


Loss and bereavement



A guide for professionals working across the
criminal justice system

“ ..it's encouraging professionals to look out for things. ”
(Practitioner, 2018)



"...no soul
remembered is ever
really gone."

(Albom, 2013:308)

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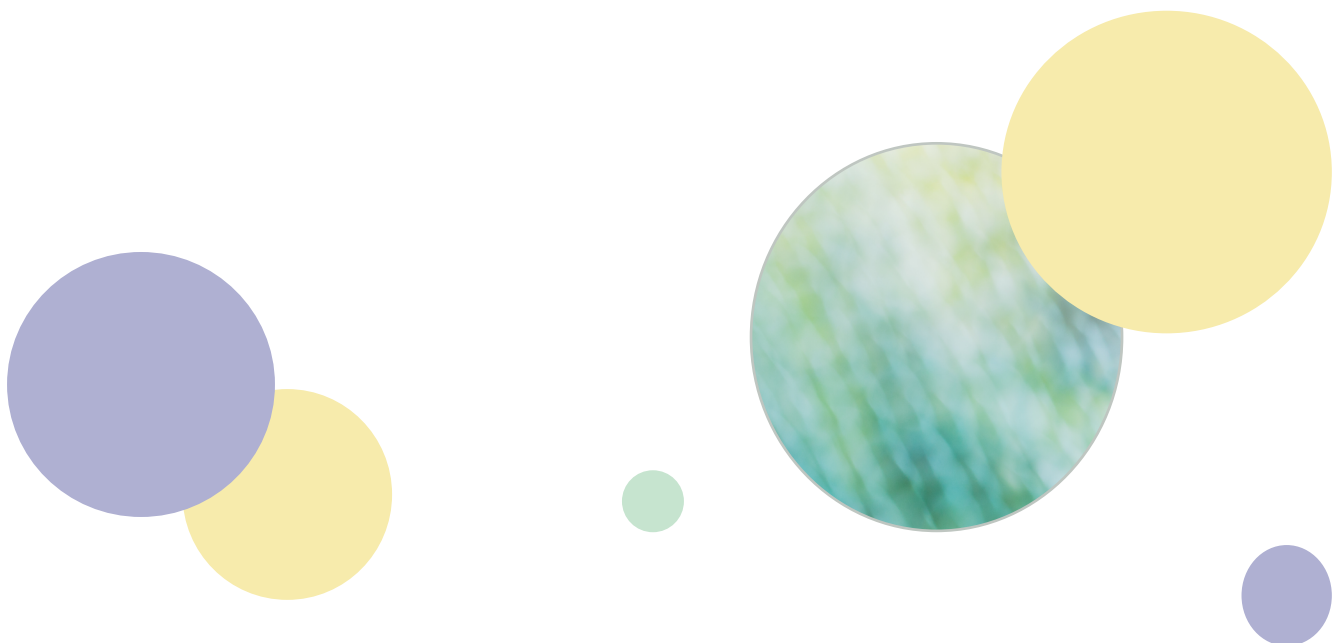
It seems as if all our lives we are either reflecting on previous losses, dealing with loss or anticipating loss (Oswin, 2004), and this project has given us the opportunity to think about loss in a different context, with a range of people across the UK. We have listened to, and spoken with, numerous professionals across the criminal justice system. We have consulted with health care professionals with a palliative care background; we have talked with bereavement counsellors working directly with people in the criminal justice system. We have explored and debated the issues of loss in the criminal justice system with a number of academics with explicit expertise in this area.

All of these people shared their ideas freely; easily engaged with the topic area and shared their powerful stories to illustrate the need for booklets like this one. Thank you to all of these people.

The Barrow-Cadbury Trust recognised the need for this project, and entrusted us with the work; thank you.

And last but by no means least, thank you to Patsy Corcoran, Development Manager, Asist, who managed to translate the ideas firmly into a reality by designing this booklet. 'Til next time.

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Introduction

“There is clearly a consistent sense of ‘double jeopardy’, with the losses incurred via the justice system being compounded and intensified by the additional losses associated with death and harm to oneself or others.” (Smith, 2018, p.x).

Although considered the only real certainty in life, death is one of the hardest losses to accommodate. No doubt, dying is a critical issue for the prison system involving many ethical issues (Wrigley, 2108). Death and dying are also probably the most difficult and significant events requiring support in the lives of young people in the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system incorporates environments involving enduring losses, where offenders confront death, bereavement and separation at a very high rate (Vaswani, 2014) and where appearing tough is an important survival skill, so that, consequently, young offenders cannot mourn openly (Hendry, 2009). The depth and multiplicity of prisoners’ losses echoes the continuum of loss which is experienced throughout the criminal justice system (Read & Santatzoglou, 2018). Within these particular contexts, the concepts of loss generally, and bereavement specifically, are likely to be overlooked. Therefore, the criminal justice system’s ‘duty of care’ “should remain its paramount obligation when it takes the decision to remove someone’s liberty” (Smith, 2018, pp.x-xi) and provide the continuum of support required.

