



# BETHANY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

## Children and their Grief



Children will grieve as well or as badly as the adults around them. Thus, if adults are open about their sadness and grief following a death the children will get the message that it's o.k. to be sad, to cry and to mourn. When adults decide to 'protect' children from the fallout of death the children then presume that it's not o.k. to grieve. They will certainly feel all the emotions of grief but, if these feelings are not allowed to be expressed, they surface as difficult behaviour or they go underground to emerge years later in adolescence or adulthood. In Ireland we are very good when it comes to including children in the rituals around death but not so good in the aftermath. Even very small children, below the age of 2, have been shown to be

affected by death. They sense that all is not well and so may become demanding and fussy. They need extra cuddles, a strong routine and extra patience from their carers. Many adults are surprised to hear that children feel all the feelings of the bereaved, the sadness, the anger, guilt, 'what-ifs', the flash backs etc. The difference between the experience of children and adults is that while we adults will experience these feelings for hours and days on end children (when they are allowed to express it) will feel sad and angry for short periods and then they can switch and go back to their play and apparent normality. They do not sustain the feelings for long periods and, depending on their age, they will move in and out of grief over the days and months

following a death.

When a parent dies children will grieve in the immediate aftermath and then in the years that follow. There will be sad times when the dead parent is not there for beginning school, finishing primary and going to secondary and all the other milestones to adulthood.

Explaining the cause of death to a child should be done in an age appropriate way. It's not enough to explain a heart attack, by saying "his heart stopped and he went to sleep". Indeed equating death and sleep only sets the child up for sleep disturbance. "If Grandad went to sleep and died I had better not go to sleep in case I die!" The mixed messages we give children that someone "is dead and they cannot come back but they are watching you from heaven" don't help either. It is much better to explain that death is final and allow the child to explore their own ideas of what might or might not go in heaven.

Most children do not need counselling although they do need a safe space to explore their feelings following a death. Painting, drawing and using play dough to tell the story of what has happened may help. Many years ago I remember a child whose mother reported that he was playing obsessively with his Lego following the sudden death of

his father. He was 8 and so I sat with him and watched his building. With some small prompts he explained that he was building a crematorium! It transpired that his father had been cremated but no one had explained what that might mean. He wanted to know what happened in the crematorium. I explained that the coffin went into a place which was very hot and where it and the body was 'zapped' like Star Wars. We had some more questions about his father's ashes and then the Lego playing returned to normal with only an occasional crematorium being built. Other children ask the same questions repeatedly. The adults around them can become very upset and angry but if the answer doesn't satisfy it may help to ask the child what they think the answer is. In this way the child's concerns may be uncovered and can then be addressed.

It is difficult, in so short a piece as this one, to address all the issues which face children when they grieve. However, there is no doubt that they do grieve, and like their elders they will find peace and resolution. Love, strong routine, re-assurance and openness from the adults around them will, eventually, bring them through.

