

**Robert A. Neimeyer**

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

### **Introduction – A conceptual frame for grief therapy (9:00-10:30)**

As contemporary models of bereavement have become more nuanced and empirically informed, so too have the practices available to grief counselors and therapists. This workshop offers in-depth training in several of these techniques, nesting them in the context of current meaning-oriented 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 a 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.

### **Part 1: Processing the Event Story of the Death (10:45-12:15)**

Particularly when death is sudden and traumatic, survivors often struggle with making sense of what has happened, at levels ranging from the practical to the existential. In this presentation we will consider techniques for helping the violently bereaved process the “event story” of the death itself, 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 homicide, 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 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.

### **Part 2: Accessing the Back Story of the Relationship (13:15-14:45)**

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. 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 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 re-accessing and revising frozen dialogues with the deceased that hamper post-loss adaptation.

### **Integrating the story: Fostering posttraumatic growth (15:00-16:30)**



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* (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 (ADEC). 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 ADEC and the International Network for Personal Meaning.