

# *Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy*

## *Part I: Recruiting Relational Resources*

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*Heloise Crista*



# ***Let's Keep Meeting This Way***

Reinekke Lengelle



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**We are wired  
for attachment  
in a world of  
impermanence.**

***--R. A. Neimeyer***





# Adaptive Grieving



## *Acute Grief Processes*

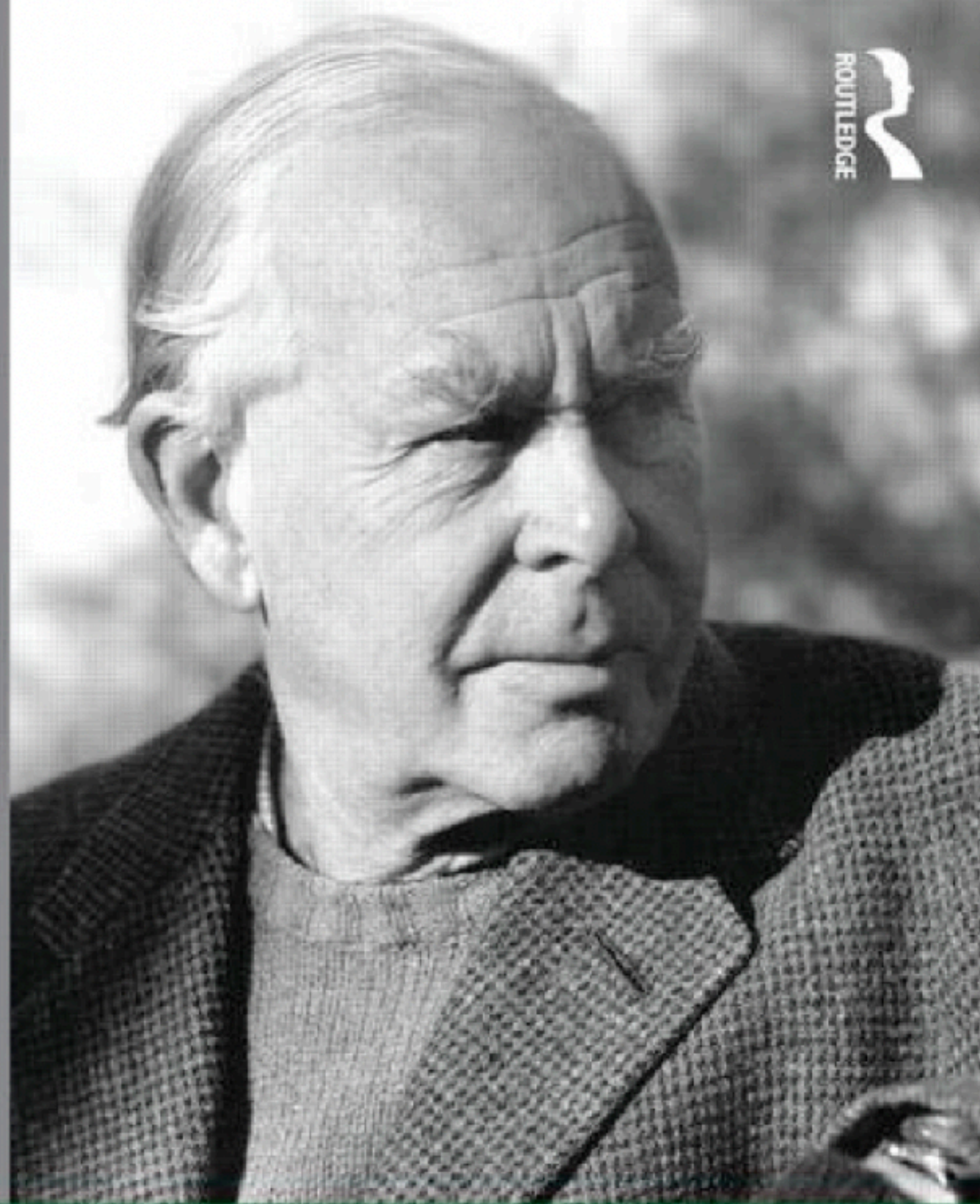
- Process “event story” of the death, attempting to make sense of it and its meaning for our lives now
- Access “back story” of relationship to restore attachment security and resolve unfinished business



