Continuing Bonds with the Living:

Bereaved parents' narratives of their emotional relationship with their children

Sarah Shankar, Lizette Nolte & David Trickey

Abstract

The death of a child can be seen as one of the most devastating experiences for parents, which can result in a unique and enduring grief. Parents with surviving children face the task of navigating their own grief while continuing to parent. This narrative inquiry explores bereaved parents' stories of their emotional relationship with their surviving children. Parents told stories of emotional connection and disconnection with surviving children, influenced by the competing and potentially incompatible tasks of 'parenting' and 'grieving'. The need for a relational focus to bereavement research and practice is highlighted. The findings demonstrate the need for clinicians to provide i) parents an opportunity to explore their sometimes contradicting and troubling experiences of grief and parenting and ii) children with support to make sense of their experiences in relation to the parent-child relationship.

Keywords: Bereavement; Child loss; Parenting; Narrative analysis; Family

Introduction

The death of a child is acknowledged as one of the most devastating and life-changing experiences for a parent (Schwab, 1997). Parental bereavement has been relatively well-researched and the potential long term effects for parents of losing a child, including

increased morbidity and mortality and a negative impact on psychological well-being (Stroebe, Schut & Finkenauer, 2013; Zetumer et al., 2015), have been reported.

However, the loss of a child does not only impact on parents, but rather affects all surviving members of the family unit (Moss & Moss, 2001). Despite a growing body of research focusing on the relational aspects of bereavement this is something that remains under-represented in the literature (Rosenblatt, 2002). Furthermore, the experience of remaining children in families where a child has died is not well represented in the literature, but there is evidence pointing towards the potential long-term impact of sibling loss (Bolton et al., 2016). There is also growing evidence that a child's response to a sibling's death is closely related to and needs to be understood within the context of the family and the parent-child relationship (Davies, 2004; Jonas-Simpson, Steele, Granek, Davies & O'Leary, 2015; Morris, Gabert-Quillen et al., 2016). This points towards the importance of understanding the impact of parental bereavement on the parent-child relationship between parents and remaining children. However, little research is available in this area. Buckle and Fleming (2010) in their grounded theory study described the dual tasks of parenting and grieving for parents who have lost a child, but did not consider how this influenced the parent-child relationship.

Therefore, the current exploratory study aimed to begin to address this gap by investigating 1) how parents experience the grief related to the loss of one child while having to sustain their relationship with and parenting of a surviving child (or children), as well as 2) how this impacted on the parent-child relationship in the parents' view.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) using individual semi-structured interviews. Narrative analysis aims to capture the richness and 'wholeness' of

complex lived experiences through the stories people tell and meanings people ascribe to these experiences. Additionally, it allows for a full consideration of the contexts in which these narratives are situated.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained for the study from a UK University (LMS/PG/UH00185). Patient and public involvement in the research design and execution was facilitated through the support of a third sector child bereavement service (CBS) whose input significantly shaped the design of the study.

Great care was taken to ensure informed consent and maintenance of confidentiality. Researchers were also particularly mindful and sensitive to potential signs of distress individuals may have felt during the interview. Participants were given time for reflection after the interview and access to free additional support if required; however, none was requested.

Sampling and Recruitment

Recruitment of interviewees was through a third sector bereavement service in the United Kingdom. Inclusion criteria were (i) the death of the child occurred at least 2 years prior to interview to ensure families were not at their most vulnerable and had received support from the bereavement service; (ii) the family had surviving children, of whom at least one was no older than sixteen years old at the time of death; (iii) parents were deemed to have a 'good enough' on-going relationship with the bereavement service, to ensure they felt able to access support post-interview if required. Exclusion criteria were (i) families who were

currently undertaking active therapeutic work with the bereavement service; (ii) parents who bereavement practitioners considered to be too emotionally vulnerable to participate.

In focusing on a pre-specified group, this study used a purposive sample. The number of participants required by a Narrative Analysis study is small due to the nature of analysis and varies dependent on the richness of the data and level of analysis required (Wells, 2011). A staggered recruitment strategy was therefore used to initially identify approximately five parents who had lost a child. After each interview the length and richness of data collected were considered before another participant was recruited. Eventually, four mothers and one father were interviewed. All parents described their ethnicity as white British. Basic demographic information (see Table 1) was obtained and has been provided to help the reader locate the participants within their context.

