



# Portland Institute

## For Loss and Transition

### **Grief Therapy Learning Retreat**

**August 15-19, 2025 (Friday-Tuesday)**

**IslandWood  
Bainbridge Island, WA, United States**

#### **Featured Keynoters**

Edward (Ted) Ryneerson, MD  
Elizabeth Coplan, Award-winning Playwright  
Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD

#### **and other Presenters**

Barros-Lane, L., PhD; Brooks, M. P., PhD; Coenen, C., GTMR, FT, CGC, MTP;  
Fecho, B., PhD; Harris, D. L., RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT; Lengelle, R., PhD;  
Milman, E., MA, PhD, LP; Ng, C., PsyD, MMSAC, RegCLR;  
Strouse, S., MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT; Vollmann, S., MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW;  
and Zampitella, C., PsyD, FT

**NOTE:**

*This Retreat offers a range of Orientation, Techniques, Case Studies, and Practicum Modules leading to Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction (GTMR), Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy (AAGT), Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses (NDL), Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy (FFGT), or Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement (GTSB) offered by the Portland Institute. For more information, simply click: <https://www.portlandinstitute.org/certification>.*

# Grief Therapy Learning Retreat

August 15-19, 2025

Welcome to the *Portland Institute for Loss and Transition*, and our Grief Therapy Learning Retreat, a 5-day, 4-night immersion in experiential workshops designed to add conceptual clarity, hone process expertise, and provide learners practical tools to enhance their practice of grief therapy and bereavement support with a broad range of clients across many contexts of clinical practice. Alongside a rich menu of training options, learners can also explore many modalities for self-renewal as persons and professionals.

Join Robert A. Neimeyer, and PI faculty – Ted Rynearson, Carolyn Ng, Darcy Harris, Jane Milman, Reinekke Lengelle, Sarah Vollmann and Sharon Strouse, as well as other guest speakers including Elizabeth Coplan, Bob Fecho, Christina Zampitella, Claudia Coenen, Liza Barros-Lane and Maegan Brooks, for an international, interdisciplinary institute that offers a new meaning-focused model of training in bereavement care.

## Target Audience

Psychologists, social workers, counselors, art / music / expressive arts therapists, pastoral care personnel, healthcare professionals, grief coaches, and bereavement volunteers.

### Continuing Education (CEs Processing Fee: \$120 for up to 19.5 CE Credits)

To qualify for CE Credits, please kindly note that:

- Full attendance of the respective sessions is required to receive CE credits. No partial credit is awarded.
- You are required to sign on a Sign-In/Out Sheet at the beginning and at the end of each session attended, as well as to complete an evaluation form at the end of the retreat.
- The Certificate of CE Credits will be emailed to you within 10 business days after the retreat based on your signatures recorded on the Sign-In/Out Sheets collected.



*Portland Institute for Loss and Transition is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. Portland Institute for Loss and Transition maintains responsibility for this program and its content.*



Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, [Provider number 1954], is approved to offer social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Organizations, not individual courses, are approved as ACE providers. State and provincial regulatory boards have the final authority to determine whether an individual course may be accepted for continuing education credit. Portland Institute for Loss and Transition maintains responsibility for this course. ACE provider approval period: 09/09/2024–09/09/2025.

## Disclosure Statement

This retreat is not supported financially by a manufacturer of any commercial product. There is no known conflict of interest for this CE program or the presenters.

## Friday (August 15th)

**4:00-5:30** Grief & the Measurement of Meaning: A Research Update (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD & Jane Milman, MA, PhD, LP)  
*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

As the meaning-focused approach to loss and transition has continued to evolve, researchers in many nations are extending the toolbox of measures and methods for clinical assessment and contributing to our understanding of how survivors of often traumatic bereavement seek to restore sense and significance in its wake. This presentation reviews a sample of recent studies by this international community, with an emphasis on the implications of this research for practice.

The first of these studies investigates the efforts of survivors of suicide and overdose loss to cope with such trauma using either avoidant strategies (e.g., denial, distraction, substance use) or approach strategies (e.g., attempts at problem-solving, soliciting emotional support), and their impact on prolonged grief, posttraumatic stress and depression several months later. Of particular interest, the prospective longitudinal design permitted an evaluation of the role of meaning making as measured by the *Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale* or *ISLES-SF* as mediating between or accounting for the impact of the two contrasting forms of coping.

Continuing this theme with a very different methodology, the second study to be presented focuses on the long-term adaptation of suicide loss survivors, applying a new and comprehensive Spanish translation of the *Meaning in Loss Codebook* or *MLC* to in-depth interviews with each. The study validated and extended the MLC in application to Spanish speaking mourners and further traced not only their early struggles to make sense of a seemingly senseless event, but also their ultimate meaning-making and resilience.

