grief therapy providing healing interventions. The need for integrating an awareness of death, techniques, interventions and therapy has much to offer the discipline of social work through a reinvigorated death education. For time-pressed practitioners, this is useful to a range of mental health workers, as a comprehensive and accessible introduction to grief, loss and bereavement that offers illumination, models for action and hope.

Overall, the need to reflect upon loss and grief is one of the most significant issues we all face. The book aims to provide a comprehensive and workable set of techniques for successful interventions and resolutions surrounding death. It is an essential contribution to the protective armoury for the inevitability of the finitude of human existence.

There are spectral absences in the book. The philosophical basis for addressing grief and understanding death would be a welcome addition, the work of [Heidegger \(1962\)](#) in facing death as a philosophical sensibility, multiple cultural perspective on mourning and the challenge of grieving under neo-liberalism would all benefit from inclusion. The case studies are American in flavour and focus, and psychology is the spectral presence that haunts this text. However, the book is of real value for those working with people experiencing loss.

References

Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*, Oxford, Blackwell.
Kubler-Ross, E. (1989) *On Death and Dying*, London, Routledge.

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