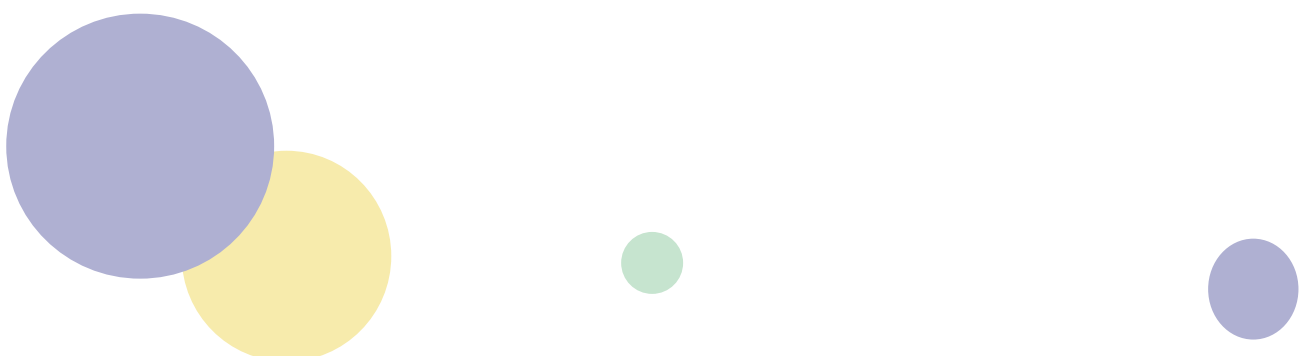
“ ... other organisations don’t have those conversations and I wouldn’t say it’s their fault, it’s because they’ve not been trained on it, they’re unaware of it, they’re scared of it.” (Practitioner, 2017).

In recognition of these issues, this guide has been developed as a supplementary resource to the Key Messages. It has been informed by an action research approach, drawing upon the experiences of a range of different professionals across the criminal justice system. The guide highlights the needs of bereaved young people and provides both information and good practice initiatives to support those professionals involved. It has been designed specifically for professionals who support young people across the criminal justice system within a variety of contexts. It also offers an evidence-based overview of the key models and contemporary bereavement practice issues; in order inform to help inform those professionals of the issues they may need to consider when supporting young people.

The aims of this guide are to:

- Remind professionals that loss can mean different things to different people, and to never underestimate its impact
- Raise the profile of the bereavement support needs of young people in the criminal justice system
- Acknowledge the varied impact that death may generate
- Promote understanding about the theoretical concepts of grief, loss and bereavement
- Focus upon the practical approaches which may be used to support young people encountering loss and bereavement
- Encourage professionals to be creative when supporting the bereaved
- Help professionals to be critically reflective and realistic about support approaches
- Ensure that a consistency of support is available to all young people in the criminal justice system.

This guide is not a substitute for education and training around this sensitive topic, but is designed to complement these and any other existing resources available. It has been developed by academics and by professionals, who have current experience of the criminal justice system.



1. Loss and Bereavement

Approaches to understanding grief

Much of the research and current thinking around grief work has evolved from the work of John Bowlby (1980), who identified the role that attachment plays when people experience loss. Usually, (but not always), the nature of the relationship between the deceased and the survivor dictates the impact of grief. A model of grief offers a framework from within which practitioners can facilitate or enable grief. Such models also affirm the grief process and the diverse ways that individuals might react following the death of a loved one. Over the years, a range of grief models have evolved, some more helpful and effective than others. The models and approaches identified here are used to offer a flavour of how such understanding can facilitate the healthy support of bereaved young people. Bereaved people may respond to death in numerous, multiple ways, which include emotional, physical, behavioural and psychological effects (See Table 1 which provides an overview of the various common responses to death.).

Table 1. Overview of grief responses (Worden, 2009, pp. 18-31)

Responses to loss (Worden, 2009, pp. 18-31)	
Feelings	Sadness, anger, guilt, loneliness, fatigue, anxiety, shock, yearning, helplessness, relief, numbness, emancipation.
Physical sensations	Hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest, oversensitivity to noise, breathlessness, muscle weakness, lack of energy, dry throat and mouth.
Cognitions	Disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, sense of presence, hallucinations.
Behaviours	Sleep and appetite disturbances, absent-mindedness, social withdrawal, dreams of the deceased, avoidance behaviours, searching and calling out, sighing and restless hyperactivity, crying, visiting old haunts, treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased.

Within the criminological context, those responses to bereavement may be linked to criminal conduct. As Rodger illustrates:

"I have been surprised how often bereavement has been the indirect cause of the criminal offence. The pain of loss has been expressed in extreme anger and violence. Alcohol and illegal drugs are an escape from painful feelings of loss and maintaining a drug habit leads to crime." (2004, p.28).

Therefore, having an appreciation of the underpinning models and theories of grief might help professionals to appreciate its complexity and inform their practical support strategies.