Finally, the third study concentrates on the development of a new measure, the *Disruption of Meaning in Bereavement Scale* or *DMBS*, documenting its validity and reliability assessing three distinct systems of orienting meanings that are disrupted by loss, including those pertaining to how the griever perceives the *Self* (identity, purpose, etc.), the *World* (others, relationships, etc.), and the *Deceased* (the deceased's character, relationship with griever, etc.). The scale was found to have unique value in accounting for prolonged grief, even after considering meaning-making as measured by the *ISLES-SF*. Significantly, the scale also revealed unique patterns of meaning disruption for mourners bereaved by high risk causes of death and by the loss of central relational figures, demonstrating remarkable theoretical coherence with the latest developments in meaning-focused grief therapy.

Each study will be discussed in terms of its implications for clinical assessment and intervention, and copies of both the ISLES-SF and DMBS will be shared with the learners.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Distinguish the impact of avoidant vs. approach coping on prolonged grief, posttraumatic stress and depression symptoms, and the role of meaning in linking coping strategies with each outcome;
- Summarize the broad themes of meaning reconstruction observed in long-term survivors of suicide loss, and a sample of the categories of meaning making assessed by the *Meaning in Loss Codebook*; and
- Discuss the development and use of the *Disruption of Meaning in Bereavement Scale* and its measurement of the unique impact of different circumstances of loss.

*Content Focus:*

- Application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that have overall consistent and credible empirical support in the contemporary peer reviewed scientific literature beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Crisis and coping: The impact of meaning following suicide & overdose loss (30 min.)
- A long-shadowed grief: Long-term meaning making following suicide loss (30 min.)
- Domains of disruption: A new measure of the struggle for meaning in bereavement (30 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Orientation Module for [All Certification Programs](#).

## Saturday (August 16th)

**8:30-10:00** Out of Grief Comes Art: Harnessing Theater's Immediacy & Intimacy [Part I] (Elizabeth Coplan, Award-Winning Playwright, 2024 Pulitzer Prize Nominee)  
*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Ethics CE Credits (ACE)*

*Out of Grief Comes Art* is a transformative three-hour presentation that examines the healing power of theatre and film in processing grief. Through a blend of educational content, artistic and cultural examples, and hands-on creative exercises, learners will explore how storytelling, performance, and visual narrative can transform emotions into meaningful expressions. This session offers a supportive space for personal reflection and artistic exploration, emphasizing creativity as a path toward emotional release and connection.

Learners will begin by exploring the emotional complexity of grief and how theatre and film depict its many forms, offering avenues for connection and shared understanding. We will then turn to a live performance of two scenes, one from *Grief Dialogues: The Experience*, and another from *'Til Death*, Elizabeth Coplan's Off-Broadway, Pulitzer-Prize nominated play, as well as a screening of the award-winning film, *Honoring Choices*, which she also wrote and produced. This session will illustrate how scripted visual storytelling helps express grief in ways other techniques often cannot.

Next, learners will engage in guided activities, including monologue creation, scene development, and film-inspired art-making exercises designed to externalize emotions. This session concludes with group sharing and personal reflection, highlighting how creative expression can honor memories and foster a sense of healing through artistic creation.

### *Learning Objectives:*

- Describe and demonstrate how observation of theatrical performance can serve as a tool to aid people facing loss;
- Identify emotional themes and ethical dilemmas confronted by protagonists in end-of-life and bereavement scenarios;
- Discuss how theater and film can externalize grief, offering unique ways to express emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally;
- Identify practical techniques for using theater and film-inspired exercises to continue processing emotions outside a session; and
- Practice creative tools that can be applied to personal healing, community engagement, or supportive artistic projects focused on grief and loss.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research other than application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Grief through the creative lens: Theatrical and cinematic encounters with loss (15 min.)
- First performance: *Hospice – A Love Story* (30 min.)
- First artistic break: Writing a monologue (30 min.)
- Second performance: *Grief Dialogues – The Experience* (30 min.)
- Second artistic break: Writing a scene (30 min.)
- Third performance: *'Til Death* (30min.)
- Final reflection: From death comes art (30 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Orientation Module for [All Certification Programs](#).

## 10:30-12:00 Out of Grief Comes Art [Part II] (Elizabeth Coplan, Award-Winning Playwright, 2024 Pulitzer Prize Nominee)

1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)

A continuation of the above workshop.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module for [All Certification Programs](#).

