

Hans-Georg Renner
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SUMMITEERS–
Moving mountains with bereaved boys

“If there is a faith that can move mountains, it is faith in your own power.”
Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

1. Introduction

Summiteers are people who rush to the top. There is a mountain summit and a metaphorical summit inside us which we can climb. In the area of mountain summits, Reinhold Messner is surely the best known and most successful summiter. He climbed, among other things, the highest peak on earth without supplemental oxygen. In the language of the country this peak is called ‘Forehead of the Sky’¹. But now Reinhold Messner’s life formula is in relation to his inner summit. His formula is called ‘Moving Mountains’. Following his example we have to first move mountains, in our inner selves, in our beliefs and in our attitudes, if we want to climb up a challenging summit.

In the course of our lives, every one of us climbs different peaks, in the metaphorical sense. We may for example face the grief of mourning the loss of a loved one. The above quotation says that when our belief is strong enough, even mountains can be moved. This metaphor should accompany this project and help grieving boys to climb or to move their own ‘Forehead of the Sky’². ‘Summiteers’ is an outdoor education project which will first help boys to move inner mountains, for example, “I will never make that peak”. Then we will actually, step by step, climb a peak. At the end, the boys will learn how to use a basic model and see how they can, step by step, move other inner mountains in the future. They will once again have a stronger belief in themselves and believe in their inner powers.

In work with the bereaved, different approaches to grief are always pointed out. In particular, the different ways in which men and women grieve³. In this project I will therefore concentrate on a programme for bereaved boys. These five boys will be aged between 14 and 16 years old. Some aspects of the project may also be helpful for when working with bereaved girls and adults.

From educational work with adolescent boys we know that different boys can be reached at different levels through direct conversation. Below I will outline three groups:

¹ The mountain is called Sagarmatha which is Nepalese for ‘Forehead of the Sky’; in Tibetan it is called ‘Mother of the Universe’. We know the mountain as ‘Mount Everest’.

² I am also inspired by the work of the French doctor, Dr. Christine Janin, who climbed Mont Blanc with young people suffering from cancer.

³ This can be seen in the book ‘Trauer-Gesichter’ (Faces of Grief) which purposefully aims itself at the female audience.

Boys who can be directly reached through a conversation.

Conversations with these boys can naturally be initiated through a direct approach. It is still favourable to choose a protected room, because many boys are not used to speaking about their bereavement and (at first) an intimate setting is preferable. Once a trusting relationship has developed, a walk together is also a good idea.

Conversations in a group of boys in this target group are more difficult, particularly if faced with the 'typical room for talking' with flowers in the middle etc. It is more favourable at first to build a base in 'casual' meetings. For example on a bus journey to place X, while barbequing or during an activity (see further under), and to then later also initiate a group discussion together.

Boys who are not approachable for discussion sessions.

These boys are not uncommon and may simply need more time. However, it is still the case in all sessions that nobody has to speak. It is also helpful to acknowledge that over 80% of bereaved people do not want bereavement counselling. It is important to be in contact with these boys and to let them know that their way is also a way of coping with bereavement, not 'better' or 'worse' than other ways. It is also important for them to know that they can find someone to talk to at any time, should they ever feel the need.

Boys who are reachable through an action based session.

This group is arguably the largest group. The action based content is a means to an end, namely working through bereavement, and not an end in itself. Action based sessions can be sports, workshop, creative technology, or nature based. In creative sessions it is worthwhile noting the fact that many boys would for example prefer wood carving to painting a picture. Games are also useful here, for example large games like table football, table tennis or football, but also small games like backgammon or chess as 'door openers'.

In order to be able to adequately support bereaved boys in this summiteers project, their above described psycho-social situation should be seen and taken up. Targets are helpful in the management of one's own grief and in the rebuilding of the boys' self-confidence. With this in mind, action based sessions and senses experiences are a possible approach. This sensual experience in nature offers the belief that he who is searching for sense, should begin with his own senses. In addition to this is the fact that nearly all people recover during a stay in nature.

