



Grief Work in Virtual Settings:

New Tools to Create Support and Connection

Alissa Drescher, LPC, FT, GC-C, MA

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4/21

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Alissa Drescher, LPC, FT, GC-C, MA, is a highly sought-after speaker addressing topics related to grief and mourning, and is known for her creative, interactive, and story-telling presentation style. She began working in the field of bereavement services in 2006, offering encouragement to grieving parents. Alissa's passion for supporting people through the grief process led to counseling both grieving children and adults in individual and group settings. At the Tristesse Grief Center in Tulsa, OK, she served as senior program director, overseeing a variety of programming including the Healing Hearts Camp, Oklahoma's first overnight camp for grieving children and teens (now Camp Erin Tulsa). Alissa was an adjunct professor at Southern Nazarene University teaching several undergraduate counseling courses including Death, Grief and Loss. After relocating to Tennessee, Alissa became the founder/executive director of the Grief Center of Middle Tennessee, whose mission is to help children, teens, and adults cope with loss and change. Alissa is a Fellow in Thanatology: Death, Dying & Bereavement and holds a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy with a focus in Play Therapy. She is also a member of the Association of Death Education and Counseling and the National Alliance for Grieving Children.

Speaker Disclosure:

Financial: Alissa Drescher is the founder and executive director of the Grief Center of Middle Tennessee. She receives a speaking honorarium from PESI, Inc.

Non-financial: Alissa Drescher is a Fellow in Thanatology. She is a member of the Association of Death Education and Counseling; and the National Alliance for Grieving Children.

Materials that are included in this course may include interventions and modalities that are beyond the authorized practice of mental health professionals. As a licensed professional, you are responsible for reviewing the scope of practice, including activities that are defined in law as beyond the boundaries of practice in accordance with and in compliance with your professions standards.

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NEXT 

1

Welcome

Alissa Drescher, MA, LPC,FT, GC-C

Grief Center Director, Alive Hospice
Nashville, TN

NEXT 

2

OBJECTIVES

- One** Describe multiple telementalhealth interventions for use with the bereaved.
- Two** Use six creative virtual interventions for grieving children and adults.
- Three** Name six internet resources to compliment your work with grievers.
- Four** Identify appropriate remote interventions for working with complicated grief.

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3

DECLARATIONS

I declare that I (or my family) do not have any financial relationship in any amount, occurring in the last 12 months, with a commercial interest whose products or services are discussed in my presentation. Additionally, all planners involved do not have any such financial relationship.

I declare that I do not have any relevant nonfinancial relationships.

4/17

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4

Use of Teletherapy

Stats

70% of behavioral health providers plan to continue offering a Telehealth option beyond COVID-19 (Tridium, 2020)

APA Survey, 2020

3/4 of clinicians are providing only teletherapy, and another 16 percent are offering a combination of remote and in-person sessions.

Why?

Affordability, flexibility, privacy, convenience, patient satisfaction:

81% clinically effective

81% same therapeutic alliance

85% no or positive impact on client disclosure

85% no impact on clinical workflow

6/17

NEXT 

5

Efficacy of Teletherapy

Evaluation

Effective for diagnosis and assessment across the lifespan, can be delivered in various settings, and appears to be comparable to in-person clinical support. New models of care (i.e., asynchronous, mobile) also display equally positive outcomes (Hilty, et al., 2013).

Additional Literature Review

Both phone and video conferencing demonstrated evidence of positive effect and are highly applicable to the model of healthcare in the US (Glueckauf, et al., 2018).

6/17

NEXT 

6

Limitations of Teletherapy

Audience	Teletherapy may not be advisable in all circumstances, presenting complaints, or individuals, and may not be culturally inclusive
Confidentiality and Privacy	Even the most effective clinician is vulnerable to data breaches and hacking
Interpersonal Barriers	Limitations on body language, mirroring, and vocal cues
Crisis Response	Difficult to respond immediately and ensure safety for the client

6/17

NEXT 

7

Ethical Considerations

Know your state	What about counseling across state lines? Do the rules that were relaxed due to COVID in your state still apply? Does Medicare or your insurance panel approve telemental health visits?
Know your tech	Is the version you are using HIPAA compliant? Do you have a BAA in place? What about the transmission of data?
Boundaries	Do you maintain the same boundaries you would if this was an in-person session? Does having a glimpse into the client's home life challenge your boundaries?
Competence	Are you capable of managing the technology itself? Does it deter from your ability to effectively implement the therapeutic model? Is your telepresence compromised?
Access to care	What about clients that do not have access to technology? How do you increase equity in your practice?