## 1:00-2:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:

*A. Compassion-Focused Therapy for Non-Death Loss & Grief [Part I] (Darcy L. Harris, RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT)*

1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Cultural Competence CE Credits (ACE)

Grief associated with non-death loss experiences that are ongoing in nature is often accompanied by significant exhaustion and anxiety. Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) is based on the principles of compassion as a sustainable approach in situations that are potentially overwhelming and/or exhausting for both the client and the therapist. This session will discuss specific approaches from CFT that can be helpful for clients with protracted, ongoing loss experiences, as well as ways that therapists can remain fully present and open when working with clients with these types of

losses, which may also include losses related to ability, racism, and political sources. The workshop will include a video presentation of a client, along with discussion, as well as experiential exercises that can be helpful for both therapists and their clients.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Discuss the unique aspects of grief that accompany non-death losses;
- Describe the primary tenets of Compassion Focused Therapy and compassion-based approaches in therapeutic contexts; and
- Apply concepts related to the compassionate stance of the therapist and client self-compassion to grief after non-death losses.

*Content Focus:*

- Application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that have overall consistent and credible empirical support in the contemporary peer reviewed scientific literature beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Grief after non-death losses: What's so unique about it? (30 min.)
- Assumptive world: An exploration (30 min.)
- Compassion-Focused Therapy: The tenets of practice (30 min.)
- Compassion-based practices: A Practicum (30 min.)
- A Person's Story: Video demonstration of CFT (30 min.)
- Wrapping up: Case discussion and reflection (30 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).

*B. Sibling Grief: Challenging Disenfranchisement to Enable Effective Treatment (Christina Zampitella, PsyD, FT)*

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

Adult siblings have a relationship unique to all others. They share not only 50% of their biological composition, but also a familial story – past, present, and future. They expect to outlive their parents, but this expected trajectory of life and loss is not followed when one adult sibling dies, leaving behind another. These survivors comprise one of the more disenfranchised groups of grievers, which complicates an already painful process. For those who work with bereaved adult siblings, awareness of the nuances of this special relationship is essential to supporting them in grief counselling or therapy.

Not only will this session address research on this disenfranchised loss, but it also will examine the potential impact of gender and cultural expectations on the surviving siblings within the family system. Accordingly, we will consider how these dimensions of diversity interact with the experience of and adjustment to adult sibling loss, and how they must be woven into the exploration of this much overlooked group of grievers.

This presentation will use a personal account and a case study to illustrate how addressing the back story of the relationship to re-establish equilibrium can support meaning reconstruction, leading to a greater integration of the loss into the surviving sibling's life narrative.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the unique nature of the adult sibling relationship and its implications for bereavement;
- Discuss how the loss of an adult sibling impacts psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being of surviving brothers and sisters; and
- Summarize research on how adult sibling loss is disenfranchised and describe implications of these findings for intervention.

*Content Focus:*

- Application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that have overall consistent and credible empirical support in the contemporary peer reviewed scientific literature beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Getting personal: Loss of a younger brother (15 min.)
- Consulting the research: Psychological, spiritual and mortality impacts (15 min.)
- Culture and family: Influences in re-establishing the back story (20 min.)
- The practical upshot: Implications for grief therapy (20 min.)
- An unexpected tragedy: A case study of sibling loss (20 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Orientation Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#), [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).



**2:30-4:00** Mini-workshops. Choose between:

A. *Compassion-Focused Therapy for Non-Death Loss & Grief [Part II]* (Darcy L. Harris, RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT)

1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)

A continuation of the above workshop.

NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).

B. *The “Back Story”: A Compositional Device for Complicated Relationships* (Maegan P. Brooks, PhD)

1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)

Accessing the back story of our relationship to the deceased is a crucial narrative process that helps the bereaved reconstruct meaning from their loss. This process of meaning reconstruction is particularly important when grieving the loss of people who are deeply self-defining, such as siblings, parents, children, or partners. However, for those mourning complex, painful, or traumatic relationships, significant challenges arise in accessing these back stories.

This workshop offers a unique approach in such cases: the *rückenfigur*, a compositional device designed specifically for those grieving complicated or difficult back stories. Mourners often resist directly confronting the deceased, especially when the relationship was fraught with complexity. In these cases, the art historical concept of the *rückenfigur* – a figure depicted from the back – provides a novel way to approach this challenge. Rather than facing the complexities of the relationship head-on, depicting the lost person from behind allows the bereaved to “brace” and “pace” themselves as they gradually reconstruct their connection to the deceased.

