

Strategies of Grief Therapy: A Meaning Reconstruction Approach

Robert A. Neimeyer, Ph.D.

Program Description:

As grief theory and research have grown to include emotion-focused, attachment and meaning-oriented approaches, so too has the range of methods available to grief therapists. This workshop explores principles and practices deriving from these perspectives, with a focus on four domains, including: (1) grief work (2) narrative work, (3) continuing bonds work, and (4) imagery work. Each of these suggests the relevance of various clinical procedures for engaging a client's words and images to reconstruct their relationship to the deceased, and to reveal obstacles to such reconstruction.

A centerpiece of this workshop will be our extensive viewing of a videotaped psychotherapy of a woman, Deborah, who is struggling with deep and debilitating grief over the death of her mother in a way that constrains her relationships with significant people in her current life. In each section of the workshop, segments of Deborah's therapy will help convey how theoretical principles can be put into practice, from assessing complications in grieving to illustrating the synergy of different therapeutic strategies in fostering rapid change. The result is a collaborative and healing "performance" of new meaning by client and therapist, one that gives rise to a renewed bond between the client and her mother, and a revitalized sense of the client's own life.

This workshop draws on cutting edge theory and research to reinforce the relevance of these four core clinical competencies, and will make use of therapeutic videos, demonstrations and exercises to convey how these methods work and feel in the context of practice. As a result, participants will leave with a clearer conceptualization of processes that foster and impede constructive meaning-making in bereavement, as well as an expanded toolbox to facilitate the former and overcome the latter.

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Specify unique contributions of attachment and trauma theories to working with loss
- Identify features of complicated grief that determine when treatment is indicated
- Distinguish two forms of narrative work and identify strategies for working with each
- Describe two methods for working with the continuing bond to foster grief adaptation
- Practice two uses of imagery and metaphor to foster the articulation and reconstruction of loss experiences
- Identify process impediments to transcending grief that arise from the ongoing relationship to the deceased and how to resolve them

Workshop Schedule

9:00-10:30	<i>Grief Work: Adaptive and Complicated</i>
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-12:00	<i>Narrative Work: Integrating the Loss</i>
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:30	<i>Continuing Bonds Work: Restoring the Connection</i>
2:30-2:45	Break
2:45-5:00	<i>Imagery Work: Envisioning the Possible</i>

About the Presenter

Robert A. Neimeyer, Ph.D., is a professor in the Psychotherapy Research Area of 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 conducted extensive research on the topics of death, grief, loss, and suicide intervention.

Neimeyer has published 25 books, including *Grief and Bereavement: Bridging Research and Practice*, *Constructivist Psychotherapy*, and *The Art of Longing*, a book of contemporary poetry. The author of nearly 400 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.

Neimeyer is the Editor of two respected international journals, *Death Studies* and the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, and served as President of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, he has been granted the Distinguished Research Award, the Distinguished Teaching Award, and the Eminent Faculty Award by the University of Memphis, elected Chair of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement, designated Psychologist of the Year by the Tennessee Psychological Association, made a Fellow of the Clinical Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association, and given the Research Recognition Award by the Association for Death Education and Counseling. Most recently, he has received the Robert Fulton Founder's Award for Outstanding Teaching, Research and Service by the Center for Death Education and Bioethics and ADEC's Clinical Practice Award for his contributions to grief therapy.