

Healing Traumatic Grief with Today’s Grieving Clients: A Meaning Making Approach

Traumatic grief occurs when the pain of loss is compounded by the impact of trauma, often disrupting emotional processing as well as a person’s sense of meaning and identity. These losses—frequently sudden, violent, or distressing—can overwhelm the nervous system and shatter core assumptions about safety, attachment, and coherence. Clients may present with intrusive imagery, avoidance, emotional numbing, and difficulty accessing memories of the person who died, leaving clinicians unsure how to effectively support both trauma and grief within treatment. While clinicians may often seek training in treating trauma, rarely is it coupled with understanding how grief and trauma intersect, leading clinicians to inadvertently miss half the picture. Trauma must be treated first to allow grief to emerge and healing to begin. This training offers a grounded, meaning reconstruction approach to working with traumatic grief, drawing from grief and trauma theory, trauma-informed care, and meaning-oriented perspectives. Participants will explore how trauma responses can interfere with the natural processes of grieving, constrict access to the relationship with the deceased, and disrupt identity and meaning-making. Attention will be given to a range of loss experiences, including sudden, violent, ambiguous, stigmatized, and disenfranchised grief, as well as common themes such as regret, guilt, and shame. Using an evolving case study woven throughout the training, participants will engage in applied clinical thinking while building skills in pacing, regulation, and intervention. Practical strategies will include trauma-informed stabilization, narrative approaches, and meaning-oriented interventions that support integration without overwhelming the client.

Target Audience		
Psychologists	Social Workers	Counselors
Therapists	Psychiatrists	Nurses
Course level: Intermediate		

Learning Objectives

- At the end of this seminar, participants will be able to:
- 1. Differentiate normative grief from traumatic grief by identifying key distinguishing features and areas of overlap.
 - 2. Describe how trauma responses (e.g., intrusion, avoidance, dysregulation) interfere with the grieving process and access to the loss.
 - 3. Identify the impact of different types of traumatic loss (e.g., sudden, violent, ambiguous, stigmatized, and disenfranchised) on meaning-making and identity.
 - 4. Recognize common themes in traumatic grief, including regret, guilt, shame, and disruptions in core assumptions about self and the world.
 - 5. Apply practical, trauma-informed and grief-oriented strategies (e.g., stabilization, narrative reconstruction, and meaning-oriented interventions) to support clients experiencing traumatic loss.

Seminar Schedule
The webinar outline is attached. See the Live Webinar page for the start and end times.

Outline

- 10:00-11:30 Foundations of Traumatic Grief Normative grief, non-finite loss, and traumatic grief Sudden, violent, ambiguous, stigmatized, and disenfranchised loss Assumptive-world disruption, attachment, culture, spirituality, and meaning 11:30-11:40 Break 11:40-1:00 Clinical Complexity Following Traumatic Loss Prolonged Grief Disorder and risk factors following unexpected or unnatural death Regret, guilt, shame, survivor’s guilt, and identity disruption Clinical themes following suicide, homicide, overdose, disaster, and other sudden deaths 1:00-1:40 Lunch 1:40-3:10 Assessment, Differential Diagnosis, and Case Conceptualization Assessment domains, measures, mediators, and clinical decision-making Differentiating traumatic grief, PGD, PTSD, major depression, and adjustment disorder Cultural, spiritual, developmental, relational, and intergenerational considerations Organizing the case: trauma responses, grief processes, risk, strengths, meaning, and functioning 3:10-3:20 Break 3:20-5:00 Interventions and Clinical Integration Stabilization, pacing, resourcing, and self-compassion Working with if-onlys, shoulds, guilt, shame, and responsibility versus control Mindfulness, CBT-informed coping, forgiveness, ritual, nature-based work, resilience, and post-traumatic growth Scope of competence, referral, vicarious traumatization, and clinician sustainability End 5:00 PM ET

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The Presenter

Dr. Christina Zampitella, Psy.D., FT is a licensed clinical psychologist, Fellow of Thanatology, founder and owner of The Center for Grief and Trauma Therapy. She often works as an adjunct professor and professional speaker, and especially enjoys training emerging mental health professionals. Dr. Zampitella is the host of her podcast, Phoenix Rising with Dr. Z. She focuses her clinical practice, research, course development, and teaching on bereavement studies, spirituality, nature-based therapy, and integrative psychology. She served as the chair for the Continuing Education Committee for several professional institutions and is an advisory board member of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). She is the former resident psychologist for Fox 5 News in San Diego, and often appeared on NBC News. She has been featured in Elle Magazine, BuzzFeed, The Huffington Post, New York Post, and several Delaware Magazines and newspapers. Dr. Zampitella happily lives with her husband, three-bonus sons, and three cats in Delaware.

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This seminar has been reviewed and approved by Keith Hannan, Ph.D., Laura Davie, LICSW, Tina Jenkins, Psy.D., and Loreen Yearick, MSN, RN. This approval expires on March 1, 2028.

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