

Book Review

***Experiential Action Methods and Tools for Healing Grief and Loss-Related Trauma: Life, Death, and Transformation.* By Lusijah Sutherland Darrow and Reverend Janet Childs. Routledge, 2020.**

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When you lose one part of your life, it is not just one part of the pie that is gone. The entire pie is changed and altered irrevocably. (p. 234)

This book confronts head-on our society's conspiracy of silence about death and grief. That silence has exacted an enormous cost on those who are grieving, often pushing them into needless isolation and alienation. The book's techniques and insights are rooted in the authors' extensive experience working at the Centre for Living with Dying and helping those who find themselves in the process of grieving. A pragmatic guide, it is built around four components: acknowledge, express, act, reconnect (not to be confused with a linear or sequential process). Despite the practical focus of this book, many of its passages are lyrical and poetic. This book is rich in metaphors: "My heart is like a hotel. Everyone I love has a room in my heart hotel."

The book offers concrete experiential methods to support those who are grieving, those who love someone who is grieving, and those who work with people who are grieving (e.g., 911 operators, emergency responders, and hospital staff and their families). Darrow and Childs stress that grief is a process to go through—an extended process—not a problem to be fixed or solved. Of particular value is their discussion of presence—how to be present to someone who is grieving. Darrow and Childs own empathetic caring presence is evident throughout in book in the gentle kindness of the book's entire tone. They note that grief is a highly individual process, one affected not only by the type of relationship involved (spouse, parent, child, friend), but also the manner of death (expected vs. unexpected; due to natural causes, murder, or suicide) and cultural and religious values as traditions and beliefs about appropriate ways to grieve vary enormously from group to group. Grief is also affected by ambivalence, unresolved issues, and a host of issues that many people do not feel comfortable expressing (anger, shame, remorse, guilt).

Darrow and Childs offer psychodrama and sociometry (J. L. Moreno) as practical approaches for creating new narratives about the complicated

relationships and events surrounding profound loss. These action methods are rooted in strong theoretical underpinnings and highlight and enhance interpersonal connections. Role-reversal, doubling, surplus reality, spectrograms, locograms, and step-in sociometry are well explained. Safety itself can become the treatment, and the work of Hudgins and Toscani (2013) is acknowledged as the authors highlight the importance of accentuating an individual's particular strengths and resilience. Additionally, action tools for coping, reducing stress, and creating comfort are generously described. The complicated nuances of traumatic loss—through violence, suicide, and natural disasters for example—are sensitively included. The authors draw on J. W. Worden and his concept of the tasks of mourning. They show that there are real things that people can do to move through the grief process and adapt to a world in which the deceased is no longer present. Although the authors acknowledge the contributions of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, they warn that her model of the stages of death and dying (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) has often been misused to imply that grief is a linear process in which people move through stages sequentially in predictable order—an idea that (as the authors point out) Kubler-Ross herself resisted.

This book provides many details about how to structure a grief support group. The authors provide chapters on dealing with specific feelings (loneliness, fear, sadness, and anger) as well as specific issues (unfinished business, guilt, and what they term “frozen moments”).

This book is a rich and helpful resource for dealing from the heart with grief and loss and helping guide others through what is typically a protracted and painful process of coming to terms with a deep change that is not of our own choosing. I believe it is an essential learning tool for all psychodramatists and therapists who dare to “feel into” the depths of grief itself. Darrow and Childs have served us all by demonstrating how to move through some of the toughest stuff that we experience in life.