People in crisis or experiencing periods of transition in their life have for thousands of years, consciously or even unconsciously, searched for nature and we should revive this tradition. We can see that people are ready to revive this tradition, through the rising number of participants in outdoor education, in pilgrimages and in the search for visions. In all of these activities the connectivity to earth and the ties between everything and everyone are felt and expressed; even though this may sometimes only be through vague statements, such as, "It did something to me, but I can't say exactly what".

“A bereaved child primarily needs resonance,
So that the supporting person’s emotional co-vibrations and sympathy,
Are like a protective room,
In which he is allowed to be, in the way he is currently feeling.”

Petra Hinderer

2. Bereavement counselling

When said by a bereavement counsellor, this is often described as us, as bereavement counsellors, joining the bereaved on part of their journey through grief⁴. In this concept we support the boys not only psychologically, but also physically on a part of their journey and develop a tactile and negotiable path through the bereavement.

2.1 Features of bereaved boys

If a brother or a sister dies, the boys are often left alone, are neglected and are very lonely, because the parents are *naturally* very absorbed in grieving for their dead child. Counsellors often deal with this ‘double loss’. This double loss refers first to the loss of the brother or sister and then to the loss of the now unavailable parents.

If a parent dies, this is a profound experience of loss. The boys often add to this by tormenting themselves with the fear of also losing their other parent. The support of a mentor is particularly helpful in these cases, in order to increase the boys’ self-confidence. A male mentor could be suitable as a role model for the boys.

The boys’ age (puberty) causes instability and many conflicting feelings as well as the search for their own identity and the questioning of the meaning of life. The definitive parting from childhood and the new start of an adult life are phases which make the boys feel very insecure and during which they can be unclear about how to express their moods. Bereavement also brings similar feelings to the fore and therefore adds to these already difficult to understand emotions.

For thousands of years, puberty was the point in time when boys took part in an initiation ceremony. Through this ritual the young people and their situation were taken seriously and it enabled them to take a second step, a clarification of the future journey through life. There were also for thousands of years rituals in nature for crisis situations, in order to be able to accept the situation and to bring clarity about the future life path. These are two good reasons for the summiteers project, because in this project we will also use the power of nature and take the boys seriously in their situation. We will offer the boys rituals in order to find more clarity for them and their life path.

⁴ Reference is made here to the rich and quickly growing literature on the topic of ‘bereavement’.

2.2 Educational concept

The formal process plans for seven meetings; Saturdays from 10am until 2pm and one week in the holidays. This time structure is already used by others when working with the siblings of disabled children and young people. The separate meetings focus on the boys' needs within a group for bereaved boys. This means that in the content of the meetings we factor in bereavement related tasks as well as building up subject specific knowledge for a mountain climbing trip.

The 'summiteers' educational concept includes several levels. I will outline the required level for a successful concept when working with bereaved boys in the concrete descriptions for the individual meetings. The focal points are described in the following categories; bereavement, nature and support for action. These focal points follow Verena Karst and William Worden's recommendations. The concept also allows space for individual and group specific focuses.

It is an event for a small group of boys and it is therefore also worthwhile factoring in and supporting the natural group processes. Phases are often discussed when working with groups and these are:

a) Making Contact

The boys make contact and get to know each other better. They focus on themselves in the group and look for where they may fit in.

b) Fighting

There will be small (mostly verbal) fights and through this an argumentative culture will develop. Everyone is anxious to find their position in the group. There are groups who appear to skip this phase, but these groups remain mostly shallow in order to avoid a conflict arising. Without going through this fighting phase it is normally not possible for the group to really develop.

c) Harmonising

The group develops its rules. The boys agree their processes and harmonise with each other. Common experiences will be established. All of the boys are involved in the dialogue and they only accept solutions which are fair to everyone.

d) Co-operation

The boys now trust each other; they support each other and have become a real team. Crises are overcome and the individual group members develop themselves further.

e) Maintaining Contact

This achieved group status must be worked at again and again; contact must be maintained in order to allow the group to continue existing. For boys going through puberty a clique of this sort is important.

The project incorporates these five phases in order to achieve a supportive group atmosphere which encourages the individuals along their paths.

