

Best Evidence Summaries of Topics in Mental Healthcare

BEST *in* **MH** *clinical question-answering service*

Question

In bereaved adults, which group interventions are effective in improving trauma symptoms?

Clarification of question using *PICO* structure

Patients: Bereaved adults

Intervention: Any group intervention

Comparator: Any/no other interventions

Outcome: Trauma symptoms

Plain language summary

More research is needed into the effectiveness of group interventions for bereaved adults, as well as looking more specifically into the differential effects between populations such as mothers and fathers following the death of a child.

Clinical and research implications

Evidence about the effectiveness of group interventions for bereaved adults is extremely sparse. There is some indication, from one very poor quality randomised controlled trial, that support groups may improve the negative symptoms of bereaved mothers. However, the size of this effect was not reported and, therefore, its clinical significance cannot be assessed. The same study found that the support group had a negative effect on bereaved fathers.

Studies are needed to adequately assess the effectiveness of group interventions in different bereaved populations. Standardisation of interventions is required to facilitate comparisons between studies and pooling of evidence. Where interventions for bereaved parents are assessed, particular attention should be paid to potential differential effects between mothers and fathers.

What does the evidence say?

Number of included studies/reviews (number of participants)

We identified one systematic review¹ and one additional randomised controlled trial,² which were considered potentially relevant to this evidence summary. The systematic review provided a broad summary of the evidence concerning the effectiveness of various types of non-pharmacological interventions for bereaved parents and siblings, following the death of a child. However, only one, poor quality, study assessed the effectiveness of a group intervention (a support group for bereaved mothers and fathers); the reported outcome measures were Brief Symptoms Inventory, Traumatic Experience Scale, Grief Experience Scale, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. The additional RCT assessed the effectiveness of a creative arts group intervention, provided in a hospice-setting, for bereaved relatives and friends and reported measures of grief response (Adult Attitudes to Grief and Texas Revised Inventory of Grief).² This trial was very small and of poor methodological quality.

Main findings

The RCT reported in a systematic review¹ found that participation in the support group intervention was associated with statistically significant improvements in symptoms immediately after the intervention (Brief Symptoms Inventory (BSI) and Traumatic Experience Scale (TES)) and at six month follow-up (Grief Experience Scale (GES)), for bereaved mothers. However, no effect sizes were reported and fathers in the same study showed greater mental distress and higher PTSD scores with participation in the support group. The additional, very small, poor quality RCT found that participation in a creative arts group had no statistically significant effects of participants' experience of grief.²

Authors conclusions

Endo 2015 – There is very little evidence of sufficient quality is available to confirm the effects of intervention measures on bereaved parents and siblings following a child's death.

McGuinness 2015 – The authors concluded that “Evidence was found that the intervention did help participants' ability to move between loss and restoration coping when they attended at least six of the eight sessions. However, the use of creative arts activities appears to be more suitable for some people than for others.”

Reliability of conclusions/Strength of evidence

The evidence included in this summary was derived from two poor quality RCTs. One RCT was reported in a systematic review and was rated as high or unclear risk of bias on all six items of the Cochrane risk of bias tool. In addition, the results of this study were only reported as outcome measures where a significant difference was observed between the intervention and control groups; no effect sizes were reported. The second RCT was very small (14 participants analysed); the sample size was unlikely to have been adequate to detect any effects of the intervention. In addition, this study was also of poor methodological quality (rated as high or unclear risk of bias on all but one of the six items of the Cochrane risk of bias tool).

What do guidelines say?

Nice guidelines make the following recommendations (CG26) for sufferers of bereavement:

All PTSD sufferers should be offered a course of trauma-focused psychological treatment (trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing). These treatments should normally be provided on an individual outpatient basis.

The duration of trauma-focused psychological treatment should normally be 8–12 sessions when the PTSD results from a single event.

Healthcare professionals should consider extending the duration of treatment beyond 12 sessions if several problems need to be addressed in the treatment of PTSD sufferers, particularly after multiple traumatic events, traumatic bereavement, or where chronic disability resulting from the trauma, significant comorbid disorders or social problems are present. Trauma-focused treatment needs to be integrated into an overall plan of care.
Pp15-16

Date question received: 25/07/2016

Date searches conducted: 02/08/2016

Date answer completed: 19/09/2016

References**Systematic reviews**

1. Endo, k., Yonemoto, N., Yamada, M. (2015) Interventions for Bereaved Parents Following a Child's Death: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 29(7): pp. 590-604

Randomised controlled trials

2. McGuinness, B., Finucane, N., Roberts, A. (2015) A Hospice-Based Bereavement Support Group Using Creative Arts: An Exploratory Study. *Illness, Crisis and Loss*: pp. 1-20

