Principles of Grief Therapy with Suicide Loss Survivors

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WORKSHOP OVERVIEW
Suicide Bereavement Clinician Training

- Introduction
- Themes of Suicide Bereavement (Brief Review)
- Orientation to Grief Therapy
- Grief Therapy Techniques with Survivors
- Summary & Guidelines
- Wrap-Up

Prominent Themes For Survivors

- WHY? - Making Sense of the Death
- RESPONSIBILITY - Guilt & Blame
  - Role of magical thinking
- TRAUMA & HELPLESSNESS - Shock & Horror
- ANGER - Rejection & Abandonment
- RELIEF - The End Of Suffering
Prominent Themes For Survivors

- SHAME - Stigma
- SOCIAL AMBIGUITY – Isolation & Social Disruption
- SUICIDALITY – Why Go On?
- SORROW – Grief & Yearning
- POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Foundations of Grief Therapy

An Orientation to Grief Therapy

- Head & heart work
- Medical vs. companioning models
  - Symptom focused vs. person focused
  - Technique vs. relationship
  - Diagnosis vs. relationship building
- "Rules" of Therapy Must Be Flexible
- Goal = Integration, not resolution
  - "Boulder" metaphor
Use Of Focused Techniques

- A Word About Technique In Grief Counseling
- Trauma Reduction Techniques
  - EMDR & Retelling the death narrative
- Meaning Reconstruction Techniques
  - Life Imprint Exercise
- Relational Repair Techniques
  - “Empty Chair” Guided Imagery

The Use of Technique in Grief Therapy

- Without Wisdom, Technique Is:
  - At best useless
  - At worst dangerous
- Wisely Used, Technique Is:
  - Invaluable
    - The right technique
    - At the right time
    - With the right skillfulness
- The Core is the Therapeutic Relationship, not Techniques

Trauma Reduction Techniques

- Underlying Principles
  - Establishment of safety, control, & self-soothing skills
  - Controlled re-exposure to traumatic images, memories, sensory data
  - Perspective taking
- EMDR - Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing - (Shapiro, 2004)
  - Background
  - Protocol
- Retelling the Narrative of the Death
  - Shear’s Complicated Grief Therapy (2205, 2006)
Meaning Reconstruction – Making Sense of the Loss
- Psychological Autopsy
  - The procedure
  - The possible benefits
    - Note: AAS training in Psych. Autopsy
- Pennebaker Writing Protocol
  - Background
  - Protocol
  - Uses of the technique
- Other Uses of Writing
  - Neimeyer's Life Imprint Technique

The Life Imprint Exercise – Neimeyer (2012)
- Decide About Whom You Wish to Journal
- This person has had the following impact on:
  - My mannerisms or gestures:
  - My ways of speaking/communicating:
  - My work and pastimes:

The Life Imprint Exercise – Neimeyer (2012)
- My feelings about myself & others:
- My basic personality:
- My values and beliefs:
- The imprints I would most like to affirm and develop are:
- The imprints I would most like to relinquish or change are:
Relational Repair Techniques

- Letter writing
- Empty Chair
  - Imaginal (guided imagery)
  - Enactment
  - Ritual (e.g., graveside)
- Guided Imaginal Conversation (Jordan, 2012)

Relational Repair Technique – Guided Imaginal Conversation

- Guided imaginal conversation with the deceased – (Jordan, 2012)
  - Background
  - Procedures

Summary: Guidelines For Working With Suicide Survivors
Guidelines

Revise your assumptions about the grieving process & clinician role
- Goal ≠ Integration not resolution of the loss
- Duration & intensity of the grief response
- Expert companioning vs. “treatment”

Longer term therapy
- Not necessarily more sessions
- Overall goal = provide a safe & sheltered context for doing griefwork & expanding repertoire of coping skills

Educate the survivor
- About suicide, trauma, grief, & recovery
- Encourage self-education
- Emphasize self-care; trial and error, and empowerment through skill acquisition