6/17

NEXT 

8

Remote Rapport

Levels and Eye Contact

- Look at camera not screen
- Minimize self-view
- Adjust height to remain at eye-level

Visual

- Lighting
- Background
- Distance from camera
- Glasses and glares

Audio

- Headset or microphone
- Background noise
- Interruptions

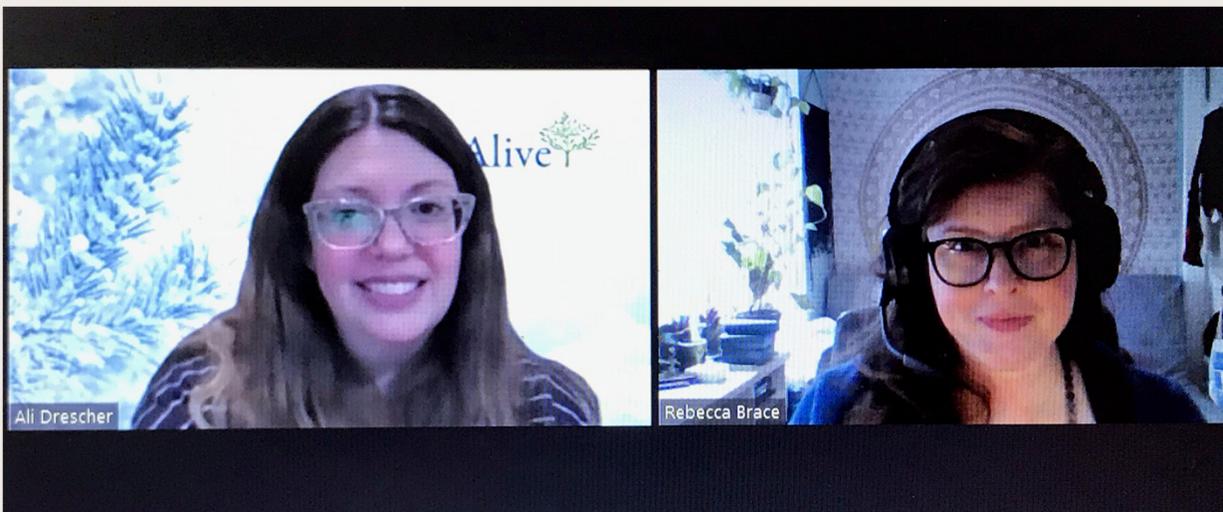
Tech Failures

- Know your client's location
- Have a sign-off signal
- Make a plan in advance

6/17

NEXT 

9



NEXT 

10

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

“I look at him. He sees that I look at him. I see that he sees it. He sees that I see that he sees it. As a result, there are no longer two consciousnesses in a moment of locked eye contact, but two mutually enfolding glances.”

NEXT 

11

Teletherapy in Grief Work

Individual Setting

Grief-specific research is limited. A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials has shown moderate to large treatment effects of web-based CBT for bereaved individuals (Johannsen et al., 2019). Remote treatment for depression and anxiety is clinically effective (Tuerk, et al., 2018).

Group Setting

Outcomes of a study of an 8-week grief support group administered remotely exceeded expectations for both facilitators (Social Workers) and participants, decreasing mean score on the ICG-R from 28.08 to 23.29, and lowering distressing grief symptoms. Scores were similar to that of in-person groups. Participants also noted a high degree of personal attention, decreased isolation and increased ease of participation (Supiano & Koric, 2020).

Online Grief Communities

Participation in online grief support communities decreased psychological distress with greater benefit linked to length of time in the group (Hartig & Viola, 2016). Yet, psychosocial outcomes and sleep quality were improved over those who accessed a grief education website (Knowles, et al., 2016). *The key may be active, not passive, online grief support.

6/17

NEXT 

12

Case Example

Widowers Grief Group

NEXT 

13

Complicated Grief

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Boelen, et al., 2020)

01

Setting the scene

04

Exposure

02

Engage a guest

05

Cognitive restructuring

03

CBT overview/rationale

06

Graded activation

8/17

NEXT 

14

Complicated Grief

Meaning In Loss - Neimeyer

01

Introduction

02

Introducing the Loved One

03

Loss Timeline

04

**Meaning Reconstruction
Interview**

05

Models of Grief

06

Hello Again Letter

07

Letter from the Loved One

08

Life Imprint

09

Further Connections

10

Virtual Dream Stories

11

Ritual Planning

12

**Ritual Reporting and
Termination**

8/17

NEXT



15

Contemporary Models of Grief

**Continuing Bonds
(Silverman)**

The griever continues the bond with the deceased through connection with the internal relationship despite physical absence. May be seen by sensing the presence of the dead, talking about the deceased, talking to the deceased, using the deceased as a moral guide, and more.