Guidelines

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2005) Post-traumatic stress disorder: management CG26. Nice: London

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg26/resources/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-management-975329451205>

Results

Systematic reviews

Author (year)	Search date	Inclusion criteria	Number of included studies	Summary of results	Risk of bias
Endo et al (2015)	July 2013	<p>Participants: Bereaved parents and siblings following a child's death</p> <p>Intervention: Any treatment or therapy for the care of bereaved parents or siblings</p> <p>Comparator: Not specified</p> <p>Outcome: measures of grief reaction, negative psychological states, or negative mental and physical health outcomes caused by bereavement</p> <p>Study design: Randomised controlled trials</p>	n = 8 studies (one study of a group intervention)	<p>This systematic review aimed to evaluate interventions for bereaved parents and siblings following the death of a child.</p> <p>The studies included in this review compared a variety of psychological interventions, classified a support groups, counselling, psychotherapy, or crisis interventions, to a 'usual care' control. Only one of the included studies assessed a group intervention and is included in this evidence summary. This study was of poor methodological quality; it was rated as high or unclear risk of bias on all domains of the assessment tool.</p> <p>The study included 161 parents who had lost children to violent death (accident, murder or suicide) in the previous 2 to 7 months. The age of the child, at death, ranged from 12 to 28 years, and the age of participating</p>	<p>The review aimed to provide a broad summary of the topic area and, therefore, defined inclusion criteria to include RCTs of any intervention.</p> <p>Three bibliographic databases were searched for relevant studies, without language restrictions. The bibliographies of retrieved articles were screened for additional studies.</p>

			<p>parents ranged from 32 to 61 years.</p> <p>The intervention was described as a broad spectrum group intervention, comprising information-giving and skill-building support, followed by emotion-focussed support. It was delivered in 10, weekly, 2 hour sessions, led by mixed gender pairs of psychologists nurses and family therapists.</p> <p>Results were analysed separately for mothers and fathers. The review authors stated that the study did not report effect sizes, only significant differences between the intervention and control groups.</p> <p>For mothers, the support group was associated with statistically significant improvements in symptoms immediately after the intervention (Brief Symptoms Inventory (BSI) and Traumatic Experience Scale (TES)) and at six month follow-up (Grief Experience Scale (GES)), compared to the control group. However, fathers in the support group showed greater mental distress and higher PTSD scores than those in the control group at six months post-intervention.</p>	<p>It was not clear whether all stages of the review process included measures to minimise error and bias.</p> <p>The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using an appropriate tool and results were reported in full.</p> <p>The use of a narrative synthesis was appropriate, given the clear variation in interventions, etc. between studies.</p>
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Randomised controlled trials

Author (year)	Inclusion criteria	Number of participants	Summary of results	Risk of bias
McGuinness et al (2015)	<p>Participants: Target population identified by social workers at the hospice. Each had a relative or friend who had died under the care of the hospice. Participants had received support from the hospice social work team during the pre-death phase and in bereavement.</p> <p>Intervention: Creative arts activities and psychoeducational inputs on different aspects of grief</p> <p>Comparator: Waitlist group</p> <p>Outcome: Grief – Adult Attitude to Grief (AAG) instrument, (AAG was chosen as a grief measurement instrument in this study as it offered a way of assessing the impact of creative arts activities on a client’s ability to oscillate between loss, and restoration, oriented coping through the dimension of Balanced/Resilient) Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG), (self-report questionnaire designed to provide a brief evaluation of the intensity</p>	n = 20 (intervention = 10, control = 10)	<p>This article describes an ‘exploratory study’ and reports a randomised controlled trial of a hospice-based bereavement support group using creative arts, supplemented by qualitative data.</p> <p>The intervention comprised eight sessions, each of which had a psychoeducational theme with a creative arts activity; the frequency and duration of the sessions was not reported. Sessions were aimed to have differing therapeutic distances from the participants’ grief experience.</p> <p>The intervention and control groups had similar AAG and TRIG scores at baseline; no other baseline participant characteristics were reported.</p> <p>There were no significant differences in change in AAG or TRIG scores, from baseline to the end of treatment, between the intervention and control groups. Participants in the intervention group, showed a significantly greater improvement in the balanced sub-score of AAG ($z = -2.21$, $p=0.02$) than those in the control group, however, the study authors noted that this finding appeared to be driven by</p>	<p>No details of the randomisation procedure or allocation concealment were reported.</p> <p>The nature of the intervention precluded blinding of participants and study clinical personnel, and it was not clear whether outcome assessment</p>

