

Outline

This research is a phenomenological study of volunteer bereavement workers' experiences of ending with their clients. Four volunteer bereavement workers from a local bereavement group were chosen as co-researchers. Their experiences of ending were explored in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed. Every effort was made to set aside preconceived ideas when undertaking the research. This involved becoming aware of personal bias in order to prevent that bias from operating out of awareness.

The most general result of the research was that bereavement workers may well experience ending as very difficult. It is particularly difficult to end when a client is lonely. It emerged that for both bereavement worker and client the ultimate task of ending in bereavement work was the huge psychological task of letting our loved ones die. This was a task that was much denied and avoided. Often ending was hardly spoken about at all.

The link between the psychological task of letting our loved ones die and the process of ending was paralleled by a number of similar links described in the literature. Together these links joined issues of bereavement, death, separation, loss and ending into one schema of generalised interactions about 'death-separation-ending'. Projective identifications originating from the client were found to be involved in the difficulties of ending. The bereavement workers' own personal

issues, their own bereavements, their childhood experiences, or their way of relating to the outside world were also shown to be involved.

The results suggested that bereavement work volunteers who had any difficulties in keeping boundaries should agree, establish and maintain boundaries that were as strict as possible from the start. This could be particularly relevant to befrienders whose training and code of ethics were looser and less extensive than those for counsellors.