Theories and models of grief

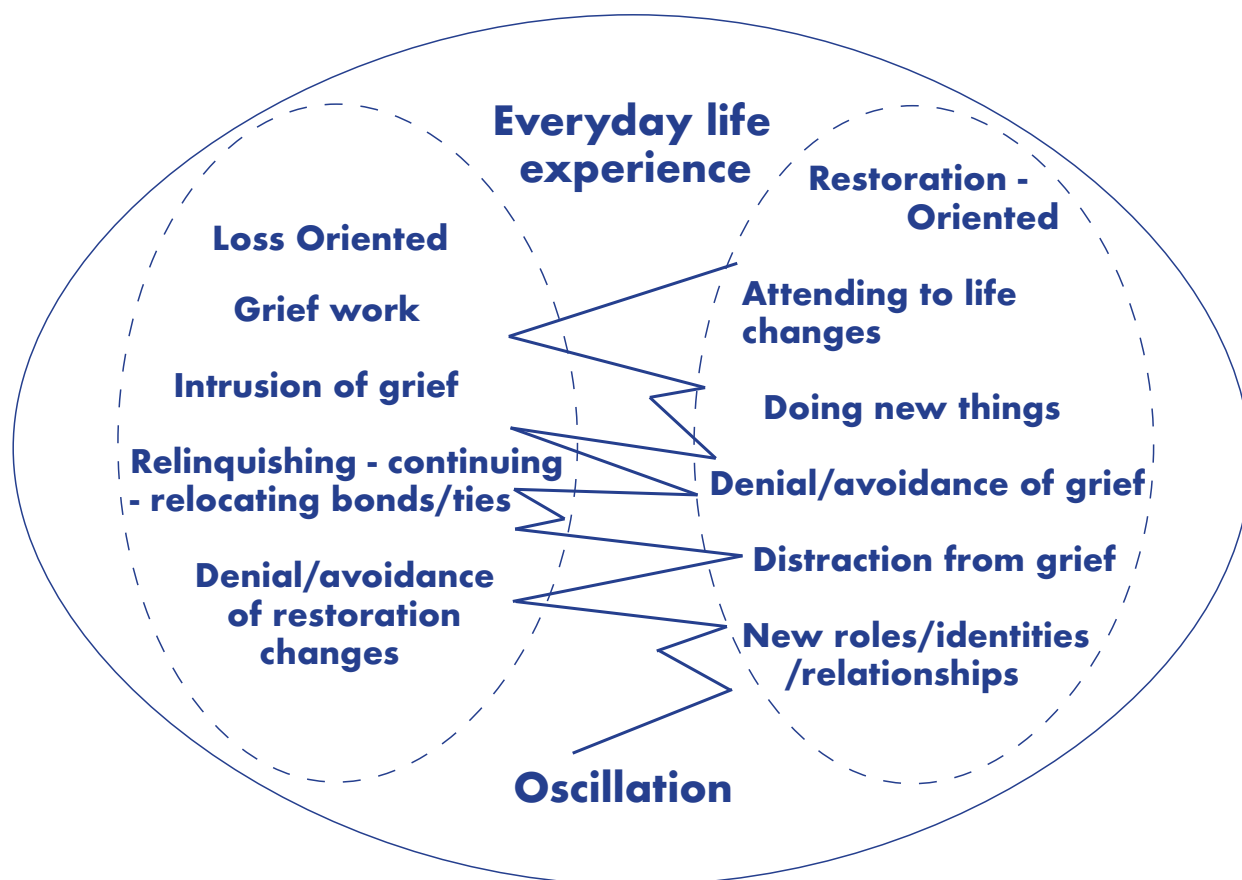
Traditional theories of grief involve the idea of psychologically 'letting go' of the deceased before being able to move on with life. Various stages of grief are described, e.g. shock and numbness, yearning and searching, disorganisation and despair, and re-organisation (Parkes, 1996). Alternatively, grief is seen as conforming to a series of tasks: to accept the reality of the loss; to process or work through the pain of grief; to adjust to a world without the deceased; and to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life (Worden, 2009, pp.30-53). Such tasks take into account theories which suggest that the resolution of grief involves continuing bonds, where the survivors maintain a relationship with the deceased and that these continuing bonds can be a healthy part of the survivor's ongoing life (Klass et al., 1996).

As the quote of Albom at the beginning of this guide so ably recognises '... no soul remembered is ever really gone'. (2013, p.308). Life story work, memory books and photographs are all tangible ways of helping young people to maintain memories and preserve important relationships with their loved ones in accessible and concrete ways. Young people may feel overwhelmed by their grief at times, yet at other times appear bright and cheerful and appear to be coping well. Grief is inevitably unpredictable and difficult to support. The following models of the Dual Process and Disenfranchised Grief may be particularly helpful in supporting professionals in this context.

The Dual Process Model

Stroebe & Schut (1999) introduce the Dual Process model of grief where bereaved people oscillate between the mixed feelings/emotions of coping, to being overwhelmed with their grief. It is worth noting that there is no time limit identified with this oscillation.

Figure 1. The Dual Process model of grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999)



Machin (1998) describes a range of response to loss in which people may show bias towards certain dimensions of loss such as feeling overwhelmed or feeling that they need to be in control. A bias towards a balanced dimension suggests that the individual is able to address both his/her emotions and thinking. Also, this means that the individual is able to address the need to be in control and get on with his/her life. In this sense, the balanced dimension is similar to the oscillation process in the Dual Process model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

Disenfranchised Grief

Doka (1989; 2002; 2016) coined the term disenfranchised grief to describe grief that is not socially accepted and so may be more difficult to deal with because of a lack of social support or the benefits of rituals. He identified certain groups as being more likely to experience disenfranchised grief, including people with mental health issues; children and young people; older people; prisoners; and people with a learning disability (Doka, 2002). His approach remains helpful because it recognises the importance of the social context in which death occurs. Indeed, death never occurs in a vacuum, but within a social context, and that context may have a profound impact on how the death is accommodated (Read, 2014), is a point, which other models often neglect to include.

As one professional indicated:

“Loss is seen in its wider term with many poor transitions and changes for our clients. We have failed adoptions, SGO families and longer term fostering as well as residential placements that break down. Young people that we work with may lose one parent also or have changes in caregiver.”
(Social Worker, 2017)

Doka recognised three key elements to disenfranchised grief: the griever, the relationship and the loss itself which all reinforce the significance of the context where the loss occurs (see Table 2).