The aim of the study was an exploration of the parent-child relationship after the death of a child in the family. Many factors may influence this, such as the ages of the children (surviving and deceased), number of children in the family, gender, marital status and cause of death. The parents who came forward to take part in the study, in what is a difficult to recruit area, made for a diverse sample in relation to these factors. However, the focus of the research was exploratory with an aim of focusing on any common experience across the sample.

Data collection and Analysis

This study used a semi-structured interview schedule to enable a flexible but focused investigation. Questions centred on the parent's experience of their emotional relationship with their remaining child(ren) before, during and after the death of their child. All participants were interviewed once and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

The first author was the main interviewer and reflectively engaged with and acknowledged their role in the co-construction of the parents' narratives (Wells, 2011).

Following the guidelines as described by Riessman (2008) the first author undertook the coding and analysis of the data. The analysis began with an immersion in the data through re-listening to audio recordings. Stage two of the analysis involved reflexive and reflective reading of the transcripts, while stage three consisted of reading for structure and plot (Bamberg, 1997). Stage four involved reading for performance, influenced by Goffman (2012/1959), and included considering for example, the role of language and emotion and what is left unsaid or is silenced. Stage five attended to reading for context and consideration of social, political and historical influences. Each story was reviewed for its main themes and an overall impression was recorded. Finally, stage six compared and contrasted narratives across the dataset. A collective review of all accounts was undertaken to identify any similarities and differences in the stories.

To ensure rigour and credibility the study followed Elliott, Fischer and Rennie's (1999) guidelines for qualitative researchers, including situating the sample, grounding findings in examples, coherence and resonance with readers. To aid triangulation other authors independently listened to a selection of interviews, reviewed coding and contributed to conceptualization of analysis. Two independent researchers also reviewed each transcript to ensure resonance and feedback was incorporated as appropriate.

Results

The co-constructed narratives of the five bereaved parents who participated in the study will now be presented through emerging storylines, with subplots for each (Figure 1). The authors' constructions of the emerging storylines are presented and demonstrated with

verbatim quotes, with emphasis on the post-bereavement period; connections to the literature and a consideration of how context influences the stories told are presented.

Many of the stories told by bereaved parents used evocative metaphors of a journey through grief, describing the landscape and weather along the road. A metaphor used by Louise, one of the mothers interviewed, was the 'fog' of grief. 'Fog' as metaphor is used here to underpin the collective storylines of the parents, as it seems to convey the nature of the grief they all described. The 'fog' is changeable, sometimes barely visible, sometimes thicker; the road ahead can still be seen, but sometimes the 'fog' of grief is so dense that parents are unable to see anything else, even their surviving children.

Figure 1: Emerging storylines of bereaved parents' stories of their emotional relationship with their children

'Putting my living children first': connection to the surviving child

All the parents told stories of 'carrying on' through their grief, motivated by a connection to the needs of their surviving children. For example, June[1] describes trying to put her *"living children"* first, "*no matter how grief stricken you are or how terrible you feel inside, that actually your living children have to take priority. But it wasn't always easy to put into practice"*.

Subplot - a reason to carry on: Parents told of how surviving children gave them a purpose and a reason to continue. Mary recalls *"I suppose in a way….thank God I'd had her because that gave me a purpose to get up, get dressed"*. Attending to the everyday demands

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[1] Pseudonym are used throughout to protect anonymity

of caring for children was described by these parents as helping them put the needs of their surviving children first.

Thus, surviving children are presented as a motivation to 'keep going', helping parents to 'carry on' – in this way parents may be distracted from their connection to their dead child and the pain of grief. Also, when considering the societal pressures on parents, particularly mothers, to put their children's needs above their own (e.g. Johnston & Swanson, 2006), it seems possible it can feel as if this is the only acceptable narrative.

Subplot - protecting them: Part of the motivation for 'putting my living children first' appears to be related to the parents' desire to protect their children. For some parents the protection was from potential 'damage'. Andrew, the only father interviewed, tells a story of parental responsibility *"to absolutely protect"* his daughter, to *"do ANYTHING we feasibly could to make sure that she wasn't going to be damaged"*. Other parents were motivated to protect surviving children because of fears that surviving children might also die. Louise says *"physically having them close was really important because....it was as though if they went out of sight I wouldn't see them again"*.

