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RoadPeace Resilience Building Programme: Tried, Tested and Effective

Key points

- Sudden, unexpected bereavement can result in complicated grief with a complex array of debilitating symptoms.
- RoadPeace's Resilience Building Programme, a six week support programme for those bereaved by crashes, was developed to meet this need by leading professionals in this field.
- Working in groups with trained facilitators, participants gain coping skills to deal with the associated symptoms.
- The programme has been refined over a five year period through reflection, participant feed-back, regular monitoring and an independent evaluation funded by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
- The independent evaluation found statistically significant decreases in symptoms and that the "strong overall response [from participants] was that being with other people in a similar situation was incredibly helpful".

Why it is needed

The suddenness and unexpected nature of a road death to a loved one can result in complex and extended grief. Many suffer from clusters of symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): *avoidance* of thoughts, conversations, people, places related to the event, *re-experiencing* (nightmares, intrusive images, flashbacks) and *psychological arousal* (being on edge, sleep problems, irritability). And these symptoms, unaddressed, can persist for years after the death. This complex grief can result in a sense of social isolation as the bereaved can find it difficult to communicate with those who have not had the same experience.

Even after the initial shock of the death, the bereaved can be re-traumatised by protracted police investigations, coronial processes, insurance claims, court proceedings, hospital and medical systems, and media attention.

Appropriate support can address the symptoms of PTSD and ease the isolation. However this is rarely available. Even generalised trauma therapy on the NHS is hard to come by as waiting lists are long; and neither Victims Support nor the national Homicide Service cover road crash victims. Private therapy is available but unaffordable to most (particularly if they have ceased work) and cannot provide peer support. RoadPeace's Resilience Building Programme aims to help fill this gap.

The Programme

The programme was adapted from material developed by Patrick Smith, Atle Dyregrov and Bill Yule¹ by RoadPeace patron Dr Noreen Tehrani, a chartered psychologist who has worked extensively with road crash victims and pioneered research in this field.

The programme was first held in 2009, using funds from an Awards for All grant and our Guardian Charity Award. Subsequently, it was funded by the MOJ. In all, there have been 13 programmes: eight in London, two each in Oxford and Bristol, and one in Liverpool.

It is offered to those who have been recently bereaved through a road death for more than six months. Suitability is determined through an extensive screening programme conducted by RoadPeace staff. Previous participants have largely been parents, partners, siblings and children (15+).

Over six weekly sessions and assisted by trained facilitators, the participants learn:

- about the psychological and physiological impacts of their bereavement, and
- coping strategies using Cognitive Behavioural methods and relaxation techniques to deal with depression, anxiety and many symptoms of PTSD

Working in small groups both assists learning and allows the development of a peer support network. These networks have frequently continued, on an informal basis, long after the completion of the course.

The Sessions

The six sessions are based around a manual, and each participant has a journal which is used during the sessions and for exercise practice at home. Each session includes an outline of the session's goals, a review of the previous week, an introduction to new information, psycho-education and skills training, practice and homework setting. The journal also includes a diary as participants are encouraged to keep a note of their thoughts and feelings so they can be addressed in the next session. The sessions are structured as follows:

- Session 1: is an introductory session which provides an overview of the programme and what the other sessions will cover, as well as an opportunity for participants to get to know each other.
- Session 2: focuses on techniques which help to give participants some control over re-occurring intrusive images or troubling sounds or smells.
- Session 3: develops skills to reduce arousal symptoms e.g. sleeping problems, being on edge or irritability. This includes identifying symptoms experienced and then sharing techniques for reducing these, and introducing deep breathing and other relaxation techniques.
- Session 4: addresses avoidance behaviours (e.g. of thoughts, conversations, places or people) through the use of relaxation exercises and positive goal setting.
- Session 5: looks at writing and drawing as a way of dealing with traumatic memories. These exercises can help gain a greater understanding of what has happened and where participants feel they are within the wider picture.
- Session 6: the final session considers who else has been affected by the bereavement - siblings, grandparents, friends and colleagues. It focuses on identifying a participant's own support network and how they might be able to increase the support they receive.

¹ At the Children and War Foundation (<http://www.childrenandwar.org/>)

Publicity & Referrals

To reach out to as many bereaved families as possible, RoadPeace has worked with local police services. The programme has also been publicised through other victim support charities and referrals have come from Brake and Victim Support.

Additionally, RoadPeace has developed close working relationships with leading bereavement organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care, Widowed and Young (WAY) and The Compassionate Friends. Many of our group facilitators have also been volunteers, trained and working with these organisations.