Table 2. The three key elements to disenfranchised grief: a criminal justice perspective

1. The griever can be disenfranchised because of the assumptions that other people make. For young people in the criminal justice system, their grief may be superseded by other events happening around them, and it may be they are assumed not to grieve because they don't seem to be reacting to previous losses.
2. The relationship may be disenfranchised if it is not recognised or valued. It may happen that (for example) a father does not visit his son very often whilst involved in the criminal justice system. If the father then dies, it would still be important for the son to know. He is still the father. Everyone has a right to know when important people in their lives die so that they can acknowledge the death and explore its consequences and impact.
3. The loss itself can be disenfranchised, as many losses that are not death related (loss of home, transitional loss, loss of friendships, etc.) can be overlooked because of the tendency to associate loss mainly with death. In the criminal justice system, young people may be exposed to enormous, often multiple, losses, that will have largely been ignored and subsequently neglected. Such losses include the transitional losses associated with, for example, home movement; care support movement as professionals may have come and gone; losing touch with close friends; job losses or loss of career opportunities. All changes (however positive in the long term) involve loss of some kind at some point. The concept of the continuum of losses (Read & Santatzoglou, 2018) is something that professionals in criminal justice need to recognize. It's a missed opportunity not to learn about loss.

Disenfranchised grief and complicated grief

Developing severe longer term reactions to loss associated with problematic health conditions is known as “complicated grief” (Zhang et al., 2006). Olson & McEwen looked at bereaved prisoners through the lens of both disenfranchised and complicated grief and found that they can be experienced in an interconnected manner where the one disenfranchised grief lead to the other namely complicated grief:

“Prison inmates and their relationships often are not well regarded by others. They may be considered disenfranchised grievers, because they are removed from their natural support systems. The secondary losses resulting from their incarceration, such as loss of freedom, privacy, and family contact, are disenfranchised losses ... When grief is not recognized as valid, feelings of anger, guilt, and powerlessness can result in a complicated grief response.” (2004, p.226)

This demonstrates the complexity of grief work which the models try to capture but professionals need to remember that they should not be completely restricted by these models.

Summary

Such approaches tell us much about the uniqueness of grief and the range of potential responses involved. Young people need to have every opportunity to participate in the rituals associated with death to affirm the death and enable them to say their goodbyes in a meaningful way. If individuals are excluded from grief work, then the grief process may be delayed and some individuals may find it difficult to accept the death and subsequently acknowledge and explore their feelings of loss, often resulting in complicated grief (Dodd & Blackman, 2014).

Young people do experience loss and do grieve, but they require every opportunity to be involved in the death and bereavement experience to do so effectively. This may prove challenging for many different reasons. Such experiences can also help them to develop appropriate coping mechanisms for any future losses.

Challenges to bereavement support for young people in the criminal justice system

Dealing with death and bereavement is often difficult. Even with support from people within their own social circle, it can be a long, convoluted process. For young people in the criminal justice system there may be additional considerations related to the perceptions of losses they may be exposed to. Many losses may simply be accepted and not formally considered as having any real impact. Figure 2 provides an overview of the potential losses young people might experience in this context.



Figure 2. Range of potential losses in the criminal justice system

Whilst the criminal justice system can preclude natural opportunities for young people to grieve (such as routinely visiting the grave), professionals must be aware of and respond to the bereaved person's need to grieve. If not, it may compound the person's ability to talk about their sadness or anger.

We know that the impact of loss can be profound. Bereavement can influence the potential for self-harm in the general population of children and young people. The 2017 published report entitled *Suicide by Children and Young People*, contained the results of 922 suicides by people aged under 25 in England and Wales during 2014 and 2015.

According to the main findings, bereavement was found to be “common in both the age groups of under 20s and 20-24 year olds”, in particular, “25% of under 20s and 28% of 20 -24 year olds”, which is “equivalent to around 125 deaths per year” (NCISH, 2017, p.3). Notably, young offenders suffer bereavement at a much higher rate than the general population, and are more likely to have suffered multiple/ traumatic losses (Vaswani, 2018; Hester & Taylor, 2011; Finlay & Jones, 2000). In one of the few studies related to young offenders and bereavement it was indicated that:

“healthcare staff had noticed that several young offenders with a history of loss/ bereavement in childhood or adolescence seemed particularly emotionally vulnerable” (Finlay & Jones, 2000, p.569).

Complicated or disenfranchised grief both also have an impact on reoffending rates (Young-Junior, 2003), and impedes an offender’s reintegration into the community (Vaswani, 2014). Furthermore, “their inability to cope with a significant bereavement” can lead them to unlawful activities (Webster, MacDonald & Simpson, 2006, in Wilson, 2011, p.11). In particular, with respect to young people, “traumatic bereavement, in childhood or adolescence are linked to offending and other maladaptive behaviour.” (Kiser et al., 1998 in Finlay & Jones, 1999, p.569).

Such findings indicate the need for guidance or a framework in supporting grief-work for young people in the criminal justice system. Worden’s tasks of mourning provide a helpful framework for consideration.

Worden’s tasks of mourning

Young people who do not have the chance to openly grieve, and who are not involved in the rituals surrounding death, may be described as ‘disenfranchised grievers’ (Doka, 1989). Young people in the criminal justice system are vulnerable from a loss and bereavement perspective, as they are often reliant upon others to facilitate these opportunities. Exploring such support-needs from a task perspective may be helpful in identifying the challenges to providing bereavement and loss support for young people in the criminal justice context (see Table 3).

Table 3. Worden’s Task model of grief (2009) from a criminal justice perspective

1.	Viewing the body or attending the funeral provides an opportunity to accept the reality of the death; this is sometimes impossible for prisoners.
2.	Prisoners are cut off from support networks, in a macho culture where there is no privacy to grieve, and where emotional expression attracts negative attention (invisible loss).
3.	Incarceration suspends the prisoner’s opportunity to adapt to new roles and adjust to life without the deceased.
4.	Being unable to visit the grave or mark anniversaries makes it difficult to stay connected to the deceased, and there is little prospect of forming new relationships in prison.