Hermann Hesse gave a good description of the importance of groups for personal development:

It is said that the search for yourself is less important than finding the right relationships with others. But these are not two separate things.

The educational basis is aligned with Rebecca and Mauricio Wild's educational theories and their indirect, active pedagogic approach. Rebecca Wild describes this as:

The harmonial development of children is a natural and therefore slow process. Our task is to create the right conditions for this, but not to accelerate the process. If we as adults can manage to not disturb this inner process with our impatience, but rather to provide the necessary nutrients, then the children will learn to stand on their own feet and not to spend their lives being dependant on external leadership.

In relation to the group of bereaved boys, this means trusting the boys' impulses, for example choosing whether to talk about their bereavement or to not talk about it.

On the other hand an orientation around the principles of outdoor education should occur. There is no uniform definition of outdoor education, but we can define three important success criteria. Outdoor education:

- a) provides meaningful experiences,
- b) has a strong formative power,
- c) has a lifelong effect.

Professor Dr. Ziegenspeck summarises that:

Every person needs adventures in order to be able to gain experiences and through this their knowledge is nourished.

He continues:

The educational value of adventures will be seen through the foundation of senses and character building, as is already seen in the formative awareness building.

Moreover, group adventures are now gaining a particular importance.

In particular, Ziegenspeck's two points about the foundation of senses and character building are central to the work with bereaved boys.

Sitting beside the educational basis is the fact that outdoor education offers the boys a high challenge and adventure characteristic. In this way, outdoor education offers itself as a perfect method for working with bereaved boys.

Outdoor education has gone through different stages of development and there are several effective models. At the beginning there was the 'the mountains speak for themselves' model. That meant that the groups would, for example, hike up a mountain and the

adventure wouldn't be reflected upon or worked through verbally. It was believed that everyone would take away their own important experiences from the trip.

Over the course of time the sessions became shorter, new target audiences appeared and there was pressure from branches of further education stating that activities were only meaningful if they were immediately followed by verbal reflection. This led many providers to introduce different models.

However, for me personally, the outdoor education base model takes absolute supremacy when working with bereaved boys. This is because this approach believes in the power of nature and of the individual person. Nature has an affect on people and has done for thousands of years, and every person draws their own knowledge from this. He draws exactly the amount that he can handle and use at the time. The inner processes are more important than the (educational) discussion about them. We can trust nature and, as a part of nature, ourselves. As supervisors we allow everyone to follow their own path and we inform them of their own innate recuperative power.

Outdoor education sessions are characterised by the fact that participants are put inside a safe setting where they choose, by their own free will, to take part in activities which build their courage and increase their self –confidence. Both of these are important points of this approach in working with bereaved boys, as described above.

Aggression towards other people and also against themselves can appear in bereaved boys, often because of a feeling of guilt. The boys tend to punish themselves and bring themselves and others into danger. The project picks up on exactly this point by allowing the boys to subjectively see themselves in danger, for example when abseiling. This fulfils the need for danger within a legal framework. Objectively, they are obviously in a safe environment during the sessions. Within the project it is very purposefully planned that the boys must also take responsibility for the safety of other participants.

Three steps; after the first step of being able to 'survive' in danger, they learn in the second step to trust themselves and others and in the third step they learn to take responsibility for themselves and for the other boys.

A further area of learning with similarities to being a bereaved boy is that, during outdoor activities, the boys must adapt to the changing natural environment. In the case of the mountain climb this means adapting to life in the high mountains. They can learn basic coping strategies which they can then use at home when having to adapt to a new environment after the death of a loved one.