Artistic representations of figures viewed from the back arise in various cultures and time periods. These diverse examples highlight the *rückenfigur*’s ability to encourage contemplation, offer perspective, and foster empathy. The compositional device’s invitation to self-reflection resonated with the presenter as she navigated the complicated back stories of her sister’s death from overdose and her abusive mother’s death from heart failure. In this workshop, personal experience will be combined with student work to demonstrate diverse ways the *rückenfigur* can be adapted. Learners will also be guided through the process of creating their own *rückenfigur* compositions. Afterward, they will be invited to reflect on their composition experiences and explore how this artistic approach can be used to support the bereaved in various contexts.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Explain the importance of accessing the back story in the process of meaning reconstruction for the bereaved;
- Identify the challenges the bereaved face when trying to access and process their relationship with the deceased;
- Outline the benefits of back-facing compositions (*rückenfigur*) and compare them to other arts-based approaches to grief expression; and
- Apply the *rückenfigur* approach to a personal loss and identify how it can be adapted to support the bereaved in various contexts.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- “Facing” complicated loss: The *rückenfigur* in challenging grief (30 min.)
- Reaching back: An experiential exercise (30 min.)
- Processing the work: Pairing and sharing (15 min.)
- Coming together: Plenary group discussion (15 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#), [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

## Sunday (August 17th)

**8:30-10:00** Traumatic Grief Treatment: Repair, Revise & Reengage  
(Ted Rynearson, MD)  
*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

Violent death presents a more complex synergism of distress than the natural death of a loved one, one that occurs with disproportionate frequency for economically marginalized communities. After violent death, accommodation includes the processing of trauma distress to the violent dying act simultaneous with the processing of trauma and separation distress to the irrevocable absence of the loved one. The internalized memory of the loved one (when they were alive) presents a dynamic, restorative focus that is opposed to the memory of the external trauma (reenactment imagery of the violent dying act), and the clinical task of revising the internalized relationship with the deceased and the way they died (alone and

unprotected) may be paramount. This dynamic is more complex than the internalized dynamic of a solitary, traumatic experience that is narrowly aversive. Instead, accommodation to violent dying may be challenged by waves of reenactment imagery complicated by remorse over failed rescue or caregiving – the memory of the life of the deceased may have been all but eclipsed by the traumatic and remorseful memory of their dying.

This keynote address will provide a conceptual and clinical frame for assessing and intervening in cases of violent death bereavement, as reflected in clinical videos of interviews with survivors of such losses. Learners should complete the training with clearer orientation to the complex clinical presentation of those bereaved by suicide, homicide and fatal accident, and clear guidelines for subsequent trauma-informed grief therapy.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Differentiate traumatic grief after violent dying from prolonged grief;
- Clarify and manage the horrific reenactment imagery of traumatic grief;
- Describe a working model of traumatic grief and its treatment; and
- Identify restorative therapeutic techniques and indications for short term treatment.

*Content Focus:*

- Application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that have overall consistent and credible empirical support in the contemporary peer reviewed scientific literature beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Building a holding environment: Supportive interview techniques (10 min.)
- Reinforcing resilience: Recruiting intrapersonal and interpersonal supports (10 min.)
- The dynamics of traumatic grief: Assessment after homicidal, suicidal and accidental dying (10 min.)
- Restorative Retelling: A short-term model of intervention (30 min.)
- Evidence-based practice: Empirical support for Restorative Retelling (30 min.)

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Study Module for [All Certification Programs](#).*

## 10:30-12:00 Mini-workshops. Choose between:

- A. *Restorative Retelling: A Practicum* (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD & Carolyn Ng, PsyD, MMSAC, RegCLR)  
 1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)

Providing clients an optimal and responsive “holding environment” for a potentially re-traumatizing or ruminative retelling of the story of a difficult loss requires clear competencies in offering non-anxious *presence* to human suffering, empathic attunement to client’s *process* and one’s own, and mastery of the delicate *procedures* for restorative narration of a tragic experience. This workshop reviews key guidelines for doing this work, briefly illustrates it with a clinical video, and ushers learners into an experiential engagement with the method in the context of non-traumatic losses that can be safely retold in a training context.

Key principles of retelling include *bracing* the client throughout, *pacing* the account to permit integration of the experience and *facing* the perturbing images and emotions associated with the event together as a team, rather than leaving the client with an undigested and potentially poisonous silent story of the loss that they must live with alone. After reviewing and modeling these clinical strategies, we will break into small groups to practice restorative retelling with the mentoring of the presenters. Learners should leave with a clear operational sense of what such work entails, and what benefits clients can experience in finding words for unspeakable experiences, and ultimately find meaning and orientation in them.

### *Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the 3 P’s of psychotherapy as they pertain to retelling the narrative of a loved one’s dying;
- Summarize the key guidelines for accompanying clients as they voice the external, internal and reflexive strands of the loss narrative; and
- Practice and discuss restorative retelling in a safe, small group context.