How do we know this programme works?

It is tried and tested. It has been running for over five years. It has been subject to continuous internal monitoring, with testing and feedback from participants. The programmes run under the most recent grant from the MoJ (2011-14) were subjected to a rigorous external evaluation which found statistically significant impacts on key indicators of PTSD and extremely high levels of participant satisfaction. Both internal and external monitoring results have been used to refine the screening of participants, programme content and delivery to progressively improve cost-efficiency and outcomes.

As part of the screening process, all the participants had an interview and completed the

- Goldberg Anxiety/Depression questionnaire (Goldberg, 1971),
- Impact of Events Scale – Extended (IES-E) trauma questionnaire (Tehrani et al. 2002) and
- A lifestyle questionnaire.

This was repeated after the course had been completed.

The Independent Evaluation

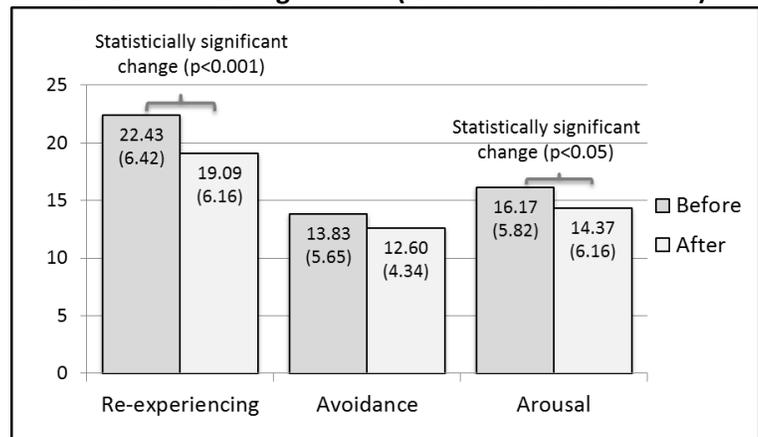
The independent evaluation of the programme, funded under the last MoJ grant, was completed in April 2014. It was conducted by a team led by David Trickey, Lead Consultant Clinical Psychologist at the Child Bereavement and Trauma Service since 2009. It made use of the data collected from participants during screening and after the programme, as well as a series of independent interviews with both facilitators and participants. Its findings were extensive (Trickey, D. and Hollamby, A. ,2014) and included:

The three key clusters of symptoms associated with PTSD had decreased.

Avoidance (of thoughts, conversations, people, places related to the event) was down; though this was too variable to be statistically significant.

But indicators of both re-experiencing (nightmares, intrusive images, flashbacks) and psychological arousal (being on edge, sleep problems, irritability) both showed statistically significant reductions.

IES-E Mean Average Scores (and standard deviations)



Source: Trickey, D. and Hollamby, A. (2014)

In addition there were statistically significant decreases in scores for both anxiety and depression on the Goldberg test.

Qualitative feedback

Quotes from participants collected by the independent review included:

- *'before (the programme), the trauma owned me. I felt totally out of control, with no idea if I would ever feel normal again'.*

Other positive changes included feeling:

- *'reassured', 'more confident', 'calmer', 'a sense of relief', 'coping better', 'brought a closeness between the family', 'felt I had turned a corner', 'felt I had a lifeline'.*

There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the programme as a whole, with 97% of respondents indicating that they would recommend it to a friend (if they were similarly bereaved). The independent evaluation stated that the "strong overall response was that being with other people in a similar situation was incredibly helpful". (Trickey and Hollamby, 2014)

"I learnt techniques and strategies to manage all the intrusive thoughts and memories that come with traumatic grief, as well as gain a deeper understanding of how to manage and cope with grief, and day to day life".

"The most beneficial part of the experience was meeting other people who could understand and empathise with you completely on exactly what you're going through. This support from like-minded people, who all share a common, yet tragic connection, makes you feel less alone on your grief journey".

"I would highly recommend this programme to those affected by the death of someone they love from a road crash. The knowledge, skills and support I received and gained from the programme have been invaluable".

Bereaved partner, London, Spring 2014

Resilience Building Programme: tried, tested, effective but unfunded

Central government funding for RoadPeace's Resilience Building programme ceased at the end of March 2014. Unlike the national service provided for families bereaved by homicide, support services for those bereaved by law breaking on the road are to be commissioned locally through Police and Crime Commissioners.

RoadPeace is seeking funding to continue its Resilience Building programme and extend it to other areas. Please contact the RoadPeace office for more information about this unique and proven service.

References

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