*Margarita Synnott*

## HELPING CHILDREN NAVIGATE THROUGH LOSS AND GRIEF.

AGE	CONCEPTS & BELIEFS	EMOTIONS	POSSIBLE BEHAVIOURS	HOW TO HELP
<b>0 - 2 Years</b>	No understanding of death. Child does not have words for feelings. They miss the presence of the person. They notice the changes in routine.	Longing. Missing contact, sounds, smell and sight of the dead person. Fears being abandoned. Anxiety.	Crying. Sickliness Food problems. Thrashing about. Rocking. Throwing. Sucking, biting. Sleep disturbance.	Cuddles and physical contact. Maintain routine. Be gentle and patient.
<b>3 - 5 Years</b>	Don't understand death is permanent. May wonder what the dead person is doing. May wonder what will happen to them if a parent dies. Magical thinking.	Fear. Sadness. Insecurity. Confusion. Anger. Irritability. Agitated. Worried. Anxious.	Regressive behaviour. Repetitive questions. Withdrawal. Playing death / change etc. Interested in dead things. May act as if nothing has happened. Crying, fighting.	Allow the regression. Physical contact. Encourage messy play. Give simple truthful answers. Maintain routine and structure.
<b>6 - 9 Years</b>	Beginning to understand death is final. Interested in the biology of death. Fears thoughts or actions may cause death. Forming spiritual concepts.	Sadness Anger Loneliness Withdrawal Worried. Anxious. Irritable. Guilty. Fear.	Regression. Wants details. Acts as if nothing has happened. Hides feelings. Sleep disturbance. Lack of concentration. Protective of others.	Allow the need to regress. Physical contact. Strong routine & boundaries. Encourage drawing / writing etc. Encourage physical & messy play.
<b>9 - 12 Years</b>	Understands death is final. May still wonder if thoughts or actions caused the death. Can formulate spiritual concepts.	Emotional turmoil Shock, Sadness, Anger Confusion, Worry, Isolated Abandoned.	Regressive behaviour & mood swings. Hiding feelings. Aggression & acting out. Sleep disturbance. Concentration difficulties.	Allow for regression and offer comfort. Encourage expression of feelings. Maintain routine & boundaries.
<b>12 &amp; up</b>	Understands death is final & universal. Worries about previous behaviour. Thinks about milestones where the dead won't be there. May not want to be seen to be weak by showing feelings.	Very conscious about being different from peers. Shock. Sadness. Anger. Confusion. Vulnerable. Isolated. Abandoned.	Occasional regression. Mood swings. Hiding feelings. Acts like nothing has happened. Concentration difficulties. Impulsive or high risk behaviour. Fighting, screaming, arguing.	Allow for regression and offer comfort. Expect the mood swings. Allow for hidden feelings. Encourage expression of feelings. Be available to listen & talk. Share your grief.

Be aware that the cause of death has to be explained in an age appropriate way. The cause may have to be updated as the child moves through life and their understanding improves. Take care how explanations influence a child's understanding / image of God.

### RESOURCES:

Barnardos provide counselling care for children who have been bereaved.

Barnardos National Office, Christchurch Square, Dublin 2. Tel: **01 453 0355**.

Email: [info@barnardos.ie](mailto:info@barnardos.ie)

Some hospitals/hospices also provide such care.

Rainbows Ireland, Loreto Centre, Crumlin Road, Dublin 12. Tel: **01 473 4175**.

Email: [ask@rainbowsireland.com](mailto:ask@rainbowsireland.com)



*Make sure that the qualifications of anyone who is working with children are checked out.*

*Margarita Synnott*

# 21st Bethany A.G.M. 21st February 2015

We had a very well attended AGM with delegates from all over the country. Moira welcomed everybody and Mass was celebrated by Fr. Myles. A moving service of light took place during the Mass to commemorate members and their relatives who died during the year.

Our guest speaker was Fr. Brendan McManus S.J. author of "Redemption Road" Grieving on the Camino. He spoke of his 10 year journey searching for a way to deal with his personal grief at losing his brother Donal to suicide. He emphasised that God is with us in our anguish and trouble but that one has to traverse through grief and that there are no short-cuts.

Dolores Brophy of the Mallow group presented their 2014 report. They work with a Family Resource Group called 'Cheile' and through them they facilitated two groups of Widows in the 5 step programme. They have also been involved in information evenings for other groups in the Mallow area. Their main service is in a two-to-one support and they hope to find a suitable place for a drop-in centre.

Terry Montague of Whitehall spoke of his involvement in a Men's group of social activities which led to a great deal of deep personal sharing.

The minutes of the 2014 AGM were read by Maeve Mason which were proposed by Ann Meade and seconded by Anne Butler.

## Treasurers Report

This was presented by Anne Butler who detailed our main expenses which are insurance, holding the AGM, newsletter and postage, and provision of all services. She expressed our thanks to those groups who contributed €50 to GEC to help defray expenses of administration which benefit all groups.