### *Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research other than application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

### *Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- The 3 P's of psychotherapy: Utilizing the therapeutic relationship (10 min.)
- Braiding the strands: Working with external, internal and reflexive narratives (10 min.)
- Principles of practice: Bracing, pacing & facing (10 min.)
- From principles to practice: A small group exercise (45 min.)
- Putting it all together: Concluding remarks (15 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module for [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

*B. Restorative Retelling & Abstract Painting: A Process of Artful Alkimie [Part I]  
(Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT)*

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Cultural Competence CE Credits (ACE)*

This didactic, experiential presentation introduces learners to *Artful Alkimie*, an innovative art therapy technique for survivors of death and non-death loss, who are fixated on the event story. *Alkimie* is a 14th century French word for alchemy, where inner and outer worlds reflect each other. This layered painting and dotting modality addresses the needs of the griever, who are often challenged to construct coherent narratives as necessary steps toward integration. Rynearson's model of *Restorative Retelling* invites survivors to retell their stories in ways that foster agency over the event, a process that makes it bearable and less traumatizing. *Artful Alkimie* creatively engages the world of duality, so often implicit in grief stories. Narratives find expression in abstract inner landscapes that are externalized, painted on canvas and overlaid with distinct dots of color. Patterns and symbols create a safe, calming container for the work. The canvas is the ground of the retelling with story forms and complexities that loosen and dissolve as new stories emerge.

This art therapy methodology is inspired by creative expressions that reach across time and culture. Etched images on cave walls, Pointillism, the Papunya Tula School of Australia's Western Desert, and contemporary abstract painters speak to our impulse toward storytelling. The canvas is the landscape of story and itself the storyteller, it provides proof, contains relics of the past, and activates a living history. *Restorative Retelling*, *Meaning Reconstruction* and *Art Therapy* anchor the work as learners stand on the ground of their narratives. They pour out and paint abstract landscapes and reach toward the light of retelling. No artistic talent is required. In a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, story forms dissolve into abstract formless fields. A new story emerges on the landscape, one that reaches toward illumination, one that is perhaps enduring and easier to hold.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Identify three key elements of *Restorative Retelling* and its interface with the *Artful Alkimie* painting process;
- Describe the two key aspects of landscape and overlay that are essential aspects of the *Artful Alkimie* painting process in its capacity to address paradox; and
- Analyze *Artful Alkimie* as a meaning reconstruction process, with special attention to the event story, back story and personal story.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research other than application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- The narrative impulse: Constructing stories of loss (20 min.)
- Visualizing the story: A cultural overview (30 min.)
- Artful Alkimie: Illustrative case studies (30 min.)
- Mourning and meaning: Benefits of art therapy (20 min.)
- Painting and dotting: A technical tutorial (20 min.)
- Experiential learning: From principles to practice (60 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module for [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#), [Certification of Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#), or [Certification of Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

**1:00-2:30** Mini-workshops. Choose between:

*A. Finding Meaning in Loss: A Group Therapy Protocol for Prolonged Grief (Jane Milman, MA, PhD, LP)*

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

Grief therapy and counselling are commonly offered in a group format. Nevertheless, there are few theory-based group interventions for bereavement and still fewer that target chronically debilitating grief referred to as Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD). This presentation will describe the Meaning in Loss Group (MLG), a 12-session meaning-based group intervention designed for grievors experiencing PGD and pilot-tested through iterative implementations in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The MLG uses a narrative-constructivist approach that supports mourners in processing (1) the event story of the death, (2) the implications of the loss for the personal story of the griever, and (3) the back story of the relationship between the griever and the person who died to facilitate a life-affirming continuing bond with the deceased. Each therapy session is organized around a specific therapeutic technique or strategy that promotes experiential engagement and reflection upon the loss, with unique group structures and processes to encourage safe participation on the part of each group member. Additionally, the MLG adapts and integrates behavioral, exposure-based, and experiential techniques into a narrative-constructivist framework to target the unique features of PGD.

This presentation will outline the MLG protocol, emphasize how it promotes meaning making specifically among those experiencing PGD, and detail unique characteristics of the MLG related to the application of narrative-constructivist procedures in the context of group processes. Case examples will be presented and specific techniques will be practiced in small groups. Challenges that can emerge in the course of administering the MLG will be discussed, with an emphasis on how these challenges can be addressed through training and supervision. Learners will be invited to share their own experiences and ideas regarding the use of a group format and a meaning-oriented approach in grief therapy.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe each session of the Meaning In Loss Group (MLG) protocol;
- Identify unique considerations in the application of the narrative-constructivist approach to grief therapy within a group format; and
- Recognize how the narrative-constructivist approach can be applied to promote meaning making specifically among those experiencing Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD).