Thus, having lost one child, parents were motivated to put their living children first by a strong wish to keep them safe and well, which has been highlighted elsewhere in the literature (Crehan, 2004). This again sits within a social and political context where, over recent decades, a dominant social narrative has developed which stresses personal responsibility and risk-management for parents (Shirani, Henwood, & Coltart, 2011).

This storyline demonstrates a collective parental storyline of connecting to surviving children by putting them first within the context of their grief.

'Avoiding the fog': disconnection from the dead child

All parents made varying attempts at 'avoiding the fog' of their grief. Some parents avoided their grief infrequently while for other parents this became their preferred location. Mary tells how she *"couldn't sit still, I was literally -...stupid things, you know I'd see a sausage on a television advertised but it was two hours away and this amazing butchers so I'd get in the car and off I'd go"*. Parents seem to describe their minds as full of grief thoughts that needed to be avoided.

Subplot: Keeping busy: The storyline of 'keeping busy' emerged for all the parents. Clare told a story of her and her husband keeping busy by spending time "s*orting stuff out in the shed"* while Andrew described 'keeping busy' by *"getting back to work"*. For many of the parents 'keeping busy' took the form of providing physical care for their children. June described, *"I guess… the children didn't suffer from the care, the physical care side of it. Emotionally (long pause) mmm, I don't know"*.

So, the parents described 'keeping busy', including through physically caring for their surviving children, as a way to avoid or disconnect from grief and emotional connection to their dead child for periods of time. Stroebe and Schut's (2010) Dual Process Model (DPM) of coping shows how coping with bereavement is a complex process of 'confrontation' and 'avoidance', with 'avoidance' viewed as not necessarily detrimental, but rather potentially a part of grieving.

Subplot - coping and being strong: Stories of 'keeping busy' were presented as transient coping strategies, but stories of 'coping and being strong' provided some parents with a firmer ongoing footing. Andrew's and Clare's narratives were dominated by stories of 'coping and being strong'. However, for June and Mary these stories were much thinner, and for Louise barely voiced. Clare takes some pride in her ability to cope, stating *"I feel I am*

quite strong and everyone said you know it's amazing how you know you've coped and stuff..." Clare constructs a narrative identity of strength shown through her ability to control emotions, cope and 'carry on', which she suggests is important for the sake of her surviving children, thus drawing on dominant societal discourses of what constitutes a 'good mother' (Shirani et al., 2011). For Andrew his position of strength comes from his construction of the role of a father - he explains: *"I suppose...thinking I'm a big you know indestructible man like being a real man that I had to take that on my shoulders, as the man of the house as the father... to absolutely be there for them and to... support them and to make them feel secure and then I had, I had to take mine somewhere else".* Andrew draws heavily on his gender and his constructions of fatherhood and masculinity as motivators for putting his own needs to one side. Riches and Dawson (2000) suggest that fatherhood is associated 'with images of protective masculinity, and bereaved fathers may experience different pressure to "limit" the impact of the death on their wives and surviving children' (p.64).

Perhaps, by telling a story of strength and prioritising surviving children, parents aim to protect an identity of 'good parent', which may protect them from troubling emotions, e.g. guilt (Krell & Rabkin, 1979), and enable them to 'carry on'. However, this study points towards how this may also distance them from their connection to their dead child.

The storylines of 'putting my living children first' and 'avoiding the fog' of grief demonstrate a prioritisation of the surviving children, which appears to result in distance from an emotional connection to the dead child and from parental grief. The implications of this are returned to below.

'Getting stuck in the fog': disconnection from the surviving child

All parents had stories about getting overwhelmed at times by the 'fog' of their grief, but for Louise, June and Mary these stories were more dominant. For example, Louise described how *"it was like a fog (that) came down and I just... disconnected."*

Subplot - I need to escape: Some parents described a strong need to escape from the overwhelming experiences of their grief. For example, June kept herself physically close to her surviving children, but used her emails as: *"my way of escape... Umm… and I think that might have looked to them as though I was not really there for them. Probably because I wasn't... there in reality. Yeah emotionally I was just, I just reached a point where I probably just couldn't absorb anything else."* For some parents, this need to escape went as far as feeling unable to continue. Mary and Louise spoke frankly about their feelings of not wanting to carry on. Mary told of having to carry on, *"but actually a part of you… wants to actually not carry on. You know, wants to drive…through red traffic lights…and of course you know, what comes with that is such huge guilt."*

Stories of needing to escape and even not feeling able to carry on illustrate the devastating and intolerable grief parents can experience following the death of a child. Parents painted a picture of potentially getting stuck, sometimes fleetingly and sometimes for longer periods, in their grief and described how this impacted on their ability and capacity to cope with the relational demands of others, most particularly their children.

