



# Shattered Assumptions: *Treat Grieving Clients Whose World Has Been Turned Upside Down*

Joy R. Samuels, D.MIN., LPC-MHSP, NCC

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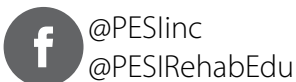
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37pp

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## **MATERIALS PROVIDED BY**

**Joy R. Samuels, D.MIN., LPC-MHSP, NCC, has over 25 years' experience as a licensed professional counselor, Fellow in Thanatology, chaplain, and ordained minister. She teaches in the graduate clinical mental health psychology department at Lipscomb University and at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in the United Methodist Church Course of Studies. She maintains a private counseling practice and supervises those seeking licensure as a LPC-MHSP.**

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**Financial: Joy Samuels is in private practice. She is an adjunct faculty at Lipscomb University.**

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# **Shattered Assumptions: Treating Grieving Clients Whose World Has Been Turned Upside Down**

joy r samuels, D.Min., LPC-MHSP, NCC  
Fellow in Thanatology



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## **Declarations**

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## Declarations

- Materials that are included in this course may include interventions and modalities that are beyond the authorized practice of mental health professionals.
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## Today's objectives

- 'Mind the gap' - differences between expectations and experiences
- Exploring how expectations are created and maintained
- How to identify expectations and value language in clients
- Interventions to explore family of origin events
- Assessments to explore values and strengths
- Creating opportunities to recreate your assumptive world

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*Give sorrow words; the grief that  
does not speak*

*Whispers the o'er fraught heart  
and bids it break.*

Shakespeare, *Macbeth* IV, iii, 209

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## **Limitations of the approach and potential risks**

While there are several research studies supporting these approaches there are limitations to the existing studies such as:

- number of subjects (power),
- lack of randomization,
- generalizability (for example to diverse populations)

As with any psychotherapy there are some potential risks that you should discuss with your clients, we think these include:

- potential increase of client distress,
- potential disruption to client's mental health well being.

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<https://youtu.be/UOPyGKDQuRk>

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- Experience- here and now, felt sense, mindfulness
- Expectation- assumptive world, core beliefs

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# Case conceptualization

## 'Mind the gap'

- 75, white, cis-gender female, upper SES, single following her spouse's death, adult estranged step-children, strong religious identification, and faith community support.
- Expectation- to continue her favorite way of self identification, i.e., a married self
- Experience- without her spouse, she is no longer a 'married' self



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***Exploring how expectations are created and maintained***

*The feeling that good things are going to happen in the future.*

Oxford Dictionary

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- The world is benevolent
- The world is meaningful
- The self is worthy

Janoff-Bulman (1992)

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- Benevolence of the world involves the extent to which an individual views the world in general and other people in positive or negative terms.
- Survivors may view the world as a place in which bad things happen and its people uncaring.

Ferrajão (2019)

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## The world is meaningful

- Beliefs about the distribution of outcomes, including expectations of fairness and justice, perceived control over events, and the degree to which randomness is explainable in the course of events.
- Survivors may view the world as an unjust and uncontrollable place in which events happen by chance—that is, bad things may happen to good people.

Ferrajão (2019)

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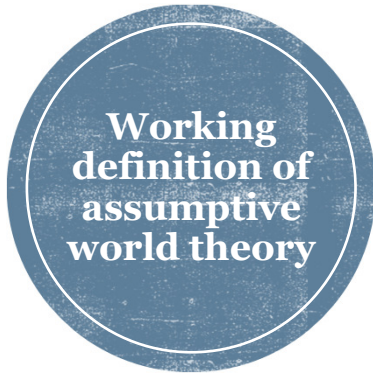


## The self is worthy

- Worthiness of self involves self-perceptions of goodness, morality, or decency; the ability to engage in appropriate behaviors and decision making; and a sense of being lucky or fortunate in one's life.
- They may develop a negative self-image, viewing themselves as bad, immoral, and subject to and deserving of ill-fortune.

Ferrajão (2019)

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**Our assumptive world may be composed of:**

- How we tend to view others and their intentions
- How we believe the world should work
- How we tend to view ourselves.

