

The Queen handled Diana's death in the right way

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UNITED IN GRIEF: The Royal Family at Balmoral after Diana's death – being there to support the princes was crucial

Following the tragedy, Her Majesty was criticised for remaining at Balmoral with her family but **JENNI THOMAS OBE**, founder of Child Bereavement UK, says it was the best thing for William and Harry



LOVING: Diana, Harry and William enjoy a day out at Thorpe Park



SORROW: William and Harry at Diana's funeral

princes come to terms with their loss" and the princes "wanted to be with their father and grandparents".

It would have made more headlines if she had dashed back to join what had become a media circus. But it would have been counter-productive – and possibly damaging – to the princes by denying them the chance to understand the truth of what had happened to

their mother, and have it explained by those closest to them.

One of those I spoke to in the days after Diana's death was Countess Mountbatten, who died in June. Her father, Lord Mountbatten, one of her sons Nicky, and mother-in-law were all killed by the IRA in 1979. Few people have given me wiser counsel on grief than Lady Mountbatten, which is why I

invited her to be CBUK honorary president. She defended the royals saying: "Put yourself in the position of someone traumatically bereaved and you would realise they need a little while to compose themselves sufficiently to face the public."

Charles was "marvellous, warm and loving" to his children and the Queen was "very good" with them. They would "receive support from

their family as they have always done", she said. "It's not going to start from now, they always have had it."

One of the myths surrounding people who have experienced loss is that they all respond by crying. Many do but not all. Some are too numb. It does not mean they are less deeply affected. For some children who lose a parent it can take years to comprehend the enormity of what has happened and to grieve. The grief can recur later in their lives. This is normal and does not reflect a lack of support when it first happened.

Another misconception concerns those less close to the person who has died. If they show deep emotion, it can be harder for the bereaved with a closer relationship to show grief themselves. The bereaved can end up providing comfort rather than receiving it.

In his recent interviews Prince Harry has described the "peculiar" public reaction and "odd" desire to see them grieve in public. He was bewildered at the "outpouring of love and emotion" from people who had never met his mother and who were showing "more emotion than he was feeling".

OTHER recent accounts from those with a close knowledge of events following Diana's death show little sign of "coldness" from the Queen and Prince Philip. According to one, when advisers suggested William and Harry walk behind their mother's coffin it produced an "anguished" response from Prince Philip who said: "It's about the boys. They've lost their mother."

If the Queen had given in and rushed back to London, she would have been closer to her subjects but she would have been far more remote from the people who needed her most – the two princes 500 miles north in Balmoral.

Gyles Brandreth, former Conservative MP and a close friend of Prince Philip, has described the grandfatherly way he suggested to a nervous William, then 15, that he should walk behind his mother's coffin. "Philip, who had not planned to walk, said to William, 'If I walk, will you walk with me?'"

Brandreth observed: "As grandparents, Philip and Elizabeth did their best that week."

His view is endorsed in the BBC documentary, *Diana, 7 Days*, in which Prince Harry says his father was "there for us" after the princess's death and "did his best to make sure we were looked after".

Prince William also gives a rare insight into the lengths the Queen went to protect them at Balmoral.

"We had the privacy to mourn, to collect our thoughts and to just have that space away from everybody," he reveals in Sunday night's programme.

Perhaps at last the Queen, Prince Philip and Prince Charles can receive the recognition they deserve for their wise and caring actions.

● *Jenni now works for Rosie's Rainbow Fund and the Angus Lawson Memorial Trust. Contact her via www.jennithomas.com*

I STILL remember being woken in the early hours of the morning on August 31, 1997, to be informed that Princess Diana had died. At the time I was director of the Child Bereavement Charity (now CBUK), the charity I founded, whose 1994 launch was attended by Diana and of which Prince William later became royal patron.

The call was from Julia Samuel, a CBUK founder patron and friend of Diana, who said she intended to go to Kensington Palace immediately.

Over the next few days I gave many media interviews on how to help the young princes, and children in general, who have experienced the sudden and traumatic loss of a parent. It is an issue that has dominated my career, first nursing in the NHS, then as the NHS's first child bereavement counsellor. Within days of the princess's death the Royal Family were castigated for their public response, or perceived lack of one.

Many of the questions I was asked centred on the fact that in the aftermath of the tragedy, the royals, who were on holiday in Scotland, did not return to Buckingham Palace immediately. They remained with Prince William and Prince Harry, then 15 and 12, at Balmoral.

The Queen, Prince Philip and Prince Charles were called "cold", "remote" or worse. Some even questioned the future of the monarchy. In fact their response was in line with standard guidance given to those responsible for children who have lost a parent.

Research and a lifetime's experience have taught me the best way to do this is to make sure children are surrounded by those who love them and that amid all the trauma and grief the routine of their lives remains as "normal" as possible.

THE princes' summer routine was to holiday with the Royal Family in Scotland. Shortly after Diana's death they attended the traditional Sunday service at Crathie Church near Balmoral with their father, the Queen and Prince Philip.

A day or so later, Charles was reported to have taken Harry and their Jack Russell terrier for a walk with the dog sitting on Harry's lap in the car as they returned.

Tiggy Legge-Bourke, their much loved nanny, was on hand to offer comfort. And the Queen and Prince Philip were with them.

In my view, the royals were right to stay together at Balmoral and it was a source of great frustration to me that my attempts to explain this fell on deaf ears.

There were calls for the Queen to "show us you care". To do this, it was said, she had to return to London and join members of the public mourning at Kensington Palace.

But, as I said at the time, that would not have shown she cared for the young princes who, as we now know, made their desire to stay at Balmoral clear.

Misunderstanding of her actions led a spokesman for the Queen to make a statement saying the royals were "hurt" by the criticism; she was in Balmoral "helping the