*Content Focus:*

- Application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that have overall consistent and credible empirical support in the contemporary peer reviewed scientific literature beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Meaning in Loss Group (MLG): Conceptualization and case examples (30 min.)
- From principles to practices: Narrative-constructivist procedures (15 min.)
- Meeting group challenges: The role of training and supervision (15 min.)
- Experiential learning: Breakout groups (20 min.)
- Grieving in the group context: Bringing it all together (10 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#), [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement](#).

*B. Restorative Retelling & Abstract Painting: A Process of Artful Alkimie [Part II]*  
*(Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT)*

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

A continuation of the above workshop.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module for [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#), [Certification of Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#), or [Certification of Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

## Monday (August 18th)

**8:30-10:00** Mini-workshops. Choose between:

*A. Symptom Dialogues: Pursuing Possibility through Meaning Reconstruction [Part I] (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD)*

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

Viewed through the lens of convention, grief therapy entails talking to a therapist about the symptoms and problems resulting from grief over the loss of a loved one, in the hope that the therapist can provide solutions or perspectives that can help the client adapt to the loss. But viewed through the lens of constructivism, grief therapy might alternatively entail *talking to the symptoms and problems themselves*, opening the possibility that the client's suffering might hold the seeds of fresh significance that can contribute to meaning reconstruction and resilience.

The present workshop explores this creative shift in perspective, drawing inspiration from George Kelly's *elaboration of the complaint*, Karl Tomm's *internalized other interviewing*, Michael White's *relative influence interviewing*, and Bruce Ecker's *coherence therapy* to formulate guidelines for an interview between the therapist and a prominent symptom associated with the client's grief, with the client performing the part of the problem.



We will begin by summarizing these pioneering practices, and then introduce Loretta, who is grieving the death of her husband of many years, and who is consulting the presenter for help in dealing with the loss. The therapist opens with a person-first approach to the therapy, inviting Loretta's detailed *introduction of her loved one* before turning to discussing her most prominent and preoccupying symptom: loneliness. He then suggests something audacious – that he interview *Loneliness* about its role in Loretta's life, with her loaning it her voice to respond. Viewing a video of the session, learners in the workshop will then practice similar symptom dialogues with one another in small groups and then return to the plenary group to process the experience and consider its value in grief therapy.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the pioneering contributions of Kelly, Tomm, White and Ecker in inspiring the constructivist foundation of *Symptom Dialogues*;
- Summarize the advantages of introducing the loved one as an opening gambit in grief therapy; and
- Discuss the process and outcome of *Symptom Dialogues* in the clinical video as well as in application to the lived experience of workshop participants.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research other than application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Advanced

*Content Overview:*

- The conceptual shift: Conceptual foundations of *Symptom Dialogues* (25 min.)
- Introducing the loved one: A clinical illustration (20 min.)
- A dialogue with Loneliness: From symptom to significance (30 min.)
- Processing the session: Group discussion (30 min.)
- From principles to practice: A small group exercise (55 min.)
- Putting it all together: Concluding remarks (20 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Studies Module leading to [Certification of Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).

*B. The Lived Experiences of Young Widowhood: Widow's Fire & A Dismantled World (Liza Barros-Lane, PhD & Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW)*  
*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

Young widows, who are typically defined as being 50 years old or younger, confront many unique complexities that warrant attention. Much of the clinical literature about widowhood is derived from older widows; it does not fully capture the experiences of young widows, who usually face an untimely and traumatic loss. In this session, the presenters will share their research about young widowhood to provide an overview of their common struggles and experiences. Impacts are usually multilayered and vast, causing shifts in their identities, roles, finances, and social standing, and creating disturbing and shocking changes to their assumptive worlds and sense of self.

Most young widows encounter significant non-death losses, such as the loss of their sexual partner, which is often a vital and disenfranchised piece of their experience. Many experience widow's fire, an intense surge in sexual desire, which is unwelcome, alien, and difficult to navigate. We will explore its roots in their longing for their partners, their need for comfort and physical intimacy, and their life force as survivors. Young widows often feel guilt and confusion about widow's fire and subsequently grapple with meaning reconstruction. Case examples from the presenters' research will illustrate some of the common difficulties and mourning experiences of young widows and will highlight the need for heightened education and support for this population.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Identify the distinct experiences and struggles faced by young widows, including shifts in identity, roles, and assumptive worlds;
- Explain the phenomenon of widow's fire, its emotional and psychological roots, and its impact on the grieving and meaning-making process for young widows; and
- Analyze case examples to illustrate the multilayered impacts of young widowhood and deepen understanding of their mourning experiences.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- An understudied loss: Young widowhood and its complexities (20 min.)
- Multilayered impacts: Loss of identity and the assumptive world (15 min.)
- Widow's fire: Definition and origins (15 min.)
- Mourning and meaning: Illustrative case studies (25 min.)
- Toward holistic care: Implications for practice (15min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Orientation Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#), [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(GTSB\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

**10:30-12:00** Mini-workshops. Choose between:

*A. Symptom Dialogues: Pursuing Possibility through Meaning Reconstruction [Part II] (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD)*  
*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

A continuation of the above workshop.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification of Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).