Harris (2020)

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## **Assumptive World Harris (2020)**

- Each of us has formed a way of seeing things and interpreting events that makes sense to us. This is our assumptive world.
- Our assumptive world helps us to feel a sense of predictability, consistency, and safety as we go through our daily activities.
- The way that we view the world, others, and ourselves is formed when we were very young and becomes the base from where we make choices, form relationships, and establish our beliefs about how life should work.

Harris (2020)



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## Loss of our Assumptive World Harris (2020)

- Significant life-changing events can cause us to feel deeply vulnerable and unsafe.
- The world that we once knew, the people that we relied upon, and the beliefs and perceptions that we once held may no longer be relevant in light of what we have now experienced (or are currently experiencing).
- The grief response is elicited in response to the loss of our assumptive world; we may lose small parts, or our whole assumptive world can be shattered.
- The appraisal of loss is subjective and entirely dependent upon an individual's experience and interpretation of the loss.

Harris (2020)



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## Holistic Approach

- It is important to note that the assumptive world is more than a cognitive construct; these assumptions exist at the very core of what in life provides us with a sense of meaning, purpose, and security.
- Each category of assumption will have cognitive aspects, but will also incorporate:
  - social,
  - spiritual,
  - emotional,
  - psychological components.

Harris (2020)



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## Overlapping losses Harris (2020)

**Presenting Loss**    **Diagnosis of dementia in loved one**

- **Ambiguous Loss**    Loved one physically present but psychologically emotionally absent due to disease process.
- **Nonfinite Loss**    Diagnosis of dementia typically ongoing, usually progressive in nature.
- **Chronic Sorrow**    Loss of loved one's ability to engage and participate in family life are ongoing with no foreseeable end.



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## Overlapping losses cont.

- **Tangible Loss**    Outward signs that loved one is compromised; incidents of not remembering names, confusion, inability to function outwardly noticeable.
- **Intangible Loss**    Grief over lost relationship while loved one alive; changes in family dynamics, affinities, and interactions.



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## Overlapping losses cont.

- **Disenfranchised** If loved one is physically present, grief is not acknowledged socially; however, loved ones may be acutely grieving before death of the loved one with dementia.

Compromises made by family members who provide care of loved one are often unrecognized but may have significant impact upon family system (i.e., financial, emotional).

Harris (2020)



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*“Shaken, and not stirred.”*

James Bond, Dr. No (1958)



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## Journal of Research in Personality

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jrp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jrp)



Full Length Article

### When are assumptions shaken? A prospective, longitudinal investigation of negative life events and worldviews in a national sample <sup>☆</sup>



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#### ABSTRACT

Theorists maintain that negative life events (NLE) can alter worldviews, but evidence for this idea has been lacking. We present a model that raises three questions: (1) Do different types of NLE engender different types of worldview change? (2) Do factors that facilitate positive reappraisals of NLE buffer against worldview change? (3) Does change in stability of worldviews occur independent of change in worldview content? These questions were examined in data from a national U.S. sample of adults surveyed prospectively over a three-year period ( $N = 2138$ ). NLE were reported by 91.6% of the sample. Each question was answered at least in part in the affirmative. Exposure to NLE may affect worldviews and thereby individual well-being and social behavior.

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## Negative Life Events (NLE)

Over the past three decades, multiple theorists have proposed that the psychological effects of NLE, including both negative and positive outcomes such as:

- depression,
- anxiety,
- PTSD,
- posttraumatic growth,

stem in part from their unique capacity to *challenge and alter individuals' worldviews.*

Poulin (2019)

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Do different types of NLE predict different types of worldview change?

- Different types of negative life events predicted change in different worldview beliefs:
  - Certain illnesses (threaten **meaningfulness beliefs**),
  - Certain events (violence- threatens **benevolence beliefs**)
- **Recent violence** predicted a decline in **benevolence beliefs**, as did recent relationship events.
- In contrast, **community disasters** predicted increased **benevolence beliefs**.

Poulin (2019)



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Do factors facilitating positive reappraisals moderate the effects of NLE on worldviews?

- **Age** significantly moderated the association between total number of recent events and levels of **benevolence beliefs**.
- **Spirituality** was not a significant moderator of the association between recent negative events and **benevolence beliefs**.
- None of the proposed moderators tested—**age**, **social support**, and **religiosity/spirituality**—moderated the association between NLE and **meaningfulness beliefs**.

