

Techniques of Grief Therapy: *Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved*

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January 31 & February 1, 2019

9:00 am – 4:30 pm

12 Continuing Education Hours

As contemporary models of bereavement have become more nuanced and empirically informed, so too have the practices available to grief counselors and therapists. This two-day workshop offers in-depth training in several of these techniques, nesting them both within the therapy relationship and in the context of current theories and research that provide flexible frameworks for intervention. Making extensive use of actual clinical videos as well as how-to instruction in the use of numerous therapeutic tools, we will discuss and practice several methods for helping clients integrate the reality of the loss into the ongoing story of their lives, while also reconstructing their continuing bond to their loved one.

Day 1: Processing the Event Story of the Death

Beginning with a discussion of the power of presence as a fundamental dimension of the therapeutic “holding environment,” we will consider how we can quickly assess our clients’ needs, particularly when they struggle with complicated, prolonged grief symptomatology. We will then discuss how to foster a safe relational container for a healing “re-telling” of the loss experience, anchoring such work in both contemporary meaning reconstruction and dual process models and related research. Drawing on clinical videos of clients contending with losses through cancer, sudden accident and suicide, we will learn to listen between the lines of the stories clients tell themselves and others about the death to grasp more fully the unvoiced meaning of their grief, and how we can help them integrate the event story of the death into the larger narrative of their lives. Participants should conclude the session with sharpened skills for clinical assessment, a clearer appreciation for the challenge to meaning and spirituality associated with violent death bereavement, and an expanded toolbox for using metaphor, body work and a variety of narrative procedures for helping clients make sense of the loss and their response to it.

Learning outcomes:

- Distinguish between therapeutic “presence” and “absence” in the process of therapy
- Recognize empirical risk factors associated with complicated grief reactions

- Implement restorative retelling and situational revisiting procedures for mastering the event story of the loss
- Differentiate between forms of directed journaling that foster self-immersion and self-distancing to modulate emotions evoked by the death
- Outline metaphoric and body-oriented procedures for exploring the sensed meanings of the client's grief
- Describe narrative techniques for accommodating loss in literal and figurative ways into the changed narrative of the client's life

Schedule:

9:00-10:30 am	The Power of Presence: Orienting to Client Needs and Resources
10:30-10:45 am	<i>Break</i>
10:45am-12:15 pm	Restorative Retelling: Mastering the Narrative of the Death
12:15-1:15 pm	<i>Lunch</i>
1:15-2:45 pm	Analogical Listening: Exploring Sensed Meanings of Grief
2:45-3:00 pm	<i>Break</i>
3:00-4:30 pm	Chapters of Our Lives: Rewriting Stories of Loss

Day 2: Accessing the Back Story of the Relationship

Death may end a life, but not necessarily a relationship. Drawing on attachment-informed and two-track models of bereavement, we will begin by considering grieving as a process of reconstructing rather than relinquishing our bonds with those who have died, and the circumstances that can interfere with this natural process. Clinical videos bearing on the death of parents, children and spouses will sensitize participants to various impediments to revisiting and reorganizing the “back story” of the ongoing relationship with the deceased, as well as to several techniques that can help move such work forward. Creative narrative, emotion-focused and performative methods will be presented and practiced for re-introducing the deceased into the social and psychological world of the bereaved, fostering a sustaining sense of connection and alliance with the loved one in embracing a changed future, and working through issues of guilt, anger and abandonment triggered by the death and the shared life that preceded it. Participants will leave with several tools for assessing “pro-symptom positions” that complicate grieving, helping clients appreciate the role of the loved one in their construction of their own identities, and re-accessing and revising frozen dialogues with the deceased that hamper post-loss adaptation.

Learning outcomes:

- Identify dimensions of insecure attachment that complicate adaptation to the death
- Distinguish between healthy and unhealthy features of continuing bonds with the deceased



- Describe two procedures for detecting obstacles to accommodating the loss deriving from invisible loyalties to the loved one
- Practice two techniques for consolidating a constructive bond with the deceased as the client transitions toward a changed future
- Choreograph imaginal dialogues between the client and the deceased to reaffirm love and resolve residual conflicts and disappointments
- Direct experiential work to access and restructure problematic emotions linked to the loss and its aftermath

Schedule:

9:00-10:30 am	Continuing Bonds: Tracking Through Bereavement
10:30-10:45 am	<i>Break</i>
10:45 am-12:15 pm	Remembering Conversations: Re-introducing the Deceased
12:15-1:15 pm	<i>Lunch</i>
1:15-2:45 pm	Encountering Resistance: Working with Pro-symptom Positions
2:45-3:00 pm	<i>Break</i>
3:00-4:30 pm	Enacting Emotion: Reopening Dialogues with the Dead

About the Presenter

Robert A. Neimeyer, Ph.D., is Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, where he also maintains an active clinical practice. Since completing his doctoral training at the University of Nebraska in 1982, he has published 30 books, including *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved* and *Grief and the Expressive Arts: Practices for Creating Meaning* (both with Routledge), and serves as Editor of the journal *Death Studies*. The author of nearly 500 articles and book chapters, he is currently working to advance a more adequate theory of grieving as a meaning-making process, both in his published work and through his frequent professional workshops for national and international audiences. The recipient of the MISS Foundation's *Phoenix Award: Rising to the Service of Humanity*, Neimeyer served as Chair of the International Work Group for Death, Dying, & Bereavement and President of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, he has been granted the Eminent Faculty Award by the University of Memphis, made a Fellow of the Clinical Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association, and given Lifetime Achievement Awards by both the Association for Death Education and Counseling and the International Network on Personal Meaning.

Registration

Registration fee is \$150; includes continuing education (12 hours) and lunch.

Register at: <https://grieftherapy.eventbrite.com>