Restrictions of the custodial and criminal justice context

Where a young person has experienced bereavement in the time leading up to commission of their offence, the court may take that into account in deciding upon the sentence (Sentencing Council, 2017). Defence lawyers and court report writers need to be aware of this issue, and advise the court accordingly. If bereavement counselling is appropriate and can be made available for the young person, whether as part of a community sentence or in custody, the court should be told and arrangements put in place (Wasik, 2018).

Potter highlights the problem of the prison environment, which separates the bereaved prisoner from the event of death and triggers the development of adjustment problems:

“When someone significant dies, it can be very difficult for a prisoner to adjust to the finality and irreversibility of the death because of this separation. Searching activity is usually not evident ... The impact of the death may be felt most when the family visits without the deceased person, but the artificial nature of these limited exposures do little to help prisoners to adjust”
(1999, p.24).

However, such unfinished business can be addressed outside prison, for example, in the re-settlement stage:

*“These adjustments only become feasible once there is parole or release at the end of the sentence, when this ‘unfinished business’ can be addressed.”
(Potter, 1999, p.24).*

Some individuals may not say goodbye or attend the funeral of a loved one and may not be informed (or be misinformed) about the death. Professionals in the criminal justice system may find it difficult to engage in conversations around death and bereavement because of the sensitivity of the subject. They may have limited knowledge regarding loss, death and bereavement; may not have received adequate training, and may not be aware of resources available to help them. They may also have concerns about, or even fear of, the individual's responses and reactions during bereavement - particularly from young people who have a history of challenging, complex and unpredictable behaviour. Such attitudes to loss and death do not help bereaved individuals to accommodate their grief, however difficult the practicalities.

Summary

Bereavement affects people in different ways, and professionals can be a source of support, whilst also anticipating, identifying and acknowledging individual responses and the need for additional specialist input. Support at this time is crucial, both to bereaved young people themselves and to those responsible for their care. Professionals need to be mindful of the importance of support at such times and that such support may be needed in the short, medium and longer term.

Reflection



“He had really-really significant attachment issues; he had been in so many houses he couldn’t even count. Like we tried to do a timeline to try and track sort of where he’d spent his childhood, and he actually couldn’t remember areas or houses that he’d lived in. So he had significant attachment issues and was saying that he’d been allocated workers and people were sort of forced upon him, and he said ‘I’m not going to meet with these people, they don’t know me, they’re not going to make any difference’. So for him to actually come to our estate and be able to engage in work and start to sort of do therapies at work... for him to get to a point where he felt safe enough to disclose to myself and one of the managers that he felt unsafe, and to then suddenly be moved, and for us to never be able to follow up on that, that just reinforces his childhood experience of ‘you don’t open up to people, and you don’t tell people that you’re vulnerable’. Actually, this person was transferred to other custodial placements with no pre-arrangement between custodial authorities and therapists who also lost complete contact with him. Yet another loss...”

(Practitioner, 2017).

Think about the real story above and consider the following points:

1. How did this story make you feel?
2. Why do you think the impact of loss influenced how the young man feels?
3. How might you help him to deal with these losses?
4. What are the immediate issues to address around these transitional losses?
5. What changes in organisational systems might help?
6. How might the Guide and the Key Messages resources help you?

2. Communication and Bereavement

Communicating effectively

“The conversation, it’s the taboo subject.” (Practitioner, 2017)

The journey of grief is a unique and individual experience and this journey cannot be predicted by others (Doka, 2016). C.S Lewis talks of the ‘laziness of grief’ (1966, p.7), where the survivor or, indeed, those around them cannot hurry this unique process. Although “Bereavement appears to be a common feature in the lives of offenders”, (Wilson, 2011, p.11), research evidence presented to the House of Commons Justice Committee indicated that “almost no therapeutic support or counselling opportunities” were found in prison (2016, p.49); even though “it was very apparent to [researchers] that trauma, loss and bereavement carried on in custody” (2016, p.49 footnote 288). Usually, support is coordinated by chaplains, which is not always ideal or able to meet all the support requirements needed (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016; Hunt & Read, 2018). Young people in the criminal justice system may experience a range of losses, not all related to death, and the importance of communication threads through them all. Recognizing these losses and acknowledging their impact is the beginning of grief work.

Loss besides death: Recognizing the link from the assessment stage

Whilst people grieve for losses other than death (Doka, 2016), it also is worth remembering that adolescence is a special life period and adolescents may grieve differently from children and adults (Geis et al., 1998, in Finlay & Jones 2000). Family and social systems are important at this age; and family and social systems can influence adaptation and vulnerability (Hogan & DeSantis, 1994, in Finlay & Jones 2000). Problems resulting from grief can often be traced back to a period of childhood or adolescence: “Prisoners who were bereaved during childhood or adolescence talk about living with unresolved grief for many years.” (Wilson, 2011, p.11). As one social worker interviewed indicated:

“Death of parent and sibling have major and profound impact on our client group and I currently hold complex cases where this has been a feature and potential trigger to trauma and behaviour issues.”

(Social Worker, 2017)

Hence, trigger losses may become an issue when communicating about loss and its impact. Trigger losses occur when apparently insignificant losses trigger emotions and responses related to more powerful, significant losses that happened weeks, months or even years previously.

Subsequently, responses that might initially be perceived as 'over the top' might just have triggered the emotions related to a more significant earlier loss or losses. Exploring emotions and responses at this time will help to disentangle where reactions are actually emanating from.

Discussion and assessment with young offenders therefore constitute a golden opportunity to address these issues along with bereavement. However, as one Head of Service YOT indicated:

"Questions are asked about emotional well-being which should trigger discussions about the impact of bereavement, as will questions about the make-up of the family. But if a dad or significant male figure leaves the home, young people and, for that matter, professionals may not recognise that a loss has occurred." (Head of Service YOT, 2017)

Therefore, recognizing loss generally should begin from the assessment stage onwards in order to facilitate effective, sensitive communication with the young person in relation to bereavement experiences.