Poulin (2019)



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## Do NLE predict changes in chronic stability of worldview beliefs?

- Recent events **did not significantly predict** instability of either belief (benevolence beliefs and meaningfulness beliefs)
- Worldviews changed the most in the **absence of factors** that may help individuals reinterpret those events, such as **older age and social support**.

Poulin (2019)



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## Shaken vs. shattered

- Individuals who experienced more negative events had less stable worldviews over time.
- In general, worldview change was *small*, highlighting the apparent stability of these beliefs.

Poulin (2019)

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# George Bonanno

## Resilience

- His research has identified **resilience** as the core experience of most people who experience trauma.
- By resilience is meant the ability of individuals exposed to a potentially highly disruptive event to maintain both healthy psychological and physical functioning and the capacity for positive emotions.
- **Individual characteristics and environmental stressors** before and after an event appear to have more of an impact on the response to traumatic events than the nature of the event itself.
- <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/ltelab/>

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What are  
your  
assumptions  
for today?

Our assumptions are guides for our  
day-to-day thoughts and behaviors.

Janoff-Bulman (1992)



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# Case conceptualization

## *Expectations created and maintained*

“I wanted to be married”

- Faith community highlighted connections through family and strongly held gender roles, e.g., engagement, wedding, pregnancy, birth, baptism, confirmation.
- Social and professional roles



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## *How to identify expectations and value language in clients*

How do clients talk about:

- Access
- Knowledge
- Belief
- Social Support
  
- Use of generalizations, and globalizations

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# Access Knowledge Belief Social support

- Traffic was so horrible today.
- I got lost a couple of times trying to find this place.
- I really don't understand why she does that.
- I've never heard of that before.
- No one has been able to help me before.
- This is just so hard for me to do.
- I have to hurry home before my partner comes home.
- I can't get anyone to help with my kids.



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*“Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”*

quoted by Chinua Achebe (1958)

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# Tell me a story

Roger Schank

Who are you in your story?



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## Case conceptualization

- *Expectation language*
- 'I guess I'll have to go to the old women's bible study'

There were several groups that had identified themselves by interest, not gender (her confirmation bias that single people could not have interests outside of marriage)



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## ***Interventions to explore family of origin themes***

- 'Thin slice moments'
- Genogram
- In my family we...
- Holidays, Celebrations

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***"Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationships."***

Bowlby (1977)

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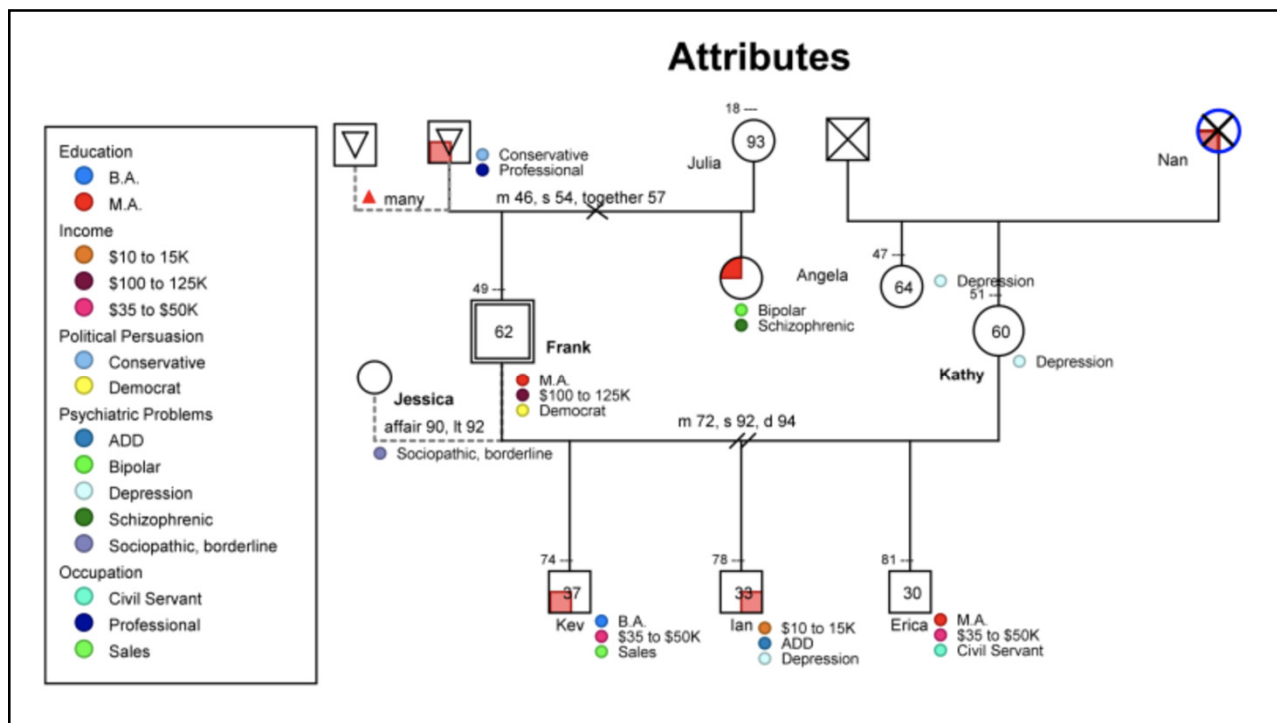