	<p>and nature of an individual's grief response, in this study with a focus on assessing present feelings.)</p>		<p>large improvements in two participants.</p> <p>The majority of the participants, who attended any support group sessions, (n=17) rated the experience as either "very helpful" or "helpful," with one participant not sure if attending had helped.</p>	<p>was conducted blind to group allocation.</p> <p>Only participants who attended at least six of the eight sessions were included the analyses (7 out of ten participants from each group).</p> <p>Results were reported for all specified outcomes.</p>
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Risk of bias

Systematic reviews

Author (year)	RISK OF BIAS				
	Inclusion criteria	Searches	Review process	Quality assessment	Synthesis
Endo et al (2015)					

Randomised controlled trials

Study	RISK OF BIAS					
	Random allocation	Allocation concealment	Blinding of participants and personnel	Blinding of outcome assessment	Incomplete outcome data	Selective Reporting
McGuinness et al (2015)						

 Low risk

 High risk

 Unclear risk

Search details

Source	Search Strategy	Number of hits	Relevant evidence identified
<i>Guidelines</i>			
NICE	Bereavement Grief		
<i>Systematic Reviews</i>			
MEDLINE	8. Medline; ((group adj3 (work* OR support* OR therap* OR intervention*))).ti,ab; 89129 results. 9. Medline; exp PSYCHOTHERAPY, GROUP/; 24304 results. 10. Medline; 8 OR 9; 108340 results. 11. Medline; exp BEREAVEMENT/; 11463 results. 12. Medline; (bereave*).ti,ab; 5750 results. 13. Medline; ((grie* OR mourn*)).ti,ab; 10035 results. 14. Medline; exp GRIEF/; 7803 results. 15. Medline; 11 OR 12 OR 13 OR 14; 18618 results. 28. Medline; 10 AND 15; 691 results. 67. Medline; 28 [Limit to: (Document type Meta-analysis or Scientific Integrity Review)]; 1 results.	28	
EMBASE	4. EMBASE; ((group adj3 (work* OR support* OR therap* OR intervention*))).ti,ab; 108034 results. 5. EMBASE; exp GROUP COUNSELING/ OR exp GROUP INTERVENTION/ OR exp GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY/; 17655 results. 6. EMBASE; exp GROUP THERAPY/ OR exp SUPPORT GROUP/; 26487 results. 7. EMBASE; 4 OR 5 OR 6; 125862 results. 16. EMBASE; exp BEREAVEMENT/; 6962 results. 17. EMBASE; (bereave*).ti,ab; 7127 results. 18. EMBASE; ((grie* OR mourn*)).ti,ab; 13511 results. 19. EMBASE; exp GRIEF/; 10404 results. 24. EMBASE; 16 OR 17 OR 18 OR 19; 23961 results. 27. EMBASE; 7 AND 24; 895 results. 54. EMBASE; 27 [Limit to: (EBM-Evidence Based Medicine Evidence Based Medicine or Meta Analysis or Systematic Review)]; 24 results.	24	

PsycINFO/CINAHL	<p>1. PsycInfo; ((group adj3 (work* OR support* OR therap* OR intervention*))).ti,ab; 54102 results. 2. PsycInfo; exp GROUP COUNSELING/ OR exp GROUP INTERVENTION/ OR exp GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY/; 26560 results. 3. PsycInfo; 1 OR 2; 66711 results. 20. PsycInfo; exp BEREAVEMENT/; 12801 results. 21. PsycInfo; (bereave*).ti,ab; 8854 results. 22. PsycInfo; ((grie* OR mourn*).ti,ab; 15799 results. 23. PsycInfo; exp GRIEF/; 11649 results. 25. PsycInfo; 20 OR 21 OR 22 OR 23; 21738 results. 26. PsycInfo; 3 AND 25; 1113 results. 29. PsycInfo; 26 [Limit to: (Methodology Meta Analysis or Systematic Review)]; 7 results.</p>	7	
<i>Primary Studies</i>			
MEDLINE	<p>8. Medline; ((group adj3 (work* OR support* OR therap* OR intervention*))).ti,ab; 89129 results. 9. Medline; exp PSYCHOTHERAPY, GROUP/; 24304 results. 10. Medline; 8 OR 9; 108340 results. 11. Medline; exp BEREAVEMENT/; 11463 results. 12. Medline; (bereave*).ti,ab; 5750 results. 13. Medline; ((grie* OR mourn*).ti,ab; 10035 results. 14. Medline; exp GRIEF/; 7803 results. 15. Medline; 11 OR 12 OR 13 OR 14; 18618 results. 28. Medline; 10 AND 15; 691 results. 55. Medline; "randomized controlled trial".ti,ab; 45427 results. 56. Medline; "controlled clinical trial".ti,ab; 10545 results. 57. Medline; randomi\$ed.ti,ab; 2 results. 58. Medline; placebo.ti,ab; 175103 results. 59. Medline; "drug therapy".ti,ab; 30456 results. 60. Medline; randomly.ti,ab; 251863 results. 61. Medline; trial.ti,ab; 418719 results. 62. Medline; groups.ti,ab; 1583272 results. 63. Medline; exp RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL/; 0 results. 64. Medline; exp CLINICAL TRIAL/ OR exp CONTROLLED CLINICAL TRIAL/; 0 results. 65. Medline; 55 OR 56 OR 57 OR 58 OR 59 OR 60 OR 61 OR 62 OR 63 OR 64; 2109516 results.</p>	234	