*B. First Response: A Somatic Workshop (Claudia Coenen, GTMR, FT, CGC, MTP)*  
*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

The body is the first responder to emotion even before we are conscious of it. In this workshop, we will move, vocalize and experience how our emotions arise in our bodies, which can generate insight and integration between the physical and emotional realms. When we work with grieving people, we often pick up physical cues that speak, sometimes louder than their words. In this workshop, we will discuss and experience somatic awareness, body language and the subtle messages communicated in gesture, facial expression and posture.

Knowledge of this subtle communication attunes us to our clients, allowing us to pay closer attention to all aspects of their grief experience. We will engage in several activities to enhance our understanding, playing with mirroring, protective stances and reading non-verbal gestures. We will explore and discuss ways to help clients notice their own physical language as it relates to their emotional state.

Let's explore how changing posture, shifting stances and releasing tension can affect feelings. We will also use our voices to connect the body and heart. This workshop is available to all humans, and modifications for disabilities will be addressed as needed.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Recognize somatic emotional cues by observing examples in art and dance along with evidence from somatic and movement therapy;
- Enact somatic expressions through movement and gesture, including alternate mirroring and not mirroring the responses of another to deepen awareness; and
- Describe how body language fosters attunement between client and therapist/counsellor and demonstrate active listening through somatic awareness to enable grieving clients to notice their own body's first response to emotion.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- The body as a first responder: An Overview (10 min.)
- Somatic expressions of grief: The evidence (15 min.)
- Expressing emotion: An experiential exercise (20 min.)
- Mirroring vs non-attention: A dyadic exploration (25 min.)
- Working with the body: A conversation (20 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#), [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

**1:00-4:00** Mini-workshops. Choose between:**A. *The Quest for Meaning in Terminal Illness* (Carolyn Ng, PsyD, MMSAC, RegCLR)  
3 CEs (APA) / 3 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)**

In the face of the news that they have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, patients have to face both their own impending death and separation from their loved ones through different dying trajectories, which can be swift or protracted. This complex emotional journey can trigger existential crisis, death anxiety and pre-death grief, in a way that calls for professional psychological attention. In this module, we will examine terminal illness and its implications from the *Tripartite Model of Meaning Reconstruction*, and address the death anxiety, distress related to unfinished business with loved ones, and pre-death grief experienced by those diagnosed with a terminal illness. Learners will become acquainted with relevant meaning-focused

intervention tools to facilitate life review with these clients and support them as they learn to cope with their dying trajectory and face their eventual death.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Identify the impacts of terminal illness from the meaning reconstruction perspective;
- Describe the key features of death anxiety and pre-death grief experienced; and
- Facilitate death preparation through the use of *Virtual Dream Stories* and a life review using *My Life Footprints*.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- Terminal illness as a crisis of meaning: Mapping the trajectory of loss (45 min.)
- Confronting suffering at the end of life: Use of creative writing (45 min.)
- Preparatory grief and unfinished business: A call to meaning reconstruction (30 min.)
- My Life Footprints: Affirming personal legacies (60 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction](#), or [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy](#).

*B. Good Divorces & Writing Autoethnographies of Loss & Transition (Reinekke Lengelle, PhD & Bob Fecho, PhD)*  
*3 CEs (APA) / 3 Clinical CE Credits (ACE)*

According to the American Psychological Association, approximately 40-50% of first marriages end in divorce. The divorce rate for second marriages is even higher, with approximately 60-67% of second marriages ending in divorce. It is clear that divorce is a common loss in our society and one that is often accompanied by conflict, struggle, grief, and confusion. On the other hand, divorce can also be a growth opportunity if the disorienting and painful “wobble” that it causes in our lives is processed and re-narrated. In this offering, learners will learn about the autoethnographic method in re-storying the divorce journey. The workshop is not limited to the perspectives of those in heterosexual relationships and applies to those with LGBTQ+ identities. The

session is applicable to those who were officially married or partnered without a legal contract but in a committed relationship.

Autoethnography is a writing approach that reflects on personal experience using theoretical frameworks and existing research to make meaning, engage readers, and contribute meaningfully to the literature on a particular topic. Although this qualitative research methodology is now well-established with many published books and articles – and a peer-review journal in the field (JOAE) – writing one’s story of loss with the right balance of personal narrative and philosophical integration remains challenging. This presentation and writing workshop will also cover briefly Lengelle and Meijers’ “Transformation through writing” model that explains how successful (re)storying takes place combining both affective and cognitive dimensions and training the observer position.