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## ‘Thin slice’ moments

- How did the big moments shape your life?
- What messages did you receive from family and friends?
- What messages would you give yourself?

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A circular graphic with the text "Holidays & Celebrations" and a list of five questions. The questions are: Who, When, Where, What, How, and Why (meaning making).

**Holidays  
&  
Celebrations**

- Who
- When
- Where
- What
- How
  
- Why (meaning making)

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# Case conceptualization

## *'Thin Slice Moments'*

- Not being able to pursue Math as a profession
- First clear memory of adaptation which helped her reframe her difficulties to:

*'I have done difficult things before'*



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## ***Assessments to explore values and strengths***

- <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu>  
VIA  
GRIT  
Brief Strengths Survey
- <https://www.viacharacter.org>
- <https://positivepsychology.com/strength-finding-tests/>

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**resiliency**

Introducing a New Theory of Well-Being

- <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/learn>

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## Assessments cont.

- Core Bereavement Items (Burnett et al., 1997)
- World Assumptions Scale (Janoff-Bulman, 1989)
- Grief and Meaning Reconstruction Inventory (Gillies et al., 2015)
- Persistent Complex Bereavement Inventory (Lee, 2015)

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# Case conceptualization

'What do you well?'

Her '*Love of learning*' moved to her to explore her grief process through a lens of 'what am I learning today?'



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***Creating opportunities to shape your assumptive world***

Relearning the world or coming to terms with the loss of our assumptive world is primarily about learning new ways of acting and being in the world.

Attig (2002)

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*“Trauma is a chronic disruption of connectedness.”*

Stephen Porges (2019)

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Reactive/Dysregulated  
Reflective  
Reintegrated/Reregulated

Kosminsky, Phyllis S.; Jordan, John R.  
(2016)

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## Reframing our shattered assumptions

**Our assumptive world may be composed of:**

- How we tend to view others and their intentions
- How we believe the world should work
- How we tend to view ourselves.

Harris (2020)



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**In order to:**

- Create safety
- Focus on what is important

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## The Dual Process Model of Grief

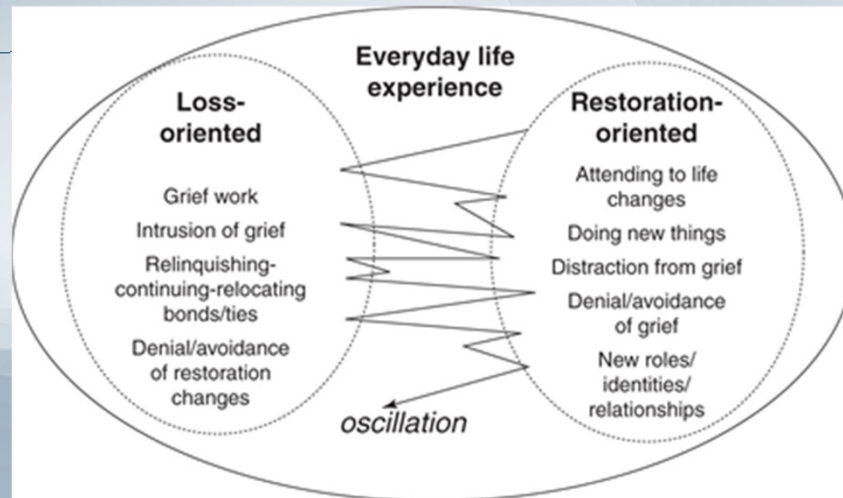


FIGURE 3.1 The dual process model of bereavement.  
 Source: From Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Stroebe, W. (2005). Attachment in coping with bereavement: A theoretical integration.  
*Review of General Psychology*, 9(1), 48–66.

