

Understanding Grief and Effective Support, with Special Reference to Suicide Bereavement

Invited lecture · Karl Andriessen

Karl Andriessen, PhD, MSuicidology, BSW, is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Mental Health in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne, Australia, an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the School of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales, and a Research Fellow at the KU Leuven, University of Leuven, Belgium. Karl's involvement in the field of suicide bereavement and suicide prevention is rooted in clinical practice, starting 35 years ago in Belgium as a social worker in youth and family counselling, and telephone crisis lines, followed by leading positions in suicide prevention, bereavement, community mental health, and policy development. He co-founded and serves as Chair (2002–2015, 2022–present) of the Special Interest Group on Suicide Bereavement of the International Association of Suicide Prevention, and is an advisor to several projects in the field of suicide prevention and bereavement. He also serves as Associate Editor of Death Studies. In recognition of his achievements, he has received several awards, including the 2005 IASP Farberow Postvention Award. He has published widely, including Postvention in Action: The International Handbook of Suicide Bereavement Support (with Dr Kryszyska and Dr Grad), the go-to resource on postvention (Hogrefe, 2017).

Abstract. Grief is a natural reaction to a major loss. Common grief reactions include crying and feelings of sadness, anger or guilt. Most people cope well with their grief. However, others may struggle with their loss, and may be at-risk of developing maladaptive grief reactions or mental health problems. Those bereaved by suicide or other traumatic death may also be at risk of adverse long-term outcomes. In addition to grief feelings such as feelings of shock, anxiety or rejection, they commonly struggle with daunting 'why' questions, and receive less social support than other bereaved people. People bereaved by suicide also present increased risks of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicidal behaviour compared to other bereaved and non-bereaved counterparts. While most research in the field has focused on adverse outcomes, there is a growing body of evidence that many bereaved people also report posttraumatic growth – a positive psychological transformation that occurs through a process of meaning-making and struggling with a highly challenging and stressful event. Informed by the litera-

ture and own research, this presentation offers a comprehensive conceptualization of grief, and grief after suicide in the context of contemporary grief models, and summarizes what is known about the efficacy of interventions provided to bereaved adults, and the potentially effective components of interventions. In addition, the presentation will focus on the impact of suicide and other traumatic death on family systems and how best to support bereaved young people.