



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*

**RESEARCH**



The  
**Martin House**  
RESEARCH CENTRE

A background image showing several lit candles in dark holders, with a bokeh effect of light spots in the background.

**CURRENT  
EVIDENCE ABOUT  
BEREAVEMENT  
SUPPORT FOR  
PARENTS**

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# MARTIN HOUSE RESEARCH CENTRE

## The issue

Although death in childhood has declined in recent decades, around 4,600 children still die in England and Wales every year, an average of nearly 13 children every day. Despite this, support for parents who lose a child is variable and there is little consensus about what helps. The lack of evidence-based guidance makes it difficult to decide what services to commission and generates uncertainty for those working in bereavement services.

## The research

This study examined the published evidence about the effectiveness of bereavement support interventions for parents of infants and children who have died. Only eight research studies have been published since 1980, nearly all of which were conducted in the USA and in young babies. These studies used very different interventions, which were poorly described. They also measured lots of different outcomes including parental grief, mental and physical health, social functioning, and religious beliefs.

## The outcome

Only three studies reported a finding that suggests parents might benefit from a bereavement support intervention. However, there were significant concerns about the quality of study methods and the outcomes used to assess effectiveness. This means that current research cannot tell us whether bereavement interventions are helpful to parents or not.

This is a neglected area of research, but before further studies are conducted we need agreement about how to assess the effectiveness of these interventions and the outcomes that should be measured.

## Centre Director

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## Published paper

[www.spcare.bmj.com/  
content/early/2019/10/03/  
bmjspcare-2019-001823](http://www.spcare.bmj.com/content/early/2019/10/03/bmjspcare-2019-001823)

## Our research themes:

CREATIVITY | CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION | ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE | JUSTICE AND EQUALITY  
HEALTH AND WELLBEING | RISK, EVIDENCE AND DECISION MAKING | TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE FUTURE