This presentation will invite learners to learn about autoethnography both theoretically and experientially through writing exercises. The practices and conversation will in part be inspired by the presenters’ personal stories of loss, through divorce and bereavement. Learners will gain knowledge about how to write a successful autoethnography of loss, focusing on the importance of the work being: evocative, well-structured, philosophically rigorous, ethical, and emotionally salient. Those participating can also learn more about how they may write an autoethnography for publication. This presentation is for those who want to write their stories of loss and transition and/or are interested in the methodology.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the primary causes, current statistics in the United States, and common negative effects of divorce;
- Conceptualize divorce as a life event with the potential to contribute to post-traumatic growth; and
- Apply the autoethnographic method to re-narrating the divorce journey.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Introductory

*Content Overview:*

- Introduction: Let the initial writing begin (30 min.)
- Divorce: Facts and learning possibilities (30 min.)
- What is autoethnography? Writing exercises and definitions (60 min.)
- Transformation through writing: A model illustrated (30 min.)
- From theory to practice: Contextualize the model in practice (30 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#), or [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#).

## Tuesday (August 19th)

**9:00-10:30** Mini-workshops. Choose between:

A. *Grieving the Loss of Our World* (Darcy L. Harris, RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT)

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Cultural Competence CE Credits (ACE)*

This workshop will explore the concept of structural grief, which includes the response to losses that originate from social/structural sources. The grief that occurs in response to structural losses may be political, environmental, cultural, and/or existential in their origin, and may be manifest in polarizing rhetoric, oppression of specific individuals or groups, or paralysis that accompanies overwhelming feelings of hopelessness. An overview of this concept will be discussed, including an exploration of the undercurrent of threat and its impact upon this type of grief. Time will be spent on brainstorming and discussing how this particular form of grief can have an impact on clients, along with helpful practices and paradigms to address the overwhelming (and sometimes paralyzing) aspects of this unique form of loss and grief.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the way that policies, laws, and decisions that are made at the structural level have an impact on specific individuals and groups;
- Apply the principle of threat activation as described by *Terror Management Theory* and *Compassion Focused Therapy* to human responses and the implications for these responses; and
- Specify practices that may be helpful for clients and therapists who are affected by structural grief.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- When the public becomes personal: Illustrations of structural grief (40 min.)
- The Truth Mandala: An experiential exercise (40 min.)
- Finding voice: Group discussion (10 min.)

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Orientation Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).

*B. Loss, Trauma & Rebuilding: An Open Art Therapy Studio with Ukrainian Refugees (Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW & Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT)*

*1.5 CEs (APA) / 1.5 Cultural Competence CE Credits (ACE)*

This presentation will highlight an open art therapy studio that was offered to a group of Ukrainian refugees, and was sponsored by Olga's List, a non-profit organization that serves Ukrainian refugees in Massachusetts. Families with children, adolescents, and individual adults were in attendance. They engaged in the art therapy offerings to process and explore loss and trauma, to creatively build resilience and coping, to connect as a community, and to create and touch tangible reminders of their homeland and culture.

Our presentation will include various case studies and art therapy images to illustrate a meaning reconstruction process, and the healing power of art therapy for trauma, death, and non-death losses. We will discuss the tenets of cultural humility and cultural competency within a multicultural art therapy setting, as well as the clinical themes that emerged from this refugee population. Learners will be invited to engage in an art therapy experiential, to create response art or an image of home and its significance.



*Learning objectives:*

- Describe the tenets of cultural humility and cultural competency, and their function within the work with refugee populations;
- Summarize three core components of meaning reconstruction, and their application for both death and non-death losses; and
- Discuss the use of art therapy modalities, and their unique qualities and functions in the treatment of trauma and loss.

*Content Focus:*

- Topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.

*Instructional Level:*

- Intermediate

*Content Overview:*

- The historic backdrop: The Ukrainian war and its refugee crisis (5 min.)
- Principles of practice: Cultural competency and cultural humility (10 min.)
- From crisis to creativity: Art therapy tenets and the Open Art Studio (10 min.)
- From methods to mourners: Illustrative case studies (15 min.)
- Meaning reconstruction in grief: Death and non-death losses (10 min.)
- The shadow of loss: Illustrative case studies (15 min.)
- Engaging traumatic loss: An arts-based experiential (25 min.)

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Studies Module for [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#), [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#), or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).*

## 10:30-12:00 Closing Ceremony

*For inquiries regarding accommodations for disability, cancellations, refunds, and/or other issues, please email [Carolyn](#).*