Subplot - I can't cope with you too: Sometimes the 'fog' of grief appeared to become so dense it meant that parents felt unable to cope with the demands of others, particularly their surviving children. Louise states, *"well if I'm totally honest with you… (pause) (begins to cry) I didn't… I didn't even want to be around them… If I heard… them coming into the room I would get up and go… somewhere else where I could be alone, just with my thoughts*

(crying) so…. [my daughter] was very chatty… you know, young girl then and little girls talk a lot and I would… it would grate on me, her voice even… and I used to be… I used to think shut up, will you just shut up talking… … I felt as though (long pause) I felt annoyed by their need for me…" Louise described struggling with these feelings for about a year; resulting in her surviving son asking her if she would have *"preferred it if it had been (him)"* who died and not his brother. Mary described similar experiences: *"I could literally have just locked myself away from [my daughter] and just….been on my own and let her…live with Grandma…"I couldn't cope with her. I found her very, very, very difficult to cope with and cope with my own grief as well…"* June similarly tells a story of detaching from her children at times when she was *"particularly low."*   *"You always think, don't you, that actually there's no way your children will know how you're feeling because you're doing a really good job of covering it up; my goodness me I'm sure they see through you looking back."* She goes on to reflect *"if I wasn't coping….I think they panicked",* because if *"you don't cope, family don't cope".*

These narratives illustrate how relationships can place demands on parents, and particularly how children in their relationship with their parent can express (often everyday) needs that may feel overwhelming to the grieving parent. The demands placed on parents can result in their desire to escape from the demands of these relationships, including their relationships with their children. These stories tell of times parents needed to prioritise their grief and emotional connection to the dead child, resulting in a distancing from surviving children. Such stories were most often told within the context of stories of life carrying on and a wish to continue to parent well, showing the complex, contradictory, competing and at times incompatible nature of 'grief' and 'parenting'.

Remembering and re-establishing connection

A few parents talked of needing to intensely hold on to the memory of their dead child, either by remembering their child or considering having another child "*to re-establish that emotional connection" (Andrew)*. Louise was the parent who spoke in most depth of the experience of remembering her child who had died, which she described as "*obsessively remembering*". Time spent "*obsessing"* meant *"I didn't have the emotional energy to (pause) do whatever was necessary for [my daughter or my son] the next day because I was just 'zombie-fied'."* Although not the focus of this study, the cause of her child's death might be significant in the powerful nature of this experience for her. Andrew described how his wife wanted another baby. He explained the potentially complicated emotional relationship with this concept for parents, *"Someone who's never been through that could probably think well… like you go down the shops and you… break the TV so you just go and get another one. It's not like that at all, it's just the fact that you NEED to re-establish that emotional connection."*

'Re-membering' refers to what continues rather than what is lost within a relationship after death (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004). The DPM (Stroebe & Schut, 2010) suggests that 'remembering' is an aspect of loss-orientated coping and necessary in the bereavement process. Furthermore, continuing bonds theorists would suggest that 'remembering' provides solace as the internal representation of the child endures (Klass, 1993). However, research suggests that strong continuing bonds are associated with higher rates of distress where survivors are unable to make sense of their loss (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006). Again, the nature of the loss might play an important role in determining the nature and impact of remembering for parents. Stroebe & Schut (2005, p. 490) suggest that some bereaved people who struggle to adjust may need to work at 'loosening' their bond and 'relocate' their loved one.

The storylines of 'getting stuck in the fog' and 'remembering' demonstrate how grief and the connection with the dead child can take over parents' experiences at times, leading to a struggle to remain connected and responsive to surviving children. The implications of this are now discussed.

Discussion

Parents in this study told stories of connection and disconnection in their emotional relationship with their surviving children after the death of a child. Parents' stories illustrated the relational and complex nature of family bereavement, influenced by multiple contexts and discourses which challenge an individual focused construction of bereavement. Emotional connection and disconnection was shaped and influenced by the competing and potentially incompatible tasks of 'parenting' and 'grieving'. Stories of connection with surviving children were constructed as 'putting my living children first' and 'avoiding the fog' of grief; these stories illustrated more disconnection from the deceased child and less connection to parental grief. Conversely, stories of disconnection with surviving children were constructed as getting 'stuck in the fog' of grief and 'remembering'; these stories illustrated more connection to the deceased child and to parental grief.

