

Grief and the Quest for Meaning: *Reconstructing the Continuing Bond*

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About the presenter:

Robert A. Neimeyer, Ph.D., is Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, where he also maintains an active clinical practice. Since completing his doctoral training at the University of Nebraska in 1982, he has published 27 books, including *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved* and *Grief and the Expressive Arts: Practices for Creating Meaning* (both with Routledge), and serves as Editor of the journal *Death Studies*. The author of over 400 articles and book chapters, he is currently working to advance a more adequate theory of grieving as a meaning-making process, both in his published work and through his frequent professional workshops for national and international audiences. The recipient of the MISS Foundation's *Phoenix Award: Rising to the Service of Humanity*, Neimeyer served as Chair of the International Work Group for Death, Dying, & Bereavement and President of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, he has been granted the Eminent Faculty Award by the University of Memphis, made a Fellow of the Clinical Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association, given ADEC's Research Recognition and Clinical Practice Awards, and designated an Honored Associate of the Viktor Frankl Association for his career contributions to the study of human meaning.

Workshop Description

Death may end a life, but not necessarily a relationship. Drawing on attachment-informed and two-track models of bereavement, we will begin by considering grieving as a process of reconstructing rather than relinquishing our bonds with those who have died, and the circumstances that can interfere with this natural process. Clinical videos bearing on the death of parents, children and spouses will sensitize participants to various impediments to revisiting and reorganizing the “back story” of the ongoing relationship with the deceased, as well as to several techniques that can help move such work forward. Creative narrative, emotion-focused and performative methods will be presented and practiced for re-introducing the deceased into the social and psychological world of the bereaved, fostering a sustaining sense of connection and alliance with the loved one in embracing a changed future, and working through issues of guilt, anger and abandonment triggered by the death and the shared life that preceded it. Participants will leave with several tools for assessing “pro-symptom positions” that complicate grieving, helping clients appreciate the role of the loved one in their construction of their own identities, and re-accessing and revising frozen dialogues with the deceased that hamper post-loss adaptation.

Learning outcomes:

- Identify dimensions of insecure attachment that complicate adaptation to the death
- Distinguish between healthy and unhealthy features of continuing bonds with the deceased
- Describe two procedures for detecting obstacles to accommodating the loss deriving from invisible loyalties to the loved one
- Practice two techniques for consolidating a constructive bond with the deceased as the client transitions toward a changed future
- Choreograph imaginal dialogues between the client and the deceased to reaffirm love and resolve residual conflicts and disappointments
- Direct experiential work to access and restructure problematic emotions linked to the loss and its aftermath