## Secretary's Report

11 monthly meetings were held

to co-ordinate activities of Bethany during the year.

6 training work-shops took place in Monkstown, Clonliffe, Esker, and Belfast.

New groups have been established in Marley, Adamstown, Corndulla, Co Galway and Ballinahinch and Lurgan, Co. Down.

The 5 Step programme was run successfully in Kingscourt, Mallow, Church of the Apostles, Ballybrack, Shankill, Rathfarnham, and Celbridge.

A Day of Reflection was held in Clonliffe College on April 26. The speaker was Fr. Brendan Comerford S.J. He spoke on the life and philosophy of 2 great but very different mystics Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Julian of Norwich. Our next day will be held on May 9th at Clonliffe. The speaker will be Sally Hyland SJG.

A training day was held on Child Safeguarding and Protection on October 4th. A further day is planned for those unable to attend.

The Orlagh weekend was as usual a very moving and consoling time for those present. It is always greatly appreciated.

## Website

This has been updated by Frank McCarthy and co-ordinated by Catherine Dunnion with support from the GEC. Many thanks to Catherine for undertaking this task.

During the year Tony Malone, Jean Cleary, and Sam Veale resigned from the GEC. Iggy Lyons and Catherine Dunnion were co-opted.

The secretary's report was adopted by Anne Butler and seconded by Iggy Lyons.

## Chairperson's Report.

In her report Moira Staines outlined the highlights of her 3 years in office which were

- The Eucharistic Congress where we took a stand which was enthusiastically manned by our members.

- Encouraging the use of the 5 step programme which has been



*Presentation to Moira as she completes her term as Chairperson. L to R: Ann Butler, Fr. Myles O'Reilly, Moira Staines and Maeve Mason*

taken up by many parishes.

- Book launch of "The Bethany Journey" and 30 year celebrations.

- Completion of Code of Ethics and Guidelines.

- Updating of Website which is still a work in progress.

- Welcoming new members to Bethany, countrywide at the end of their training.

- Organising 2 events "Coping with Loss" where Brid Carroll was speaker. These were held at the Maldron Hotel Tallaght, in June and Fitzpatrick's Hotel in October. These were heavily attended confirming the need for such talks and outreach.

- Priorities for the future include support for groups on the ground, recruitment and outreach to the bereaved.

- Moira expressed her gratitude to all the members of the GEC for their support to her while in office and to all of the members.

Nomination and election to GEC

- Margaret Chambers
- Iggy Lyons
- Catherine Dunnion
- Shirley Scott.

Moira announced that following Margaret's nomination she was delighted to accept the Chair of the GEC for the coming 3 years.

Finally Fr. Myles spoke movingly in thanking Moira for her outstanding contribution to Bethany in the 20 years she has been involved, particularly in the past 3 years as chairperson. She has made it her chief priority and greatly expanded our outreach. She was then presented with a beautiful sculpture of a Raindrop and a bouquet of flowers.

After this the meeting concluded and almost all present adjourned to the dining-room and enjoyed lunch and chat together.

## Compulsory

**Child Safeguarding and Protection Training for all Bethany Members**

**Facilitated by Fr. Paddy Boyle**

**Venue: Milltown Institute,**

**Sandford Road, Ranelagh.**

**Saturday 3rd October 2015**

**10.00am - 1.00pm**

**Registration 9.30am**

**It is imperative that all Bethany volunteers undertake this Workshop.**

**Please confirm numbers attending by**

**25th September 2015**

**by Texting 087 9905299 or**

**Email: bethanysupport@eircom.net.**

# Letter from the new Chairperson of Bethany

Dear Members,  
It is a great privilege for me to take up the role of Chairperson of Bethany for the next three years. It is also a great challenge, following as I do in the footsteps of so many dedicated hardworking Chairs of the past. I will do all in my power and with the support of the General Executive Council to be true to the vision of Fr. Myles O'Reilly SJ and Fr. John Murphy SJ to ensure the onward growth and development of Bethany in being a support for the bereaved throughout the country. I was first introduced to Bethany when I completed the training course in 1999 under the superb guidance of Sr. Sheila Mc Auliffe and joined the newly formed Kilmacud Parish Bethany Support Group. Input to the training courses over the years kept me in touch and ensured that