The stories parents told were found to be fluid and interwoven, moving through times of restoration and grief (see Figure 2). These findings highlight a fundamental dilemma which faces parents in grief, namely how to balance the needs of 'self' versus 'other'. Parents in this study at times told compromised stories of parenting within the context of adopting the identity of grieving parent. How parents navigate this terrain is highly complex, poses great challenges and potentially has significant implications for the parent-child relationship and well-being of the child.

Furthermore, these findings highlight potential implications for the parent-child relationship and child well-being. As Crehan (2004, p.215) evocatively states, 'consider the experience of a child who seeks the comfort of her mother's arms having lost a sibling, to find those arms unavailable, or indeed broken, by the heavy weight of the dead child.' Furthermore, it is possible that for surviving siblings excessive or exclusive parental 'remembering' or being positioned as a 'replacement' child for their parents may mean they themselves might not be fully or sufficiently 'remembered' or held in mind (Crehan, 2004).

Figure 2: Competing stories of 'parenting' and 'grief'

Thus, location of self-as-parent ('good parent' vs. 'grieving parent') and location of both the deceased and living child (connection vs. disconnection) become important clinical considerations, which will now be considered.

Clinical implications

This study highlights the importance of interventions using a relational and contextual perspective in clinical bereavement work. More specifically, the study points towards a need for clinicians to more fully consider the potentially contradicting and at times troubling experiences of bereaved parents and to fully hold in mind the needs and experiences of their surviving children.

Thus, an integration of a focus on parental grief and ongoing parenting seems important. In particular, it appears valuable for practitioners to create a safe space in which a parent's experiences of ongoing parenting, including troubling experiences, can be expressed and explored without judgement. For many parents this may be sufficient; however,

indications from this study show that perhaps practitioners need to go one step further and explicitly name the fact that some parents in similar situations have thoughts and feelings of which they are ashamed, and that such things are surprisingly common and understandable. This study has considered the wider societal discourses (e.g. what it means to be a 'good parent', gender prescriptions in society, and 'good ways' to grieve) that may contribute to the experience of parental bereavement. Illuminating these discourses and exploring parents' preferred relationships with such discourses may be particularly helpful for grieving parents (Hutton, 2008; White, 2007). Furthermore, interventions that actively support parenting at times when parents are finding the 'oscillation' between 'parenting' and 'grieving' difficult are likely to prove helpful, potentially preventing some of the potential long-term effects for the parent-child relationship and for the well-being of surviving children pointed to in this study.

The current study also highlights the need for further exploration of this 'oscillation' between 'parenting' and 'grieving' and its almost inevitable impact upon the parenting of surviving children. Clinical exploration of how parents experience 'oscillation' may help indicate the need for additional support for parents and in particular surviving siblings, as some parents told stories that illustrated their inability to attend to the needs of their children, especially their emotional needs, within the context of their own grief. Parents described how many of the children of these parents struggled with troubles of their own (e.g. anxiety, etc.). Ultimately, practitioners need to be mindful of the potential impact of parental bereavement on surviving siblings, and work hard for these stories not to become silenced by the dominant narrative of the parent's grief. We would argue that it is important that services become skilled in providing support for siblings, not only in relation to their own grief at the loss of a sibling, but also in relation to their experiences in relation to the parent-child relationship.

Finally, a more relational and contextual approach would allow for the exploration of other relational contexts that may be sustaining for the child at times when the parent is less

able to be physically or emotionally available. Relationships with the wider family, neighbours, friend and their immediate community play highly significant roles in supporting surviving children as parents battle to cope with their grief for their deceased child – this can be actively explored in bereavement work with parents.

Strengths and limitations of the study and directions for future research

A strength of this study is its rich and in-depth qualitative consideration of the relational aspects of family bereavement, drawing out the complex and nuanced ways in which parents work to navigate parenting, the parent-child relationship and the cultural discourses about parenting available to them, following the death of a child. This exploratory study has provided a useful, novel and interesting perspective from which its methodological and design limitations can be considered.