6/17

NEXT



16

Contemporary Models of Grief

Dual Process Model (Strobe & Schut)

The griever oscillates between a "Loss Orientation" and "Restoration Orientation." The griever seeking emotional proximity to the deceased lingers near loss orientation while restoration encompasses present/future identification and adaptation. Grievers engage in "dosing" as they become more comfortable with the movement of grief.

6/17

NEXT 

17

Contemporary Models of Grief

Meaning Reconstruction (Neimeyer)

Rooted in a constructivist approach. Consists of "Loss Assimilation" or "Loss Accommodation" as well as a focus on sense making and benefit finding. By making meaning of the loss, the griever contextualizes the experience formulating a loss narrative. The griever commonly encounters existential questioning and identity reconstruction.

6/17

NEXT 

18

Virtual Grief Interventions

For griever across the lifespan

NEXT 

19

7/17

Virtual Grief Intervention 1



Hello Hand, Goodbye Hand

Source: Unknown

Goal: Build rapport, reinforce continuing bonds, externalize the experience of loss

Materials: None

Tech Support: Zoom, Teams, Miro, or other whiteboard app

Audience: Young children (4-9)

- Allow client time to reflect on themselves/ deceased
- Launch whiteboard feature
- Ask them to trace their hand on screen
- Provide prompts to add text to hand (hello: about themselves, goodbye: about the deceased)
- Explore

NEXT 

20

Virtual Grief Intervention 1



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- Explore

NEXT

Virtual Grief Intervention 2



G.O.A.T. Grief Edition

Source: Alissa Drescher

Goal: Normalize grief, explore perception of their experience, meaning making

Materials: List of statements about grief

Tech Support: WheelDecide or other online game spinner

Audience: Tweens

- Explain that they will play a game so that clinician can better understand their experience with grief
- Note there are no right/wrong answers.
- Share screen or send link to spinner
- Spin wheel and provide time for client to answer questions based on their experience
- Explore/Process

NEXT

Virtual Grief Intervention 3



Music and Memories

Source: Drescher, Majka, Orvis, 2012

Goal: Explore music as self-care, emotional expression, and reinforce continuing bonds

Materials: List of song prompts

Tech Support: YouTube, Spotify or other music app

Audience: Teens

- Discuss the power of music as it relates to loss
- Provide prompts to build a playlist:
 - My person's favorite song
 - A song from our relationship
 - A song that brings me comfort
 - A song I can cry to
 - A song for my future
- Explore/Process

NEXT 

Virtual Grief Intervention 4



What is Grief?

Source: Drescher, 2012

Goal: Externalize the client's relationship with loss, meaning making and framing grief.

Materials: Digital Images

Tech Support: GoogleForms

Audience: Young Adulthood

- Allow client time to reflect on the many metaphors for grief
- Provide GoogleForm link in chat or by email
- Ask them to choose an image that best represents what their grief is like right now
- Compare and contrast their experience with grief to that of the metaphor
- Explore/Process

NEXT 

Virtual Grief Intervention 5



Virtual Situational Revisiting

Adapted from: CGT (Shear, et al.)

Goal: Address overactive avoidance

Materials: Situational revisiting hierarchy list

Tech Support: Google Earth

Audience: Young Adulthood+

- Allow client time to reflect on the significant locations of the relationship
- Explain situational avoidance and its impact on the griever.
- Invite client to identify a location to revisit together.
- Discuss SUDS level and monitor distress
- Share screen/control and open GoogleEarth map
- Explore/Process
- Grounding exercise

NEXT 

25

Virtual Grief Intervention 6



Memory Show and Tell

Goal: Identify linking objects, emotional expression, legacy work

Materials: Mementos, photos, clothing, letters, etc.

Tech Support: Canva or other collage app

Audience: Older adults

- Allow client time to reflect on the deceased
- Invite client to gather treasured belongings photos, etc. to share with the clinician.
- Screenshot client's items and upload to collage creator
- Explore/process

NEXT 

26

Case Example

Ms. Betty

NEXT 

27

Additional Tools

01

Awwapp.com

Virsite Online whiteboard application

04

Shape Collage

Presentations are communication tools that can be used as demonstrations, lectures, speeches, reports, and more.

02

StoryCorps Connect

Record an interview remotely through a web browser.

05

New York Life Foundation

Presentations are communication tools that can be used as demonstrations, lectures, speeches, reports, and more.

03

GriefInSixWords.com

Presentations are communication tools that can be used as demonstrations, lectures, speeches, reports, and more.

06

MentiMeter

Presentations are communication tools that can be used as demonstrations, lectures, speeches, reports, and more.

8/17

NEXT 

28

Closing

Let tech ENHANCE, not REPLACE

No matter what device you're using, "it's [still] the relationship that heals."
- Irvin Yalom

12/17

NEXT 

29

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6/17

NEXT 

30

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17/17