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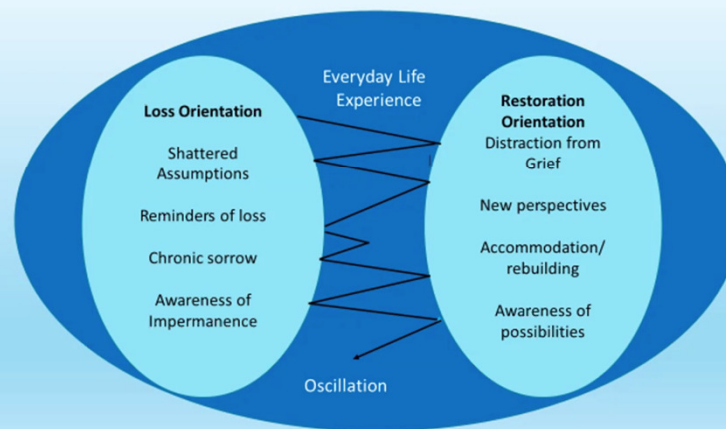
Oscillation:

Recognize feelings,  
 go into them as  
 needed

Alternated with

Focusing on life  
 and what is not  
 part of the crisis.

## Dual Process Model Applied to All Loss Types



Harris (2020), modified from Stroebe & Schut (1999)

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*“It is the meaning of the traumatic event, for the survivor, that determines which assumptions are affected and how the event is understood.”*

Beder (2005)

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## Meaning reconstruction

### Neimeyer

Grieving is a process of reconstructing a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss

- Redefining the self
- Redefining how one engages with the world
- <http://www.robertneimeyerphd.com/>



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# interventions

## 1. *DISTANGELING MULTIPLE LOSSES*

- Distinguish between the relational implications, grief-related feelings, and needs associated with each loss

## 2. *THE GRIEF RIVER* <http://www.griefriver.com/>

- Headwaters, rapids, runs, delta

## 3. *WHO AM I?* Write 4 answers to each question:

- Who was I?
- Who was I while these events took place?
- Who am I now?
- Who do I want to be?



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# interventions

## 4. *LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION*

- May I be free from inner and outer harm and danger. May I be safe and protected.
- May I be free of mental suffering or distress.
- May I be happy.
- May I be free of physical pain and suffering.
- May I be healthy and strong.
- May I be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully, with ease.

Jack Kornfield



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# interventions

## 5. WELCOMING WHAT IS <http://www.focusing.org/index.htm>

- Welcoming the resistance
- Inviting a felt sense
- Attending
- Articulating
- Resonating
- Sensing a stopping point



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## 6. GRIEF NARRATIVE

Writing your personal grief narrative



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# interventions

## 7. LETTERS TO SELF

### Writing from adult to child

- What do you want to tell your “child” so that you are prepared for your future life?

### Writing from child to teen

- What does your “child” want you to hold on to that could get lost in adolescence?

### Writing from present to future self

- What are you hoping to change for the future?



