

## Maarten Eisma

### Exposure and Behavioral Activation for Complicated Grief

Avoidance processes have had a key role in theories on coping with bereavement for over a hundred years. The current workshop will provide an introduction into two proven-effective techniques to target such avoidance processes, namely exposure therapy and behavioral activation.

According to modern coping models, such as the cognitive-behavioral model of complicated grief, two types of avoidance may play a role in the persistence of grief complications. First, bereaved people may engage in anxious avoidance, implying that they avoid reminders of painful aspects of the loss, for instance through overt avoidance of loss-related objects and situations or through cognitive avoidance, such as thought suppression and rumination. Such avoidance is thought to impair integration of autobiographical memories about the loss with existing autobiographical knowledge and impair acceptance of the loss, thereby fueling grief complications. Second, bereaved people may show depressive avoidance, which implies that they avoid engaging in social, occupational or recreational activities. Such behavioral withdrawal reduces exposure to rewarding activities that could disconfirm negative cognitions and lift one's mood.

Anxious avoidance is typically reduced in therapy through exposure exercises, in which bereaved clients are exposed to avoided situations, objects, or memories. Depressive avoidance is typically ameliorated through behavioral activation, in which people are encouraged to engage in more meaningful and rewarding activities. The workshop will provide a theoretical and practical introduction into the use of both techniques. The workshop is of interest to both researchers and mental health practitioners.



Dr. Maarten C. Eisma is assistant professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. His main research interests are repetitive thinking and avoidance processes in adjustment to bereavement and (internet-based) psychological treatments for complicated grief. He completed his PhD thesis titled 'Rumination following bereavement: Assessment, working mechanisms and intervention' at Utrecht University in 2015, under supervision of experts on coping with bereavement such as prof. dr. Margaret Stroebe, dr. Henk Schut and prof. dr. Paul Boelen. Subsequently, he worked for a year as postdoctoral

researcher at the University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom. Presently he leads several investigations that aim to further clarify the role of cognitive emotion regulation after bereavement. Simultaneously, he is involved in multiple international research projects, including a trial on the effectiveness of community-delivered bereavement counseling of Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland and reviews of complicated grief models and treatments.