Attend to traumatization
- Combine therapies for PTSD & grief
- Facilitate confronting and reworking of the death narrative
- Dosed re-exposure to avoided triggers
  - Imaginal & in-vivo
- Personal psychological autopsy/inquest
- “Walk in the shoes of the deceased” – Sands
- Differentiate the self from the deceased
- Go slowly with guilt
- Gently help with reality testing
- Consider “atonement”

Support transformation of attachment to the deceased
- Development of continuing bonds
- Reparative work on the ruptured relationship
- Facilitate restoration of positive imagery, memories & connection
- Encourage memorialization of the deceased
Guidelines

- Address family & social network issues
  - Scapegoating
  - Coping asynchrony & relational strain
- Facilitate contact with other survivors
  - Groups
  - Internet
  - Reading personal narratives

Guidelines

- Facilitate meaning making (Sense-making & benefit finding)
  - Redemption - “Don’t Waste Your Grief”
  - Bearing witness
  - Spiritual search
  - Honoring the life, not the death/suicide
  - Activism - Preventing reoccurrence & assisting other survivors
- Encourage Reinvestment in Life & Exploration
  - Ritualize transitions
  - Encourage new activities, goals
  - Seek Growth In Your Clients

Two Final Thoughts

- Postvention is Prevention
- It Takes a Village to Journey with a Survivor
WRAP-UP

- Questions?
- Comments?
- What will you take with you?

2. American Association of Suicidology – Clinician-Survivor Task Force (2018): [http://cliniciansurvivor.org](http://cliniciansurvivor.org). The AAS Clinician Survivor Task Force provides support and resources to clinicians and professional caregivers who have experienced the suicide loss of patients, loved ones, students and/or clinical colleagues.


83. Song, I. H., Kwan, S. W., & Kim, J. E. Association between Suicidal Ideation and Exposure to Suicide in Social Relationships among Family, Friend, and Acquaintance Survivors in South Korea. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 45(3).


SURVIVING AFTER SUICIDE LOSS

Recommended Readings for Suicide Loss Survivors


_Linn-Gust, M._ **Do they have bad days in heaven? Surviving the suicide loss of a sibling**. Atlanta, GA: Bolton Press, 2001 (Chellehead Works 2002).


_Rubel, Barbara._ **But I Didn’t Say Goodbye: For Parents and Professionals Helping Child Suicide Survivors**. Griefwork Center, Inc. 2000.


_Wroblefski, A. & Reidenberg, D._ **Suicide: Why? 85 Questions and Answers**, 3rd Ed. SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education), 2005. (http://www.save.org/)
**Book Services:**

These book services specialize in a wide range of books related to loss and bereavement, for children, adolescents, and adults.

- Centering Corporation – Omaha, NE – Telephone - 866-218-0101 http://www.centering.org/

**Organizations and Online Resources:**

All of these groups have resources for survivors.

- Alliance of Hope - Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors — bit.ly/hopeall — Internet community focused on 24/7 peer assistance for the suicide bereaved
- Canadian Association for Suicide prevention – Survivor Resources: http://suicideprevention.ca/coping/survivor-support/
- G.R.A.S.P. – Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing – see http://grasphelp.org/ - support groups and resources for parents bereaved after the drug overdose of a child.
- Parents of Suicide and Friends and Families of Suicide - http://www.pos-ffos.com/ - online web resources for parents bereaved by suicide, and other family members/friends bereaved by suicide (siblings, children, spouses, friends, etc.).
- Samaritans Grief Support Services – 41 West St., 4th Floor - Boston, MA 02111 Telephone: 877 870 4673. www.samaritanshope.org/
- Samaritans of Rhode Island – Telephone: 401-272-4044 - www.samaritansri.org/home.htm
- SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education) - 8120 Penn Ave. S., Suite 470, Bloomington, MN – 55431 – Telephone 952- 946-7998.
- SOLOS – Survivors of Loved Ones to Suicide, Inc – http://www.solossupport.org – online support community for suicide loss survivors
- After A Suicide Resource Directory – a comprehensive listing of support resources for suicide survivors. – bit.ly/afterasuicide