Breaking down barriers to effective communication: The role of the 'exquisite witness'

Supporters of grief work have been described as 'exquisite witnesses' (Jeffreys, 2011, p.xi). This means:

'...we observe more than we act, listen more than we talk, and follow more than lead' (Jeffreys, 2011, p.xi).

Adopting such a person-centred philosophy may be extremely helpful, particularly for those specializing in bereavement support, such as counsellors and therapists. There is no doubt, however, that for criminal justice professionals who also have a caring role this may cause conflict in the reality of what they can do with the resources, time and opportunities they have at their disposal. Yet whatever uniform or badge that different professionals wear, underneath the veneer we are all human, and bereavement work encourages us all to remember this. The idea of the 'exquisite witness' helps us to establish and make the most of a person-centred approach to grief and bereavement support by highlighting the existence of a significant communication role for every professional which needs to be supported and be effective.

Jeffreys (2011) identifies a number of basic 'human principles' to support grief work, regardless of professional role or function (see Table 4).

Table 4. Human principles to support grief work (after Jeffreys, 2011, pp.252-253)

- offer yourself
- be respectful
- become comfortable with silence
- be a skilled listener
- avoid judgement
- take action
- don't do anything by yourself
- keep your promises
- be aware of and respond to your own compassion fatigue
- be sensitive to cultural, ethnic and family traditions

Being an 'exquisite witness' means applying these basic principles when working with individuals in a range of different circumstances. This is especially evident, when equality and diversity can become a source of communicative challenges.

Communication, equality and diversity

The challenges of balancing the multi-faceted role of a criminal justice professional and offering young offenders the space and place to grieve may highlight many personal, professional, environmental, and ethical tensions (Wrigley, 2018). In particular, issues of equality and diversity can be particularly challenging during the communication process.

Equality is concerned with ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and not discriminated against because of their background or characteristics. On the other hand, diversity is focused around noting the differences between people and groups, and placing a positive value on those differences. Hence, equality and diversity are different - and equally important - but may cause many challenges when groups of individuals are cared for collectively (for example, in hospital, care homes or in the criminal justice system). Therefore, it is important for professionals to recognize sensitivities arising from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as from religious, non-religious and spiritual needs.

Death often raises questions which science cannot always or easily answer (Parkes et al., 1997). Many people have multiple ethnic and cultural identities, possessing mixed heritage, with parents, grandparents and great grandparents from different groups or communities. Ethnicity and culture can profoundly affect the way loss is dealt with. For many young people, it is important to them that they are able to maintain their cultural values and practices. However, cultures are not fixed and static; they change in response to new situations and pressures. Some aspects of culture are visible and obvious, such as dress, written and spoken language, rites of passage, architecture and art. Less obvious aspects of culture are the shared norms and values of a group, community or society. Whilst grief may be experienced in similar ways across many cultures, within any given culture there can be a huge range of individual responses. Furthermore, micro-cultures exist within cultures, each with their own distinct differences.

When people are ill or vulnerable, they need care that is focused on their needs and what is important to them. Sometimes people turn to religion for an explanation of personal tragedy and sometimes people turn away from it (whether temporarily or permanently). Most major faiths teach that physical death is not the end. However, the precise form that such continued existence takes varies between different religions and even within different denominations of the same religion. Professionals also need to be mindful that talking about religion may be unhelpful because, for some people, a secular lifestyle (one where religion plays no role, that does not accept the existence of god(s) or an afterlife), is their preferred choice.

The terms 'spirituality' and 'religion' are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. Religion is generally interpreted as a set of beliefs and practices, whereas spirituality is more to do with a person's sense of self, purpose, connection with others and quality of life. Sometimes spirituality is expressed through religion but this is not always the case. Some people may describe themselves as both spiritual and religious. Others may consider themselves spiritual but not religious and others religious but not spiritual. Just as the circles on a tree trunk make up the story of the tree's life, so all that has happened in a young person's life is never discarded – it is incorporated into the 'wholeness' of the young person. Therefore, whether they identify themselves as being religious, spiritual, or secular often forms an essential aspect of their life and needs to be accounted for when considering their needs when ill, grieving, or vulnerable through loss.

Summary

Professionals require skills, information and the confidence to find out what each young person needs. Importantly, with respect to grief work, professionals need to remember that loss presents in many forms. The early acknowledgement of any loss at the assessment stage remains significant. Part of this acknowledgment is the beginning of being an 'exquisite witness' during the grief work process. The human principles are fundamental to the 'exquisite witness' and support the communication process throughout. In this process, issues of equality and diversity remain important.

Communication and Creativity

There is a range of strategies that can be helpful when supporting young people to explore and express their emotions. Such methods may include gardening, drawing and painting, life story work, memory books, poetry, photographs, etc. which are all useful ways of engaging with a person but also help to develop a positive, constructive relationship. Such approaches can also be used to build self-esteem (Blackman, 2003) and to preserve memories of the deceased, in keeping with the continuing bonds theory (Klass et al., 1996).

In the criminal justice context resources may be limited so, within these constraints, professionals need to be creative in finding out what young people enjoy that can be used to develop the therapeutic relationship whilst encouraging the person to talk about their sadness. Although such approaches may be somewhat restricted, it is possible to effectively utilise even relatively simple methods, such as listening to music. When sad or remembering unhappy events like bereavement, listening to music can help to preserve memories, or to feel closer to that person. Many scholars, such as Levitin, (2007), believe our love of music starts inside the womb where, surrounded by amniotic fluid, the foetus hears sounds (Levitin stated that musical preferences may be influenced, but not determined, by what is heard inside the womb). But love of music goes way beyond our early developmental influences. In numerous countries throughout the world, within and across cultures, music has always been a way of communicating and expressing oneself. For many young people, music can anchor onto the feelings experienced at the time to somehow ground them in that moment or create an acceptance of the current situation.

