

# Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction



Portland Institute  
For Loss and Transition

## Training and Basic Certification Program in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction

*Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction Training Course* offers intense, professional training in grief therapy, counseling and bereavement support which acquaints participants with a broad range of practical techniques, as well conceptual understanding relevant to their practice.

The program consists of **2 main modules** and **3 complementary modules**.

**Module 1** (21 hours) includes the Core Courses addressing grief and its complications, providing a theoretical frame of grief therapy, and conveying practical and research informed strategies for facilitating meaning reconstruction. This phase of the training introduces the constructivist, narrative perspective, according to which grief requires an attempt to reaffirm or reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by the loss. Participants learn trauma-informed interventions relevant to processing the event story of loss (e.g. Narrative Retelling), and attachment informed interventions (e.g. Introducing the Loved One) related to accessing the back story of the relationship and reconstructing the symbolic bond.

**Module 2** (21 hours) includes varied techniques, applicable in the individual and group settings, and practicum hours. In this program it focuses on work with bodily sensed meanings, the multiplicity of the self and healing dialogues and includes work with ambiguous and non-death- related losses. It consists of a deepening process, in which introduced techniques build one on another in order to a) facilitate the openness and receptivity to the implicit and unspeakable (i.e. Listening to the Body and Analogical Listening), b) differentiate the complexity of the self and emotions (i.e. Composition Work), c) process interpersonal and intrapersonal relations (e.g., Chair Work), and d) construct new life meanings in the wake of loss.

Participants who are interested in completing the Certification Program should also complete the complementary modules listed below:

- Orientation for Reconstructing Meaning: self-learning readings and reflections (12 hours)
- Individual tutoring: minimum 3 hours (3 sessions of 1 hour)
- Evaluation session: Analysis and evaluation of 3 hours of videos and transcripts

Apart from the intense professional learning, the training serves to build a sense of community in a growing worldwide network of providers associated with the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, which can be joined at no cost by those participants who will complete the online modules included in the Basic Certification Program in Meaning Reconstruction in Loss.

By participating actively in systematic experiential workshops and mentoring, learners:

- a) develop competencies in helping the bereaved to:
- process traumatic loss,
  - reconstruct a symbolic bond with the deceased,
  - access new meanings as essential sources of change and renewal,
  - explore and restructure problematic emotions and identities linked to the loss and its aftermath,
  - re-compose new identity after the loss,

b) learn

- a broad range of useful, applicable techniques to process grief in individual and group settings,
- different forms of dialogue to process grief,
- art based methods to work with loss in grief therapy,
- to process their own grief, deepening emotional awareness, presence and enhancing self-care,
- to apply knowledge and methods to particularly difficult losses, such as suicide, traumatic death, and loss of a child or a couple.

### **Substantiation:**

As contemporary models of bereavement have become more nuanced and empirically informed, so too have the practices available to grief counselors and therapists.

Participation at Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction Training Course provides intense, professional training in grief therapy, counseling and bereavement support which acquaints participants with a broad range of practical techniques, as well conceptual understanding relevant to their practice.

### **Participants :**

The program is aimed at all health professionals interested in grief and loss care: psychologists, doctors, nurses, social workers, among others.

### **Methodology:**

The General Methodology is based on the Experiential Learning Model (ELM)

ELM assumes that learning occurs in a cycle intersected by two dimensions: 1) Prehending or taking in or grasping information and 2) Transforming or processing information. The prehending dimension is expressed on a concrete-abstract continuum. The transforming dimension is made up of a reflective-active continuum. The opposing ends of the intersecting dimensions are called learning modes: Concrete Experience (Experiencing), Reflective Observation (Reflecting), Abstract Conceptualization (Thinking), and Active Experimentation (Applying).

Deep learning involves all four of these modes. For this reason, all PI training involves “teaching around the circle,” anchoring learning in concrete experience (e.g., clinical videos, demonstrations, case studies), promoting reflective processing (e.g., small and large group discussion), presenting abstract conceptualization (e.g., lecture and readings on theory, research and practice), and leading into active experimentation with strategies and techniques (e.g., in individual, dyadic and small group exercises). This cycle repeats several times across the course of each module.

### *Onsite Training Program Overview*

## **Module 1: Core Courses**

### **Day 1. Grief and its Complications: A Conceptual Frame for Grief Therapy**

We present contemporary models of grief, including conceptualization and diagnosis of complicated grief or prolonged grief disorder. Viewed in constructivist, narrative terms, grieving entails an attempt to reaffirm or reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss. We will consider adaptive grieving in terms of the ability to process the “event story” of the death to make sense of it and to access the “back story” of the relationship with the deceased to restore attachment security. By extension, complicated, prolonged and traumatic grief can be conceptualized as a breakdown in these same processes. We will exemplify this perspective in videos of actual clients in grief therapy, as well as review the latest evidence supporting this meaning reconstruction model and related theories.

### **Day 2. Processing the ‘Event Story’ of the Loss: Trauma-informed Interventions**

In Day 2, participants first practice establishing a therapeutic sense of presence to the client’s processes as well as their own, and also recognize factors that impede this mindful stance. They then learn how to help clients voice and integrate the narrative of the loss and mine its meaning for their ongoing life in its aftermath. Working in small groups, participants practice how to reinforce emotion regulation, prevent re-traumatization, and foster the construction of a more coherent narrative in which the event story of the loss can be included in a new way. Several additional techniques to assist in the reconstruction of meaning in the

loss are considered, clearing a space for renewing and revising the continuing bond with the deceased and opening a path to a stronger sense of self.