2.3 Educational Supervisor

The supervisor needs to have the following competencies:

a) Cognitive Competence

He is an experienced bereavement counsellor, who knows about grief exercises and processes and has at his disposal a reflective knowledge of legality and risk factors in the bereavement process. It is however important that every boy follows their own very personal path through their grief. The supervisor's knowledge must therefore not stand between them and the boys as a 'correct way of dealing with grief', but as an aid which may help in being able to better understand some actions and reactions. This concept can be expressed with a rule from bird lore, "If the bird and the book don't concur, always believe the bird".

b) Emotional Competence

A basis for emotional competency is obviously reworking through one's own occasions of grief and considering one's own mortality. The supervisor is also able to reflect on their own feelings and understands why he is more deeply affected in some situations and less affected in others.

c) Technical Competence

The supervisor must obviously be technically competent, for example he must be able to lead a group in the high mountains. Alternatively, he must get the assistance of someone who does have the required technical knowledge. This technically competent leader must however be informed of the educational approach and be able to give it his backing.

d) Social Competence

The general counselling competencies (active listening, authenticity, empathy etc.) are still needed when working with bereaved boys and therefore communication skills are one of the basic requirements. The word communication derives from the Latin 'Communicare' and means to search for and build commonalities. This illustrates that the supervisor may not hide behind a method, but is required as a person with head and heart.

The psychologist Bernhard Aucouturier described this by saying:

If I have to choose a person to help a child with difficulties, I would always choose somebody who is in a position to experience feelings. I would always give emotional competency supremacy over intellectual competency. One can acquire intellectual competency, where as emotional sensitivity is very difficult to learn.

2.4 Potential Obstacles in the Team

In a mixed gender team obstacles can emerge, because the 'man / male colleague' doesn't instantly seek a conversation, instead he supposedly plummets straight into the activity. But this activity often conveys to the boys a sense security which is first needed in order for them to be able to take on their own inner processes – this is particularly the case with boys who are not very well practiced verbally. This problem is similar to that of parents': married woman: "You're not grieving properly," because the husband doesn't want to talk (much). In a team: female colleague: "You're not counselling properly" (same reason as above).

“It is so pleasant,
To simultaneously explore nature and yourself,
To commit violence neither against it nor your own spirit,
But to bring both through a gentle interaction
Together into equilibrium.”

J.W.Goethe

3. Bereavement Course

The basic structure of the meetings is constructed in a similar way to many bereavement courses. This means that the beginning and the end are always organised in the same way and this ritual helps the boys to orientate themselves in the meeting and provides them with a sense of security. Through the middle section, where the content changes, the meetings turn to their core purpose of providing opportunities for emotional expression and creating areas for memories.

This occurs against the background fact that bereavement counselling is life counselling and that grief is not an illness, but a hard experience of life.

First Meeting

Topics

In the first meeting mutual introductions take the foreground. The boys get to know each other, the supervisors and nature and they get to hear an outline of the planned course.

The first meeting begins appropriately for the target group with the greeting ritual. Following this there is lots of time for ice-breakers from the cooperative New Games are well suited here, because they are fun games without winners and losers.

There are also exercises in nature in the style described by nature educationalist Joseph Cornell. In these exercises a cautious contact between you, nature and your co-players stands in the foreground.

There are opportunities for discussion in between the substantive focal points and at the end of the meeting. In these conversations the supervisor concentrates on the humanistic approach to psychology guidelines as developed by Carl Rogers⁵.

Focal Point – Grief

That means that it will be made clear during the discussions why the boys are in this group. The boys learn the reasons for each other’s grief and a further connection is

⁵ Rogers saw a ‘fully human encounter’ as a success criterion for helpful support. Aspects associated with this are: tolerating all emotions, the basic assumption that the individual is good and having sympathy for and trust in the person.

For me, this approach is predestined for a bereavement counsellor, because I am also of the opinion that the individual and their grief are good – not ill. I also see it as helpful to give room for your emotions in a sympathetic and trustful environment.

developed between the boys through their similar fate; this is similar to the connectivity found in self-help groups.

Focal Point – Nature

The aim is to complete a first investigation of nature near the front door. To notice the (often surprising) variety of nature in close proximity, as well as sensitising one's own senses to be able to sense oneself in nature and to come in closer contact with it.

Focal Point – Support for Action

Naming the reason for their grief may help the boys to accept the reality of their loss a bit more. It must always be clearly felt that at any time in this group the boys are allowed, so to say they have the 'permission', to talk about themselves, their emotions and feelings and their bereavement, but that they do not have to.