	66. Medline; 28 AND 65; 234 results.		
EMBASE	<p>4. EMBASE; ((group adj3 (work* OR support* OR therap* OR intervention*))).ti,ab; 108034 results.</p> <p>5. EMBASE; exp GROUP COUNSELING/ OR exp GROUP INTERVENTION/ OR exp GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY/; 17655 results.</p> <p>6. EMBASE; exp GROUP THERAPY/ OR exp SUPPORT GROUP/; 26487 results.</p> <p>7. EMBASE; 4 OR 5 OR 6; 125862 results.</p> <p>16. EMBASE; exp BEREAVEMENT/; 6962 results.</p> <p>17. EMBASE; (bereave*).ti,ab; 7127 results.</p> <p>18. EMBASE; ((grie* OR mourn*).ti,ab; 13511 results.</p> <p>19. EMBASE; exp GRIEF/; 10404 results.</p> <p>24. EMBASE; 16 OR 17 OR 18 OR 19; 23961 results.</p> <p>27. EMBASE; 7 AND 24; 895 results.</p> <p>42. EMBASE; random*.ti,ab; 1107469 results.</p> <p>43. EMBASE; factorial*.ti,ab; 27963 results.</p> <p>44. EMBASE; ((crossover* OR cross-over*).ti,ab; 81497 results.</p> <p>45. EMBASE; placebo*.ti,ab; 238301 results.</p> <p>46. EMBASE; ((doubl* ADJ blind*).ti,ab; 165385 results.</p> <p>47. EMBASE; ((singl* ADJ blind*).ti,ab; 17905 results.</p> <p>48. EMBASE; assign*.ti,ab; 291131 results.</p> <p>49. EMBASE; allocat*.ti,ab; 106043 results.</p> <p>50. EMBASE; volunteer*.ti,ab; 204748 results.</p> <p>51. EMBASE; exp "RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL (TOPIC)"/ OR exp CONTROLLED CLINICAL TRIAL/; 663362 results.</p> <p>52. EMBASE; 42 OR 43 OR 44 OR 45 OR 46 OR 47 OR 48 OR 49 OR 50 OR 51; 1874424 results.</p> <p>53. EMBASE; 27 AND 52; 134 results.</p>	134	
PsycINFO/CINAHL	<p>1. PsycInfo; ((group adj3 (work* OR support* OR therap* OR intervention*))).ti,ab; 54102 results.</p> <p>2. PsycInfo; exp GROUP COUNSELING/ OR exp GROUP INTERVENTION/ OR exp GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY/; 26560 results.</p> <p>3. PsycInfo; 1 OR 2; 66711 results.</p> <p>20. PsycInfo; exp BEREAVEMENT/; 12801 results.</p> <p>21. PsycInfo; (bereave*).ti,ab; 8854 results.</p> <p>22. PsycInfo; ((grie* OR mourn*).ti,ab; 15799 results.</p> <p>23. PsycInfo; exp GRIEF/; 11649 results.</p> <p>25. PsycInfo; 20 OR 21 OR 22 OR 23; 21738 results.</p>	468	

	<p>26. PsycInfo; 3 AND 25; 1113 results. 30. PsycInfo; random*.ti,ab; 152539 results. 31. PsycInfo; groups.ti,ab; 412475 results. 32. PsycInfo; ((double adj3 blind)).ti,ab; 19403 results. 33. PsycInfo; ((single adj3 blind)).ti,ab; 1724 results. 34. PsycInfo; controlled.ti,ab; 95071 results. 35. PsycInfo; ((clinical adj3 study)).ti,ab; 12713 results. 36. PsycInfo; trial.ti,ab; 81387 results. 37. PsycInfo; "treatment outcome clinical trial".ti,ab; 0 results. 38. PsycInfo; exp EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN/; 51878 results. 39. PsycInfo; 30 OR 31 OR 32 OR 33 OR 34 OR 35 OR 36 OR 37 OR 38; 666851 results. 40. PsycInfo; 26 AND 39; 2 results. 41. PsycInfo; 26 AND 39; 468 results.</p>		
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