Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness: Considering practical approaches to bereavement support

Tania Brocklehurst, Clinical Bereavement Lead, supported by Kimberley McLaughlin, Director of Supportive care. Contact: tania.brocklehurst@stfrancis.org.uk

There is no fast track through the grief process. Whilst the developing use of approaches such as Mindfulness and CBT in bereavement may feel questionable to some, when used appropriately, they can provide a practical framework from which clients can work towards an increased sense of manageability and wellbeing.

Mindfulness: Bereaved clients at the Hospice of St Francis were provided with an opportunity to attend a mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) programme, to learn and develop new tools and skills with which to manage stressful situations and feelings. Monthly support and development groups are held to support continued development of mindfulness practise.

CBT: Bereaved clients at the Hospice of St Francis experiencing practical as well as social and psychological complex grief responses are offered CBT sessions to support their grief process.

“A CBT approach can be easily tailored to help those clients with normal grief reactions where the intervention might have a psycho-educational focus, to a more structured, long-term intervention for those who are suffering from prolonged or complicated grief (Morris, 2008)”.

Example of Interventions:

- Mindful movement and exercises, along with learning and practising relaxation, breathing and meditation techniques can enhance wellbeing.

- Specialist interventions such as the downward arrow technique can support a clients search for meaning and sense of self when feeling confused.

- Tools such as the ‘responsibility pie’ can help to logically relocate feelings of displaced responsibility or guilt in grief when facilitated by a CBT practitioner.

Conclusion: With the development of commissioned bereavement services, resources that can offer shorter term, practical support are being explored and utilised in a creative, collaborative way with clients. Further research is required to establish the long term benefits of such interventions, however our experience suggests that they can be effective when combined with the option of alternative more traditional approaches for those that prefer them.