Second Meeting

Topics

From the starting point of mistrust and suspicion, through the first acknowledgement of others' abilities, then develops the first senses of trust, faith and belief. Outdoor educational co-operative games and trust exercises will be the methods for encouraging this development and the boys will also keep a diary.

Focal Point – Grief

In the games the boys first learn to trust themselves. They learn that their behaviour is okay, that their emotions are okay. In a second step they see that the other boys also trust them and that the other boys are also experiencing similar emotions. This provides the opportunity to use their mutual trust in order to arrive at a common grief.

Focal Point – Nature

Nature is seen as a reliable place for exciting experiences and it increases the boys' desire for adventure and discovery.

Focal Point – Support for Action

Being together and the emotions experienced in this community stand in the foreground in the exercises. The emotions experienced are often versatile and quick changing, ranging from fear to satisfaction. These emotions will be both examined and expressed by the boys. The boys learn that they can tolerate these emotions and they are encouraged by this. A diary is used in which the boys can write down their first experiences straightaway. It may be clear to some boys that they know many emotions, including in relation to their bereavement, and they may be able to identify these emotions and express them in their diary.

Third Meeting

Topics

The boys bring photos of the deceased with them and can show these photos to the others. We will construct our own pictures out of natural materials and we will look at these artworks again during our last meeting

Focal Point – Grief

Emotions and memories can be revived by showing the pictures which have been brought along. The boys can express their emotions and talk about them. Everyone will become aware of the deceased and of the associated loss.

Focal Point – Nature

The boys will refashion nature in order to express themselves. In this way they experience nature as mouldable and differentiated. If there is interest within the group, the boys can create their own colour paints using natural materials. The artworks which remain in nature will be found again during the seventh meeting.

Focal Point – Support for Action

The focal points from the earlier meetings are picked up again and reinforced, namely being able to talk and giving room and time for emotions. In addition to this the boys now have physical objects, like the diary and their artwork, which will support their journey through grief.

Fourth Meeting

Topics

Technical competencies are imparted in preparation for the mountain climb.

Focal Point – Grief

The boys further develop their ability to notice and express their emotions. These sessions have grown out of the belief that many boys have little practice in speaking about their emotions, but that they may really want to discuss them. On the other hand we must not forget that boys have a culture when coping with grief which isn't necessarily about expressing themselves through 'talking about it together', but is more action based.

Focal Point – Nature

We use the understanding of nature which we have developed up until this point as a basis for learning to use a map and compass. It is important when using a map and compass to have physical experience of the terrain which the symbols refer to.

Focal Point – Support for Action

The main target to climb a mountain draws ever closer. The boys develop the first necessary technical abilities. Among other things they learn how to use a compass. Inside the compass is the compass card with the four compass points and the degrees

markings. We develop our own compass card on which emotions are written instead of the four compass points. This compass card can for example be taken home and hung on the bedroom door; it can show other family members what mood the boy is currently in, whether he would prefer some peace and quiet or if he is amenable to contact.

Fifth Meeting

Topics

The mountain climb, the common action in the group, is planned. Individual strategies for how to deal with new environments are also planned.

Focal Point – Grief

The boys must apply their existing resources to the mountain climb. That is also the case in the bereavement process. Which resources does the individual have at their disposal? Which of these can he use in his journey through grief? Which survival strategies does he have or can he further develop? Which emotions will he encounter?

Focal Point – Nature

The boys apply their existing knowledge in order to be able to plan a suitable mountain climb. The map must be correctly understood, a possible route prepared and alternative sections of the route must also be considered.

Focal Point – Support for Action

The boys must develop firm survival strategies. Who is dealing with what? Who has which tasks to fulfil on the trip? Responsibilities are clearly allocated in order for everyone to be able to deal with the new situation. The basic model is the same at both levels (nature and grief). The boys first learn very concretely to develop appropriate techniques for surviving the demands of nature. This process can similarly help them when developing strategies for their changed everyday life after the bereavement, in reinterpreting this process for everyday life they will fall back on resources which they would otherwise rarely use.

