

Intervening in Meaning: A Masters Class in Grief Therapy

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You've spent years offering support to bereaved people. And when they appear "stuck" in an anguishing and life vitiating grief, you've used reliable procedures to help them manage waves of disruptive emotion, reconnect with others, and envision a changed life and changed bond with their deceased loved one. You've likely encountered and found inspiration in some of the newer models of grieving, and perhaps even sought training in recent evidence-based protocols for addressing the possible complications in bereavement. But where can you turn to find an ample frame for this work, one that respects the fundamental role of our personal *presence* to a client's suffering, while also helping us navigate the sometimes mysterious *process* of therapy within which we sometimes perform specific *procedures*?

This workshop is designed to answer just these questions. Beginning with a discussion of the multiple meanings of meaning, it offers to experienced grief therapists a generous set of principles for practice, illustrated in clinical video, live demonstrations and experiential exercises. Pushing beyond a conception of bereavement support as "talk therapy," we will then consider several methods for exploring grief related metaphors, imagery and embodied knowing, artfully integrating visual media with analogical listening to deepen clients' awareness of their implicit needs in relation to their particular loss. In keeping with a constructivist understanding of resistance to change as a coherent expression of often inarticulate core beliefs and purposes, we will consider how to invite and engage such "immunity to change" in the process of therapy, and watch this non-counteractive stance unfold in recordings of actual sessions. Finally, we will practice visual supervision of current therapy cases, in order to understand more clearly the problem systems in which both our clients and we are enmeshed, and to imagine more constructive alternatives. Described by previous participants as "wildly creative, but practically relevant," this workshop is intended to stimulate clinical creativity in grief therapy, enlivening both experienced practitioners and the clients they serve.

Learning objectives:

- Identify 4 “principles of practice” that guide the process of responsive grief therapy
- Refine skills for using position work in counseling through the use of choreography and imaginal conversations to address “unfinished business” with the deceased
- Meld analogical, body-oriented work with expressive arts modalities to promote fuller articulation and renegotiation of felt meanings
- Spot the emergence of “immunity to change” processes in order to befriend resistance and overcome unconscious roadblocks to therapeutic progress
- Engage actual problem systems of current clients through symbolic expression, in order to imagine fresh possibilities in difficult therapies

Approximate schedule:

9:00-10:30 The Meaning of Meaning
10:30-10:45 Break
10:45-12:15 Principles of Practice for the Reconstruction of Meaning
12:15-1:15 Lunch
1:15-2:45 Dialogue with Loss: Conversing with the Canvas
2:45-3:00 Break
3:00-4:30 Encountering Resistance: Working with Pro-symptom Positions

Recommended readings:

Neimeyer, R. A. (Ed.) (2016). Techniques of grief therapy: Assessment and intervention. New York: Routledge.

Thompson, B. E. & Neimeyer, R. A. (Eds.) (2014). Grief and the expressive arts: Practices for creating meaning. New York: Routledge.