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# interventions

## 8. RELATIONSHIP REVIEW

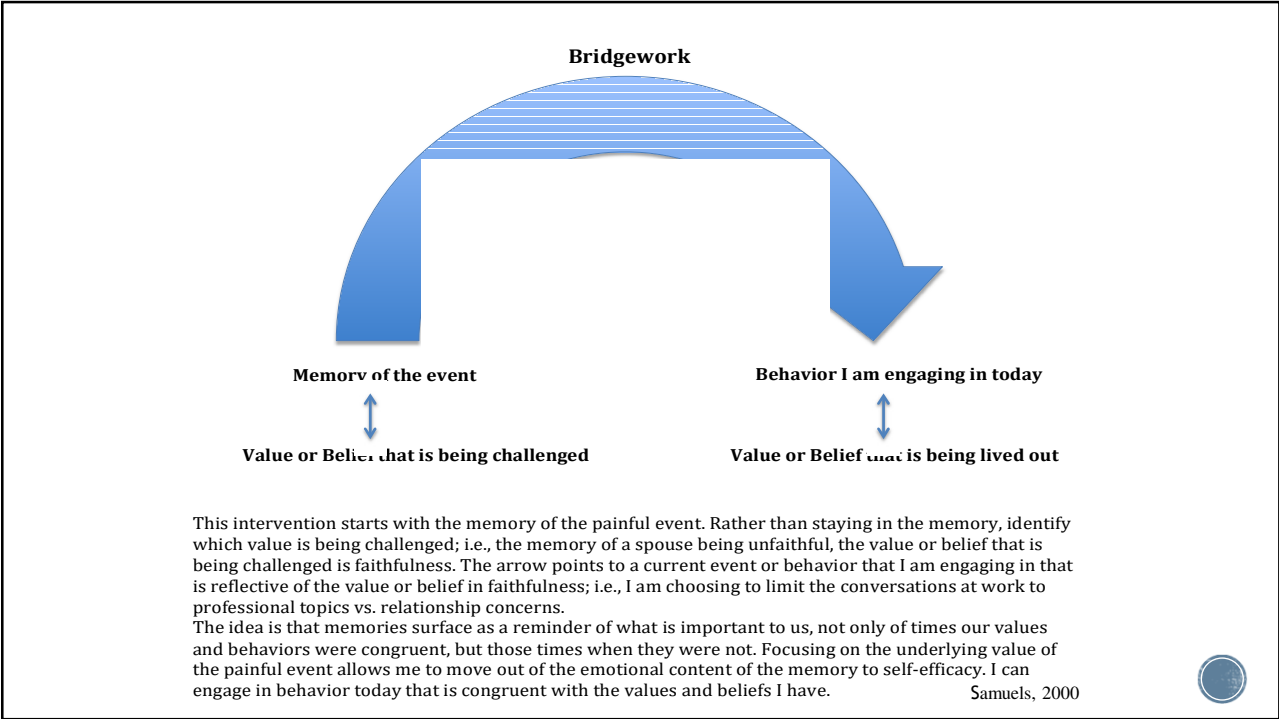
- The clinician identifies narrative disruptions, disorganization, dominant themes, and other obstacles that need to be restructured to allow integration to occur. Neimeyer (2006)

## 9. *Mapping the influence of the loss*

## 10. *Bridgework*, Samuels (2000)



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# Case conceptualization

‘What is important?’

*‘Tell him I’m coming.’*

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# Final Thoughts

Very rarely do we permit ourselves to *understand* precisely what the meaning of his (sic) statement is to him (sic). I believe this is because understanding is risky.

If I let myself really understand another person, *I might be changed by that understanding.* Rogers (1961)



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# podcasts

- <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/griefcast/id1178572854>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/terrible-thanks-for-asking/id1126119288>
- <https://help2makesense.org/podcast/>
- <https://www.cruse.org.uk/blog/podcasts-for-grief>
- <https://player.fm/podcasts/Loss-And-Grief>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/grief-out-loud/id963387015>



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## apps

- [https://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Bereavement\\_Support/MyGrief/ACGB/Bereavement\\_Support/MyGrief.aspx?hkey=aa58a004-82f0-408e-8ce5-7f0d0624df87](https://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/MyGrief/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/MyGrief.aspx?hkey=aa58a004-82f0-408e-8ce5-7f0d0624df87)
- <https://www.headspace.com/science>
- <https://liliesgriefsupport.weebly.com>
- <https://bounce.works/apartofme/>
- <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ima.fantastic.griefsupport&hl=en&gl=US>

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## websites

- [www.adec.org](http://www.adec.org)
- <https://complicatedgrief.columbia.edu>
- <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/LTElab/>
- <http://www.robertneimeyphd.com/home.html>
- [Http://deathcafe.com](http://deathcafe.com)
- <http://www.nationalhospicefoundation.org>
- <http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/>
- [www.optionb.org](http://www.optionb.org)
- <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu>

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## professional journals

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/upil20/current>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0030222817691870>
- <https://journals.lww.com/jhpn/pages/default.aspx>
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