Sixth Meeting – The Mountain Climb

Topics

The seven day trip goes through the ‘Steinernes Meer’ (Rocky Sea) in the Eastern Alps. While crossing the Steinernes Meer there is the opportunity to climb individual summits. For example the ‘Schönfeldspitze’ at 2653m above sea level or the ‘Großen Hundstod’ at 2594m above sea level. The ‘Schindlkopfhöhle’ cave can also be explored. Accommodation is in the German and Austrian Alpine Associations’ huts. Before the start of the mountain climb, the boys visit the ice chapel at Watzmann-Ostwand. Then it begins on the ‘skywards ladder’ up the first alpine meadow.

Focal Point – Grief

The sequence of the mountain climb fits in well with the phases of the grief process. First there is the visit to the ice chapel which lies fortuitously before the start of the

mountain climb. In the chapel the boys can individually psyche themselves up for the upcoming mountain climb and realise again the reason for the group, for the trip and hence the death of their loved one.

It is easy to become disorientated in the Steinernes Meer and the path is therefore a search, separating from old ways and refocusing. This process can be seen as a metaphor for the journey through grief.

Multifaceted emotions will arise during the trip. These range from wanting to give up during the ascent, to the great feeling of happiness on reaching a summit.

It is always helpful to use your resources and develop strategies for the different environments, whether in the alpine huts, on the mountain trip, when rock climbing, when exploring the cave or when ascending the summit. One example of this is provided below:

The Steinernes Meer has many rocks which (occasionally) invite one to climb them. The boys enter a so-called 'key moment' when rock climbing. This is a difficult part of the route which prompts the climber to truly evaluate whether to continue or to give up. We also find these 'key moments' in everyday life when we have to evaluate whether we want to continue in the same way, or if we want to leave that route behind. In future 'key moments' the boys will remember this situation. With this comes the background that he was safely guided through the whole trip and in his decision making process. This guidance didn't dictate the direction, but ensured his safety in all of his actions, no matter which decisions he made. This safeguarding friend is his guardian angel who facilitates these experiences for him.

Multifaceted metaphors can clearly be found which enrich inward reflection and also make it easier to discuss personal grief. Each boy will create his own references. Here is one personal interpretation:

During a summit climb, I climb slowly upwards with small steps. The rucksack is heavy, I see no end, I look constantly down at the path, at the earth, and I am totally preoccupied with myself. When I look up, I only see the mountain (of grief) before me.

As I reach the summit after the long journey, I once again have an unobstructed view. Suddenly I once again notice the other summits, the mountain world, my whole surroundings. I open myself up.

Naturally, I know that the mountain (of grief) will remain and that's okay, because I am standing firmly on this mountain, it belongs to me, I don't need to disown it, because it gives me my much needed grounding. But it is no longer the only thing in my life; my perception has been changed by my new farsightedness and I notice the sky and the whole surroundings and I feel like I belong. I am a part of this whole, of this world with its never-ending sky, all of its mountains, summits, people and so much more...

During the mountain trip a group discussion and some 'solo time' is planned for every evening, in order to fulfil the boys' different expressional needs. The group discussion provides them with the opportunity to compare, to learn from each other and to support each other. The solo time is a time used by every boy for themselves, alone; everyone finds themselves a peaceful spot in nature, not too far away from the hut, for an hour. In this time they have space to reflect on the day once again or to write something in their diary, or, or, or...

Focal Point – Nature

This mountain climb is an easy to intermediate hike, which the boys can technically and physically cope with, but it is not a stroll in the park. It is a real challenge which leaves them feeling proud when they have succeeded. There are also additional adventures, for example the water is cold and scarce and must be extracted from the snowy fields. Temperature drops from minus 15°C to minus 20 °C are also possible, so after morning sunshine we can once again find ourselves in driving snow in the afternoon. Nature is how nature is; it is not possible to retune it or to persuade it. We have to adapt to nature; this is both possible and good for us. There are distinct contrasts in nature (flowerage and barren rocks), magnificent views, sounds, winds, ... all of our senses can be affected and this lets us know that we are absolutely alive and that this world is wonderful. The mountains speak for themselves.

