Reviewer’s report

Title: When a parent dies - a systematic review of the effects of support programs for parentally bereaved children and their caregivers

Version: 0 Date: 30 Jan 2017

Reviewer: David Trickey

Reviewer's report:

This is a really useful review, which has been well-conducted and well-written. The authors should be congratulated on condensing such a disparate body of research into such an accessible article.

I do have a few suggestions that in my humble opinion will improve it further.

Page 4, line 19: The Webb reference is not the best citation to support the assertion that a closer relationship means a higher impact for a child. The Webb reference states this and then cites three other references to support the statement. It would be better to cite a reference that actually provides support for the assertion rather than one that states it and cites other sources. For example Worden (1996).

Page 4, line 57: I find the wording of the 2nd inclusion criteria confusing - it could be taken to mean that studies HAD to include children whose parents were cared for in the terminal care phase. I would suggest that it would be clearer if the fact that some studies happened to include such children was listed in the results, or a separate note that this was NOT used as an exclusion criteria.

Page 5, line 20: In the interests of transparency replicability, this exclusion criteria should include the definition of "so small", together with some justification.

Page 5, line 40: I'm not sure that the "common language effect size" is actually very common, and so a brief description of what it is would be useful here.

Page 8, line 4: I cannot understand "one study focused on expected respectively sudden/violent death" It might just need some punctuation.
I am not convinced that a simple list of mediating factors associated with just one intervention is very helpful, unless you make the case that these are likely to be generalisable and then discuss practical implications.

The rather prescriptive conclusion that "interventions need to be directed to both the bereaved child and the child's remaining parent or caregiver", does not follow from the results - unless I am missing something. For example, all three of the interventions that were mainly directed to children (i.e. NOT directed to both) achieved statistically significant results (with the exception of one measure from one study), including one (writing for recovery) which achieved the largest between groups effect-size of any of the studies in the review. In any case, there may be very good reasons why some interventions can NOT be directed to parents.

The statement that "sessions involving both child children and the remaining parent are an important component" is not really a conclusion from your results. You may say that such session are considered important, or "may" be important. But to state it so starkly really requires some data to support it.

The PERI is listed out of its alphabetical order.

The final column "pow" is not explained or described anywhere.

Writing for recovery dz is in as 1.26 - it should be 1.26 (presumably).

It would make this important table a lot more easy to navigate if the column titles were repeated at the top of each page.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
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Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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1. Yes: I am sometimes asked to provide training for organisations that provide interventions to bereaved children, and seeing as this article supports such provision, those organisations may in an indirect way benefit by its publication.

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