Music and familiar sounds may also help young people to cope with stressful situations and associated feelings. Therefore, finding musical preferences may help a professional utilise a simple but widely effective method for engaging a young person.

Professionals can also use photographs, drawings, films and digital media, as well as observation, to capture and record feelings and wishes the young person may have, and these can always be re-visited over time. Drawing and painting are simple to facilitate; the use of colour, paint and design can aid self-expression and release tension (Read, 2007); thereby creating long term, concrete memories for the young person.

Creativity is primarily restricted by the person's ability to think and behave creatively. Professionals need to be guided by young people but also act as the catalyst for change; using approaches to help the young person to identify what works or helps them to think and act in a creative way.

" ... notoriously doing emotions with young men in prison – or young men anywhere – is really difficult because they only have three emotions – happy, sad and mad." (Practitioner, 2017)

Creative working is more than simply using words. Sometimes doing things (such as drawing or painting) can act as a helpful diversion and the person talks as they are attending to the task itself. Thinking about total communication (i.e. what the person says; how they say it, what their body language is saying) might also help professionals to fully appreciate how the young person is feeling (see Table 5).

Name and describe emotions as young people may experience them.

Observe the person's facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language to assess their feelings, don't simply rely on what they say.

Be creative, try using the communication picture/symbol prompts. Pair one with a corresponding emotive word/situation. By correctly labelling and acknowledging emotions, you have taken the first step in helping the person to develop their emotional vocabulary. Gradually add emotion words to further expand a person's emotional vocabulary.

Table 5. Communication is more than simply talking

Summary

Dealing with loss and grief is never easy. Some young people are socialized into not sharing their emotions and not talking about feelings and sadness. Professionals may have to work creatively in order to access the young person's thoughts and feelings. There are practical limitations to working creatively across the criminal justice system, but sometimes simple approaches can have good results. Professionals are urged to think about what resources they do have access to and how these can be used to better effect when supporting the young person with loss.

Reflection

“Even during the visits situation, these people are not in a room alone having these visits. There’s lots of other families around them, so to be a young man and your mother’s just died and you’re wanting to cry, you’re not going to be able to do that in any safe way. Because lots of these families will know each other, and the lads will certainly get the message through that so-and-so is crying. and they don’t even need to know the reason for that. and some will cry with us, so they’re able to do that or in the cells they’re able to do that, so a family member talking to you about the person that’s just died, they very quickly know to sure themselves up. Or they actually use resources from the past and suring yourself up and not crying is a way of managing the bereavement. ”

(Practitioner, 2017).



Think about the real account above and consider the following points:

1. How did this account make you feel?
2. In what way is this typical of how the young people you support may communicate?
3. How might you could help the young persons to express their feelings?
4. What are the immediate communication needs that should be addressed?
5. How might you improve communication in your organisation?
6. How might the Guide and the Key Messages resources help you?

NB: PLEASE PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE AND USE AS APPROPRIATE

3. Meaningful Support

Supporting sensitive conversations

'The inevitability of death is a constant reminder of the fragility of life' (Read, 2014, p.17), and therefore is often not a topic that people yearn to talk about. The art of talking about difficult topics is often about how to start the conversation. Sometimes, this can be about simply asking general, open questions such as:

So tell me, how are things with you today?

Alternatively, it may be about asking very focused questions, such as:

How are you coping with ...

So, are you wanting to think about visiting your mum in the hospice?

General questions can often lead to more focused questions in a natural way, an approach familiar to many practitioners:

"'OK we can have the conversation, have you ever suffered loss and bereavement, why don't you tell me a wee bit about that?' And then they can open up that conversation, and then the more the young person spoke, they could go 'hold on, I see what you're talking about here' and then we would open that up and sit with them."

(Practitioner, 2017)

In the absence of all the facts, young people sometimes come up with their own ideas and thoughts, which may be even more upsetting for them and may not be entirely accurate. Therefore, professionals need to think about how to start these, somewhat sensitive, conversations beforehand. Always think about what you feel comfortable saying and how the introduction can be phrased in a way that is meaningful yet simply portrayed. Rehearse what you want to say and how exactly you want to say it. This is often described as preparing for 'an invitation to talk', where people are given a number of cues that tell them you are there and willing to listen if they need to talk. When having difficult conversations, you might find the principles in Table 6 helpful.

Table 6. Principles underpinning sensitive conversation

Try to be honest whenever possible.
Don't be afraid to talk about difficult or upsetting things
Use a language that the young person understands.
Allow time for the young person to digest the information.
Repeat important information often
Don't make promises you can't keep
Don't give false hope

Young people often only hear what they want to hear, and may ignore or fail to hear words that are important to you but are sensitive and challenging to them. This is often most apparent when breaking difficult or bad news.

Breaking difficult or bad news: Buckman's protocol

Buckman describes bad news as any news that drastically and negatively alters someone's perceptions of their future (Buckman, 1992), and there are a variety of guidelines available to support people through this challenging process. Buckman offers a six-step protocol or framework that may be useful to support young people in any setting (see Table 7).