As a qualitative study based on a small non-representative sample, the findings are not intended to be generalised. However, the participants' experiences and the studies themes may have relevance beyond the sample and reflect common cultural narratives and expectations. Consequently, the findings should be considered as pointing towards areas worth considering and lines along which to look when working with bereaved parents and their surviving children. As the self-selected sample was predominately White British parents, particularly mothers, who were all married at the time of bereavement, future research should aim to include the experiences of black and ethnic minority parents, lone parents and fathers in particular. Additionally, as the study is retrospective, there are differences in the sample in terms of time since loss as well as the age and nature of death of the child. However, despite this, it is important to note that this study found significant commonalities across the stories told by the parents who participated in the study.

Finally, by focusing on the stories told by parents about the parent-child relationship, stories told by the children were not heard and relationships within these families were not observed. Thus, findings related to impact on children are based on the descriptions of their parents. This perspective needs to be held in mind when interpreting the study's findings and also points to further research. Future research could aim to broaden our understanding of parent-child emotional relationships after the death of a sibling, most importantly by capturing the stories and voices of bereaved siblings. Furthermore, while this study focused on bereaved parents who have surviving children, continuing to develop our understanding of resilience and reasons for keeping going for parents without surviving children also seems important. If these stories can be understood alongside parental narratives, a fuller understanding of family bereavement can be established and more relational focused support can be provided to parents, children and their families.

Words: 4679

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Table 1: Sample Demographics [23]

Pseudo Names	Age (at interview)	Gender	Marital Status (at interview)	Ethnicity	Number of years since death of child	Age and gender of child that died	Number of surviving children	Cause of death	Age and gender of surviving children (at time of death)	Number of children born post child death
[4]June	55	Female	Separated	White British	8 yrs	18, male	2	Suicide	21, female 10, female	-
Louise	47	Female	Married	White British	4 yrs	17, male	2	Suicide	15, male 7, female	-
Claire	Not provided	Female	Married	White British	5 yrs	16 months, female	2	Accident	8, female 2, male	-
Mary	Not provided	Female	Married	White British	4 yrs	24 months, female	1	Illness	11, female	1
Andrew	45	Male	Married	White British	6 yrs	18 months, female	1	Illness	9, female	1

[2] Presented by earliest to latest date of interview

[3] Some specific elements of the demographics have been slightly changed to preserve anonymity

[4] Pseudonym are used throughout

Appendix One: Interview Questions - Guidelines for Semi Structured Interview

1b. Introduction – loss story

As you know the focus of this interview is on your emotional relationship with your surviving child(ren) but before we get into the main part of the interview, I was wondering if you would like to tell me about _____ and how (he/she) died?

2. Emotional relationship with surviving child

Acknowledge story and transition into main part of interview……

So I was wondering, with the story you have shared so far as a context for the main focus of the interview, which is your emotional relationship with your surviving child(ren), I was wondering if you could tell me what your emotional relationship with _____ was like generally like before the death/illness of _____?

Prompt:
How close did you feel to _____?
How do you demonstrate that?
What do remember most about your emotional relationship at that time?
What would your partner say about your emotional relationship with _____at that time?
When did you notice times of emotional closeness? What created the / influenced them? (People, places events)?
When did you notice times of emotional detachment? What created the / influenced them? (People, places events)

At the time of the loss
I am wondering how you felt your emotional relationship with _____ was at the time of _____ death?

Prompt:
How was that relationship different?
How was it better? How was it worse?
How did you demonstrate that to them?
What do remember most about your emotional relationship at that time?
What would your partner say about your emotional relationship with _____at that time?
When did you notice times of emotional closeness? What created the / influenced them? (People, places events)?
When did you notice times of emotional detachment? What created the / influenced them? (People, places events)

After
I am wondering what has happened to your emotional relationship since the death of _____?

Prompt:
How is that relationship different?
Is it better? Is it worse?
How do you demonstrate that to them?
What would your partner say about your emotional relationship with _____ since?
When did you notice times of emotional closeness? What created the / influenced them? (People, places events)?
When did you notice times of emotional detachment? What created the / influenced them? (People, places events)

3. Surviving children's stories

If _____ was here with us now, I am wondering what you imagine they might be saying about their emotional relationship with you?

Prompts:
Before
During
After
Now

Would you mind if I look at my interview schedule and see if there is anything I've missed?
Can reflect on a particular point, ask for more information….

NB: If more than one child, ask a general question and then ask about each child separately.