Bethany was to find a secure lodging place in my heart! The development of the Bethany Bereavement Support Service over thirty one years has been truly remarkable, moving from its origins in the Dublin Diocese to establishing parish groups all over the country – North, South, East and West. One of the many challenges facing the GEC is to assess the impact of this expansion and the anticipated further expansion on the organisation. With a view to exploring these questions, a full day meeting has been planned in April 2015 when the GEC will review current structures and plan ahead to ensure that we maintain and strengthen what works well, have the courage to start new ventures and equally have the courage to make the changes we deem necessary. One of the areas that I would hope to see progress in over

the coming years and which appears to be a source of frustration for some Bethany Groups is the slow take up at group meetings. We all need to think of creative ways in which we can make it more emotionally comfortable for the bereaved to attend our support services. We are in no doubt as to the extent of loss in any given parish, not only through death, but also in the many other losses people experience that are so often not acknowledged or that may not be spoken of at all.

While I understand the desire for new trainees to gain experience in practising their skills in onetoone or group Bethany settings, please remember that your training is never wasted. While you are not always on Bethany 'duty' you will find opportunities most if not all days, to give that specially trained ear and heart to people around you.

Look out for it within your family, at work, with the friend you meet for a walk or coffee. You really can bring Bethany onto the streets! There we can meet people who may not see our notices in the parishes but who may be in need of the sup-



*Margaret Chambers*

port we have to offer. I firmly believe that the presence of a Bethany Bereavement Support Group in a parish is a quiet consolation in itself, even if not called upon. Thank you for all you do in reaching out to the bereaved. May the Holy Spirit guide and direct you in your ongoing training and in your ministry. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any help to you or your group.

**Margaret Chambers**  
**margaretcchambers@eircom.net**

## Dates for the Diary....

**Day of Reflection:** Sally Hyland SJG 'Tending the Quality of Presence - the inner and outer journey'.

**Saturday 9th May 2015 @** Holy Cross College, Clonliffe.  
9.30am – 4.00pm. Confirmation of attendance text or phone  
**087 9905200**

Email: **bethanysupport@eircom.net** by 1st May.

**Training: Esker 2015:** 25th - 27th September  
and 6th - 8th November 2015. Further information:  
Sr. Mary Glennon **087 3204569**  
Email: **mbglennon@eircom.net**

**Dublin Training Course September 2015:**  
St. Patrick's Hall, Monkstown (dates to be confirmed).  
Contact Liz Ronaldson **087 2392465**

**Orlagh Weekend:** 20th to 22nd November  
Contact: Anne Butler **087 2050514**  
Email: **annebutler@live.ie**

**Northern Ireland:**  
Good Shepherd Centre, Belfast. 24th September 2015  
with final day 12th December at Drumalis.  
Contact: Claire Dowds Tel: **00447766934246**  
Email: **cdowds181@gmail.com**

**Compulsory Child Safeguarding & Protection**  
3rd October the Milltown Institute 9.30am to 1.00pm

## General Executive Committee 2015

Fr. Myles O' Reilly - **Spiritual Director**

Margaret Chambers- **Chairperson**

Maeve Mason - **Secretary**

Anne Butler - **Treasurer**

Winnie Keogh, Iggy Lyons, Gobnait O Grady,  
Liz Ronaldson, Moira Staines and Shirley Scott.

## Bethany Bereavement Support Group contact details:

Bethany Bereavement Support Group,  
c/o Rathfarnham Parish Centre, Willbrook Road,  
Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

**Bethany Phone:** 087 9905299

**Email:** **bethanysupport@eircom.net**

**Website:** **www.bethany.ie**