

# Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction



Portland Institute  
For Loss and Transition

## Specialized Program: Dialogical Approaches to Grief

Grief therapy and counseling in a constructivist perspective is seen as a process of reaffirming or recomposing a world of meaning that has been challenged by the loss. The dialogical self approach emphasizes that a person is a multiplicity of different self-aspects (e.g., spiritual, loving, anxious, rebellious), and people potentially can give meaning to any experience from different positions, under a condition that these positions are accessible.

The impact of profound loss often is multidimensional and ambivalent, as it touches those various aspects of the self (e.g., some positions are lost), relations between them, sometimes significantly rendering such relations problematic (e.g., as when a mother blames herself for her child's death) and the overall composition of one's identity (e.g., when many roles are impoverished). Undifferentiated emotions and parts of identity in grief can become like a knot, in which people are stuck. To make new steps in the process of mourning, a therapist may need to help clients to differentiate between those parts and emotions related to loss, to map the

influence of loss on them and access those positions which are potential sources of new meanings.

Not only the self of a mourner but also the self of a deceased one is complex, what often requires acknowledging different sides of a loved one (e.g., he or she as strong, he or she as vulnerable) and the relationship in order to develop the continuing symbolic bond.

**Objectives:**

1. learn various techniques, which allow differentiation of emotions and positions involved in the loss, and application of them in individual and group settings,
2. work with multiple self-aspects, experientially access them, give them a voice and bring them into dialogue, to enhance the client's agency, freedom, and possibility to give different meanings to the loss,
3. map the influence of loss on one's identity, in order to help people to understand the complexity of loss and validate varied aspects of themselves affected by it,
4. facilitate healing, empowering and continuing dialogues, to process loss, access resources of growth and develop the continuing bond,
5. learn to access new positions as novel sources of meaning in order to reconstruct one's identity,
6. apply Dialogical Self Theory as a basis for work with multiple self-aspects in loss and transition,
7. enhance awareness of the therapist own processing of losses and related emotions,
8. implement Composition Work to deepen emotional awareness in the loss and to trace the change from pre-to post-loss identity configurations,
9. facilitate self-compassion and self-care in grief

**Substantiation:**

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

Participating at Dialogical Approach to Grief training course, provides to the therapist the perspective that people potentially can give meaning to any experience from different positions, under a condition that these positions are accessible under the conceptualization that a person is a multiplicity of different self-aspects (e.g., spiritual, loving, anxious, rebellious), and

**Participants:**

The program is aimed at therapists who have experience in grief and loss care. Participation in Specialization Tracks does not require completion of Basic Certification, however Specialized Certification does.

**The program includes the following topics and techniques:**

**Module 1**

*Dialogical Therapeutic Relations*

1. Dialogicality and Relationality of the Self in Therapy
2. Dialogical Approach to Counseling and Possibilities of Work with I-positions.

*Relation with the Other: Dialogical Perspective on Continuing Bond*

1. The Other in the Self and Continuing Bond
2. Introducing the Other and Self Through Multiple Symbols
3. Recomposing the Continuing Bond\*
4. Personal Position Repertoire for Exploring the Relation with a Deceased One
5. Healing Dialogues for Unfinished Business
6. Empowering Dialogue with a 'Promoter Position' in the Deceased
7. Continuing Dialogue: Correspondence with the Deceased

\*optionally, if not introduced in the Basic Certification.

*Work with the symptom as I-position*

1. Personification of a symptom
2. Voicing a symptom

3. Symbolization and creative externalization
4. Symptom dialogues:
  - Correspondence with the symptom
  - Two chair dialogues
  - Symptom interviews

### ***Change in Grief Therapy***

1. Innovative Moments in Therapy
2. Ambivalence and Grief

## **Module 2**

### ***Recomposing Multiple Self in Loss and Transition***

1. Contemplative-Dialogical Perspective
2. Method of Composition Work for Disentangling Multiple Loss
3. Accessing Implicit Positions and Unspeakable Through the Body‘
4. ‘Carnivalization of Therapy’: introducing Unusual and Unknown.
5. Healing Dialogues for Transforming Inner Relations.
6. Empowering Dialogues and Promoter Position Work

### ***Relation with Emotions in the Face of Loss***

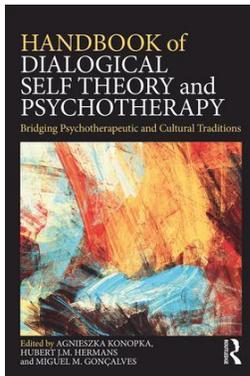
1. Self as Dynamic Process
2. Bi-directional Relation with Emotions
3. Applying Mindfulness to Enhance the Awareness and Dialogical Relation with Emotional Pain.
4. Mapping and Re-Composing the Emotional Terrain of Loss
5. Healing Relation with Emotions and Dialogue with Grief
6. Empowering Dialogue: Emotion as a Promoter Position
7. Continuing Dialogues: e.g., Correspondence with Love

## **Program Structure**

6 days (42 hours)  
Module 1: 3 days  
Module 2: 3 days

**Reading Course:** (10 hours) based on:

*Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory and Psychotherapy:  
Bridging Psychotherapeutic and Cultural Traditions,*  
edited by Agnieszka Konopka, Hubert Hermans and Miguel Gonçalves



**Reviews:**

*'This book provides a tour de force of the development of dialogical theory and its contribution to psychotherapy theory, practice and research. It enables the reader to connect different therapeutic traditions and schools in a theory-guided way like no book has done before. This work launches the application of the view that the self has many voices in dynamic interaction into new territory and provides a significant contribution to the study of the self in psychotherapy.'* - **Leslie S. Greenberg,**

**Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus, York University, Canada**

*"How do I silence the self-critical voices in my head?" "What can I do about my vulnerable side?" The idea that human beings consist of many different "selves" is integral to a diverse array of psychotherapy and counselling practices. This unique and much-needed collection of chapters looks at how therapists can work with the "dialogical self": helping clients to overcome internal conflicts and find more cooperative, dialogical, and satisfying internal relationships. Written by leading international experts in the field, the chapters provide a wealth of guidance, illustrated throughout with vivid and compelling case studies and narratives. A very valuable resource for therapists of all orientations.'* - **Mick Cooper, Professor of Counselling Psychology, University of Roehampton**

**Modifications**

- The program is designed to be flexible, and in collaboration with PI faculty can be modified according to the preferences of particular organizations.
- Different techniques and clinical challenges (e.g., loss of a child, violent death loss, end of life care, non-death loss, career transition) can be emphasized to meet the needs of practitioners in different contexts of practice.

- PI can flexibly accommodate different sizes and compositions of learner groups, from small “in house” training of a dozen agency staff members to medium size groups of post-graduate students in the helping professions to hundreds of credentialed practitioners.

*For more information on the costs and availability of training, contact:*

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Certification in Meaning Reconstruction in Loss,  
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