Table 7. A six-step protocol (after Buckman, 1992)

1.	Getting started involves finding an appropriate space and sufficient time. This space should be private, comfortable, and if possible, familiar to the young person.
2.	Finding out how much the young person knows and understands about the situation. This might involve asking questions to explore understanding, perhaps using the Key Messages (the accompanying book on a ring) to help you with prompts to empower the individual to ask appropriate and meaningful questions.
3.	Finding out how much the person wants to know. Although some people may not want to know all the details surrounding the event, they do have a right to be told when someone has died.
4.	Sharing the information at the individual's own pace and communicating in a way that the individual is likely to understand. The young person should be provided with the basic facts, using language that is truthful and cannot be misunderstood, e.g. the person should be told that a relative/friend has died, not that the relative has left (as such ambiguity can be confusing).
5.	Responding to the individual's feelings by recognising and evaluating responses; offering constructive and reflective feedback; and working at an appropriate pace, namely the young person's pace.
6.	Planning and following through, which involves informing appropriate others. Professionals may be reluctant to inform individuals about bereavement if they have a history of challenging behaviours, for fear of inappropriate, unmanageable responses. Making sure appropriate others are aware of the situation can help to safely manage responses.

Whilst recognising that breaking difficult news may prove challenging, all individuals have the right to know about the death of their loved ones, and planning around staffing issues for immediate and ongoing support is crucial in these circumstances. Buckman's first principles indicates the need for a safe space to begin these important conversations, something well-recognised in the criminal justice practice world:

"People need to be able to feel safe to discuss things and they need to be able to feel that it's somewhere that they can trust and nobody else is going to see that." (Practitioner, 2017).

His fourth principle highlights the importance of using a person-centred approach by using the language that the young person clearly understands and relates to:

"The majority of the young people we work with don't know what bereavement is and then when we say it's death or loss of somebody close to you, 'oh I've heard of that'. But when you say bereavement it goes so far over their head that they don't even associate that as being something that affects them." (Practitioner, 2017).

Buckman's final principle involves forward planning, and letting others know that a bereavement or loss has occurred may be necessary.

Summary

Starting sensitive conversations is never easy, and professionals need to rehearse their introductions very carefully. Whilst principles of good communication may inform what they say and how they say it, when breaking bad news, having a framework to work through (such as Buckman's six step protocol), might make the professional feel more confident.

When, where and who to refer on to

Referring on

According to Worden (2009), most grieving people cope with their loss in their own social circle and with their own networks of friends and family. Only a small percentage of individuals actually require additional specific help and support, for example, through counselling or therapy. However, for young people in the criminal justice system, their access to existing social support networks, families or friends is curtailed or severely limited, and this may necessitate the need for specific bereavement and loss support. People who have been excluded from the funeral or who have not been told about the death for some time after the event may need the professional help of a bereavement counsellor, as they may be experiencing disenfranchised or complicated grief (Read 2014).

Having to hand a contact list of appropriate others (e.g. religious faith leaders, advocates, youth workers, bereavement counsellors, etc.) in a particular area is always useful, as finding an appropriate contact at the time it is needed can be difficult or time consuming.

Letting other people know

Accessing specialist support can be helpful, and there are individuals across the criminal justice system who can assist when a young person is struggling and that is impacting upon the person at a particular time. Sometimes external support is required, such as a Mental Health practitioner. The initial assessment provides the prompt that might lead to accessing bereavement support both inside and outside of the criminal justice system.

*“Initial self-assessment asks if they have lost anyone significant”
(Youth offending case Manager, 2017)*

However, loss and bereavement may have been identified but not prioritised by a range of different professionals:

“[Loss] has sometimes been identified as an issue by our clients. But probably tends to be seen as less of a priority in the scheme of all the other issues (by them and probably by professionals, to be fair). They ask about social history and family/relationships but not specifically about grief.” (Mental Health practitioner, 2017)

Professionals across the criminal justice system therefore need to recognise the importance of identifying and recognising the existence of grief and the associated support needs for young people:

"...no lawyer that I ever met with asked about trauma bereavement experiences. They would often quite ask about your home, so who lives in your home, what is your home like, but they would never ask about experiences." (Practitioner, 2017)

Summary

Loss often makes a person feel disempowered, and if those around you are making decisions about you without you this can make matters worse, adding to anyone's emotional distress.

When events happen in the lives of young people in the criminal justice system, a range of people need to know. This is so they can look out for changes in usual behaviour; can offer opportunities to talk; and can fully appreciate if the young person seems less talkative or is not engaging with others. It is important to always let the young person know that you are telling others to avoid additional distress arising from the feeling of decisions being made without their involvement. If you feel the need to make a referral to another professional, again check it out with the young person themselves, where possible and procedurally appropriate.

Reflection

“So, if loss never really came up ... if you listened at the assessment stage, if they mention anything - we'll take note of it. But again, if they're not prioritizing it or bringing it up in a way we'd kind of recognise 'ok, they don't want to talk about it'. It may be further down the line ... it might be a year later before we talk about it again. Unless it's brought up as one of the topics, sometimes it might get missed. We might say 'I'm so sorry that happened to you, that's a massive thing to deal with. Do you feel you have the support and time just to kind of click on the switch?' Initially they'd say 'I'm fine', and within 15-20 minutes of talking they're in tears because they perhaps haven't identified that it's affected them so much'.



(Practitioner, 2017).

Think about the real account above and consider the following points:

1. How did this account make you feel?
2. In your experience, is this typical of how young bereaved people react?
3. In what way(s) do you feel you could begin sensitive conversations?
4. What strengths do you have as an 'exquisite witness'?
5. What might help you to get the support that young bereaved people may need? What do you have at your disposal already? What else might you need?
6. How might the Guide and the Key Messages resources help you?

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'If this is the beginning then I'm excited because just from this, staff now feel competent just to have conversations.

I'm not saying they've got all the answers but at least they can begin to have those conversations.'

(Practitioner, 2017)





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