### **Day 3. Accessing the ‘Back Story’ of the Relationship: Attachment-informed Interventions**

Reconstruction of one’s life and identity in loss and transition is closely related to the reconstruction of the relationship with the deceased, in a new symbolic form. Anchoring our conceptualization in a continuing bonds model of coping with loss, we’ll then consider how to utilize ongoing attachment to the deceased as a resource in grief therapy, while also assessing forms of bonding that are associated with prolonged suffering. Participants learn how to explore the complexity of this relation, drawing on such techniques as Introducing the Loved One, Correspondence with the deceased, and the Life Imprint. These techniques are applicable in group and individual settings.

*Specific methodology Module 1:*

- Lecture and discussion
- Clinical video
- Live demonstration
- Case study
- Small group practice

## **Module 2. Re-composing the self in loss and transition**

### **Day 4. Accessing the wisdom of the body: Work with implicit meaning in grief therapy**

At a deep sensed level, we know more than we can say, so that grief therapists often must assist a client in the delicate process of meaning symbolization, in which an attitude of ‘not knowing’ and curiosity can be an entrance to the ‘knowing body.’ The body carries the implicit sensed seeds of feelings, which can ripen into the explicit fruits of new meanings if given attention in an open, soft and patient way. This subtle process of bottom-up emergence of new meanings requires focusing on pre-verbal, somatic experiencing, which can be more easily expressed in figurative, symbolic, and metaphoric terms, rather than through a linear narrative account. This day of training coaches participants on this implicit

quest for meaning using Analogical Listening and related body-centered procedures and imaginative techniques, which contribute new perspectives on client needs and possibilities for recomposing their life and self in the wake of loss and transition.

### **Day 5. Re-composing the multiple self in loss and transition**

Starting from the implicit, bodily sensed level, participants learn to work with the multiplicity and complexity of the self in loss and transition. Expanding awareness of the body beyond our habitual focus, listening to the messages of vaguely sensed feelings located in different parts of the body may invite and allow less accessible, ignored parts of ourselves (“I-positions” in the language of Dialogical Self Theory or DST) to be recognized, validated, and recruited to support adaptation to a changed life. Participants will learn to use Composition Work to differentiate those aspects of their identity and social world involved in the loss and transition, explore their relations (e.g. internal and external conflicts) and experiment with possibilities for their reorganization (e.g. possible integration). Differentiation of a broad range of self-aspects involved in the process of adaptation can then reveal a need for the further processing of relations between these elements in a transformative dialogue.

### **Day 6. Healing dialogues: Addressing conflicts, reconstructing the continuing bond**

In order to construct new meanings in the process of loss and transition, a variety of intra-subjective and inter-subjective relations may need to be processed and transformed in dialogue. Training in variations in chair work for addressing *internal conflict* (e.g., self-blame or ambivalence) and *unfinished business* (e.g. unfulfilled wishes or unresolved conflict with the deceased) will help participants address these common problems that complicate adaptation to loss. In addition, symbolic experiential dialogue with a growth-enhancing “promoter position” in the client’s “community of self” or in relation to internalized significant others. Alternative formats for fostering this dialogue will also be considered such as therapeutic correspondence and journaling.

### *Specific methodology Module 2:*

- Lecture and discussion
- Clinical video
- Live demonstration
- Case study
- Small group practice
- Practicum with close supervision by PI faculty

## **Complementary modules**

- Guidance for Reconstructing Meaning: self-learning readings and reflections
- Individual tutoring: minimum 3 hours
- Evaluation Session: Analyzing and Evaluating Videos and Transcripts

The complementary modules will have the participation of collaborating professors from the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition.

For more information, visit the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition website [www.portlandinstitute.org](http://www.portlandinstitute.org)

### ***Certification and accreditation***

The requirement to have the Certification in Bereavement Therapy as Reconstruction of Meaning from the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition is to have completed the 2 main modules, as well as the 3 complementary modules.

*Participants who have the Basic Certification and who meet the criteria of professionalism in their discipline and country may be included in the Portland Institute's Global Provider Network.*

The program of Training and Certification in Bereavement Therapy as Reconstruction of Significance has the recognition of Activity of Health Interest (RIS) issued by the Departament de Salut de Generalitat de Catalunya with registration number 9002E/87/2019 and is accredited with 5.0 credits by the

Catalan Council for the Continuing Education of Health Professionals (09/025079-PG).

When you have completed each program, you will be accredited by the corresponding Portland Institute, Basic Certification or Specialized Certification. Once you have completed both programs, you have the possibility of obtaining accreditation as a university expert.

### ***Price***

The Training and Certification Program in Bereavement Therapy as Reconstruction of Significance includes 2 basic modules (6 days) and 3 complementary modules.

**Price 2.640€ - 10% discount for early registration**

This training (60 hours) can be subsidized through the FUNDAE.



Go to [www.fundaciohospital.org](http://www.fundaciohospital.org) for more information about prices and annual calendar of modules and training programs, or write to [inscripcionespi@fundaciohospital.org](mailto:inscripcionespi@fundaciohospital.org)

### ***Calendar***

In this first edition, this programme is taught in Barcelona but is working to make it in other cities in Spain and Portugal

Programme and basic certification PI

BARCELONA

Module 1 November 2019

Module 2 June 2020

Complementary courses between

November 2019 and June 2020

### **For further inquiries,:**

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*Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction. Training and Basic Certification Program in Meaning Reconstruction in Loss and Transition*

Visit the web <https://fundaciohospital.org/formacio-i-coneixement/portland-institute/>,

send an email to [inscripcionspi@fundaciohospital.org](mailto:inscripcionspi@fundaciohospital.org) or

phone at 696 836 700 / 93 741 91 60 (business days from 17:00 to 19:00h).

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For more information about training and  
Certification in Meaning Reconstruction in Loss,  
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