## *Integrated Grief*

- Finality of death acknowledged
- Bittersweet emotions accessible & changing
- Mental representation of deceased revised
- Coherent narrative of loss formulated
- Life goals redefined





John Bowlby  
and Attachment Theory  
Jeremy Holmes

SECOND EDITION

# Attachment Theory

- We are naturally motivated to develop and maintain attachments to others for whom we provide and from whom we receive care
- Attachment behavioral system lasts “from cradle to the grave”
- Caregiving behavioral system as important to adults as attachment is to children



# Features of Attachment

- Attachments vary in:
  - Strength
  - Security
- Two primary functions:
  - [Safe haven](#) in times of stress
  - [Secure base](#) from which to explore world







# Secure Attachment

- “Good enough” parenting
- Child develops working model of:
  - Other as available, dependable, supportive
  - Self as resourceful, resilient, lovable
- Generalizes to later intimate relationships

*Gustav Klimt: Die drei Lebensalter der Frau (1905)*



*Clinician's  
Toolbox*

# The Secure Base Map

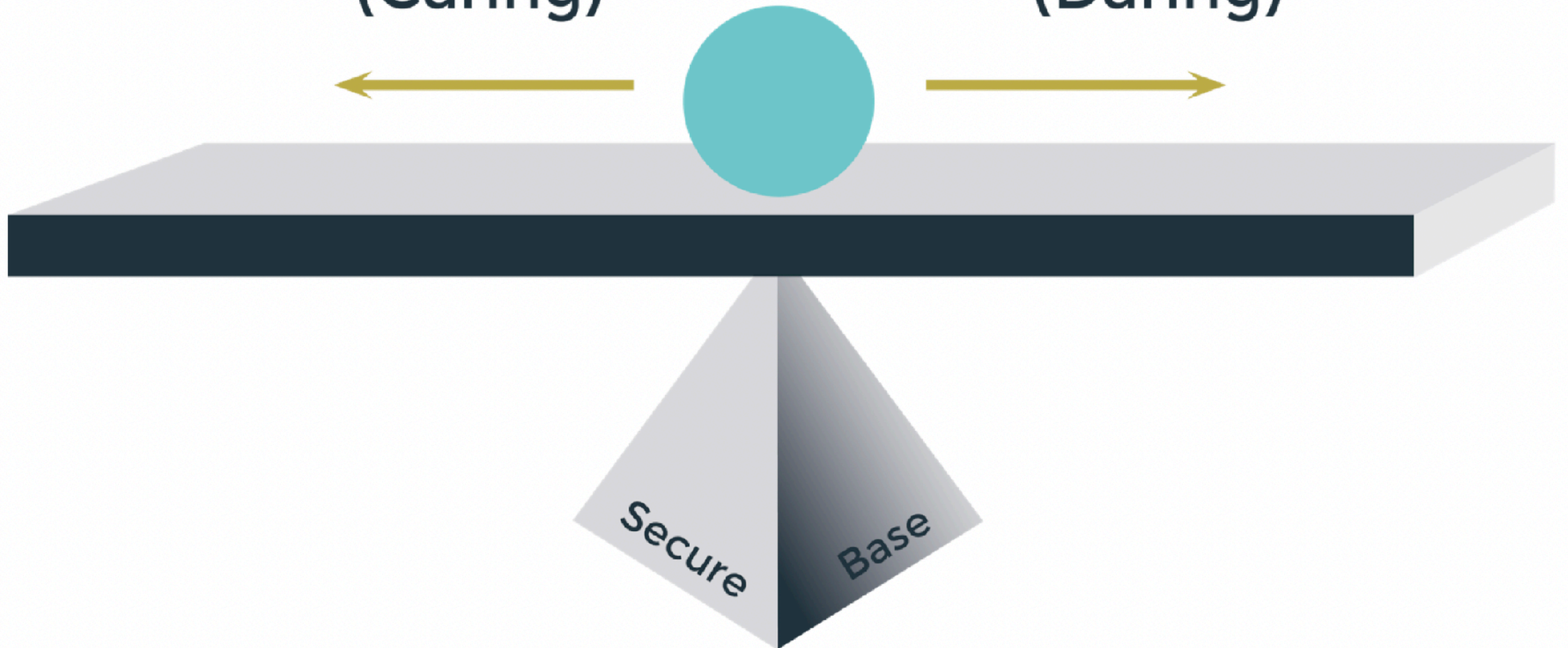


*Jakob van Wielink*

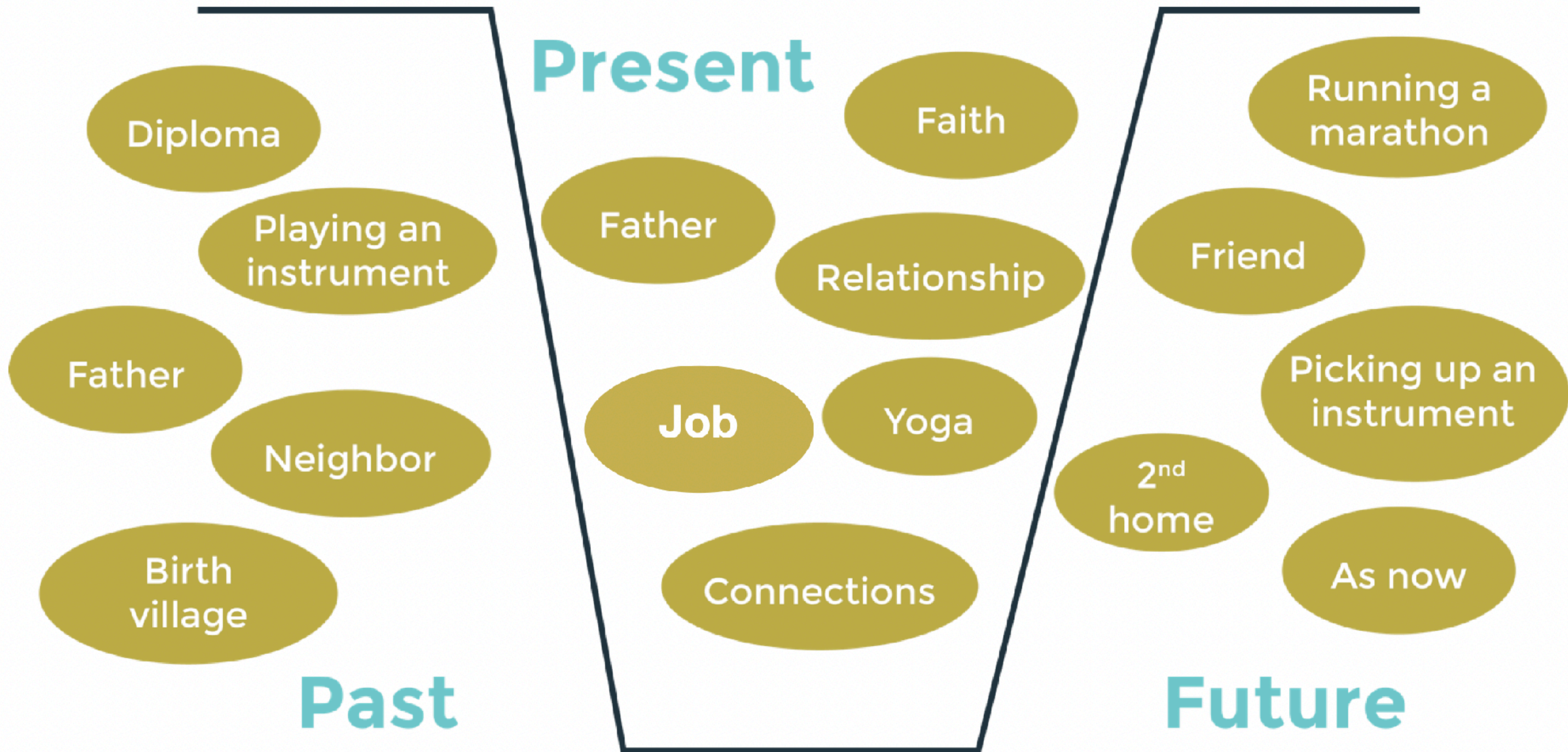


**Safety  
(Caring)**

**Taking Risks  
(Daring)**











# Secure Base Maps

*The Art of  
Connection*





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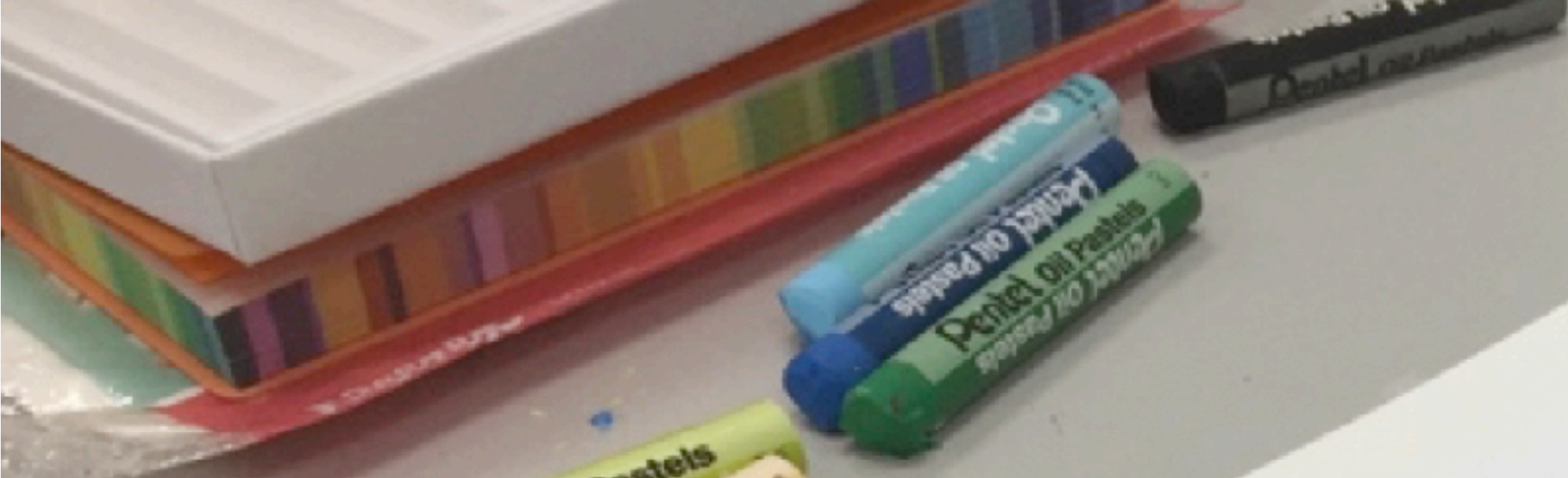
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40x0



# Secure Base Maps

## *Pairing and Sharing*





# Processing the SBM

- *Striking observations*
- *Themes or patterns*
- *Implied needs when distressed*
- *Consistencies*
- *Changes*
- *Life lessons or inspiration*
- *Steps to take now*







# Uses of the SBM

- Ground clients in a place of security before practicing trauma-informed interventions
- Identify past attachments to loved ones and activities that can be reactivated in the present
- Trace attachment history to identify ongoing resources that remain accessible now
- Recognize the need to augment secure bases when these are few or fragile
- Encourage therapy in a positive direction by acknowledging gratitude for people and things that enhance our sense of safety and hope



# The Continuing Bond

Adaptive Grieving commonly involves:

- Reconstructing rather than relinquishing our connections to those who have died
- Having access to consoling, proud and inspiring memories
- Projecting our loved ones into our future rather than leaving them behind in our past
- Reclaiming them as active participants in the story of our lives
- Being able to speak their names
- Accessing their voice and values
- Honoring them in cultural and personal rituals of remembrance



Remedios Varo, *Los Amantes*



# Synchronicity





# Cultivating the Continuing Bond





# Object Stories

THE MEANING  
OF THINGS





# Object Stories

anchored in:

- *Linking object that reminds you of loved one*
- *Significant belonging of loved one; a keepsake*
- *An object symbolizing loved one*