Focal Point – Support for Action

The boys develop a variety of resources during the mountain trip. Learning from resources is a skill that can be transferred to other areas. The boys can apply these competencies in other situations with a similar structure. This learning model is referred to as 'isomorphic learning' and is consciously used in outdoor education in order to positively change young peoples' images of themselves.

On the last day of the mountain trip, the boys each choose a symbol from nature to take home with them. This symbol can remind them of the trip in later life, of their experiences, of the skills they have gained and of their accomplishments and it can give them the courage to take on another challenge in their life. May Balthasar, the patron saint on hikers, lead us benevolently.

Seventh Meeting

Topics

The conclusion of the course is the central topic; this includes the parting from each other - from the other boys and from the supervisors.

Focal Point – Grief

In how they deal with their grief, the boys have presumably changed. They have been able to develop a new relationship with themselves and with the world. They can trust themselves and the other boys. They have learned for themselves that they are able to develop new strategies and that they are not helpless in their grief, but that there is room for them to shape their own direction and that only they can define the right path for

themselves. Within this they naturally know that they can talk to others and are free to ask for help.

Focal Point – Nature

We visit the natural art project from the third meeting and discover that nature has changed itself back again after we had altered it. We ascertain that nature changes itself back and that all changes are always bound within the same cycle.

Focal Point – Support for Action

The transition into everyday life is consciously constructed. The boys learn from each other by discussing the course. It is ensured that the ability to name emotions and to take part in a discussion will remain in new situations and this may also come to them more easily now. They have also learned that their grief is okay how it is and that there is no 'royal method' of dealing with grief. They have learned that they can make the right decisions for themselves and that they can develop their own survival strategies. This brings self-confidence, but it is of course important that after the course ends the grief is not simply shut away. The boys bring their natural objects from the trip with them and this should remind them of their journey (through grief). To end, they step over a constructed barrier with this object in their hand. The barrier is a symbol for the beginning of a new life chapter; a life chapter in which the boys and the deceased now take a new place. This may be in the spirit as described by J.W. Goethe:

“I have the courage to dare to be in the world
To bear the earth's pain and the earth's fortune.”

“We’re so happy in nature
Because nature doesn’t judge us.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

4. Final Contemplation

To conclude we will look at the views of experts of this concept. Experts - that is the affected boys themselves. At the second German Children’s Hospice Forum in Cologne (2nd/3rd November 2007) siblings requested a concept with the following:

“Outdoor education sessions, because they can increase our self-confidence and our sense of group belonging.”

→ ‘Summiteers’ is an outdoor education concept through and through and it fully factors in both of these crucial points.

“Discussion sessions and opportunities to talk”

→ The supervisors provide a multitude of discussion sessions and opportunities to talk which the boys can embrace throughout the bereavement course and in particular during the mountain climb. There is also a lot of free space for leading discussions amongst each other (from boy to boy).

“Accept our grief and our emotions”

→ Accepting grief and the emotions associated with loss and giving these emotions room is the basis of the ‘summiteers’ programme. This is one of the biggest contrasts to classic outdoor education courses.

“We want to fulfil our own wishes”

→ This request is aspired to by the fact that many boys have once wanted to climb a mountain. This wish can however only be achieved together with the other participants. As mentioned above, the base concept also provides the opportunity to fulfil individual wishes, namely through several small units aligned into the main project (sailing, canoeing, cross country skiing, theatre trip, workshop activities, circus visit etc.).

“The activity should take place in a group of people in similar positions”

→ ‘Summiteers’ is a project for bereaved boys only. This brings the advantages of a self-help group to the project, for example not always having to explain yourself.

The boys are ready to move mountains. We support them on their journey and we are always aware of the fact that grief is not an illness, it is love.

“And if I were able to speak prophetically. And knew all secrets and all knowledge. And had all the faith that I could move mountains. And did not have love, so I would not be.”

Author:

Hans-Georg Renner, outdoor educationalist and bereavement counsellor. Contact:

www.natuerlich-trauern.de