*My Mother's Life*



# Rebecca's Reflections







# *The House of Memory*

*The Soul of a Place* by Austin Eddy



# Sharing Object Stories





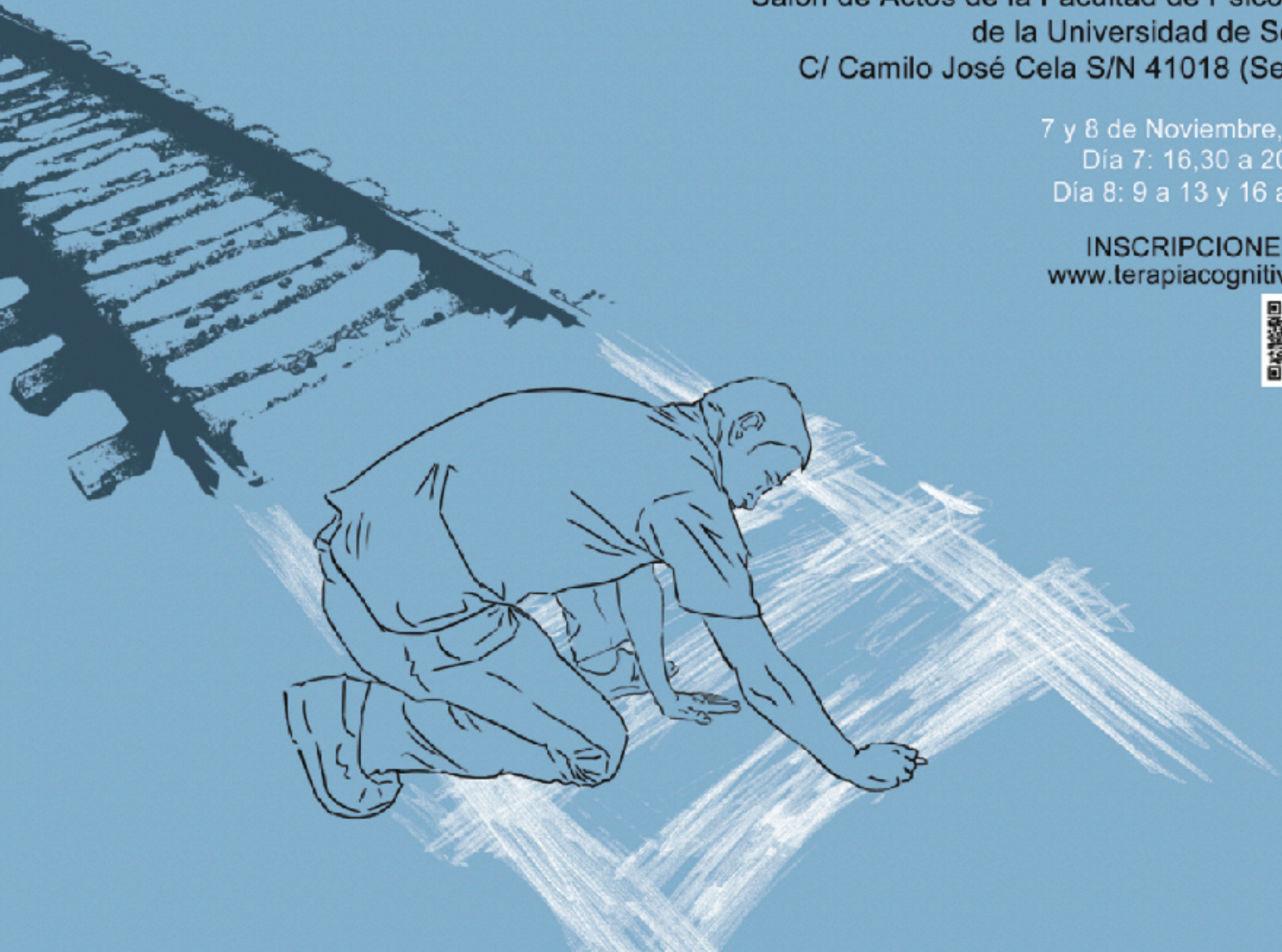
# Taller sobre Terapia del Duelo: Prácticas Creativas para la Orientación de la Pérdida

Impartido por: **Robert A Neimeyer**  
University of Memphis (USA)

Salón de Actos de la Facultad de Psicología  
de la Universidad de Sevilla  
C/ Camilo José Cela S/N 41018 (Sevilla)

7 y 8 de Noviembre, 2014  
Día 7: 16,30 a 20,30 h  
Día 8: 9 a 13 y 16 a 20 h

INSCRIPCIONES EN:  
[www.terapiacognitiva.net](http://www.terapiacognitiva.net)



# *Tracking through Bereavement*



# Two-Track Model of Bereavement

(Rubin, *Death Studies*)

## Track 1:

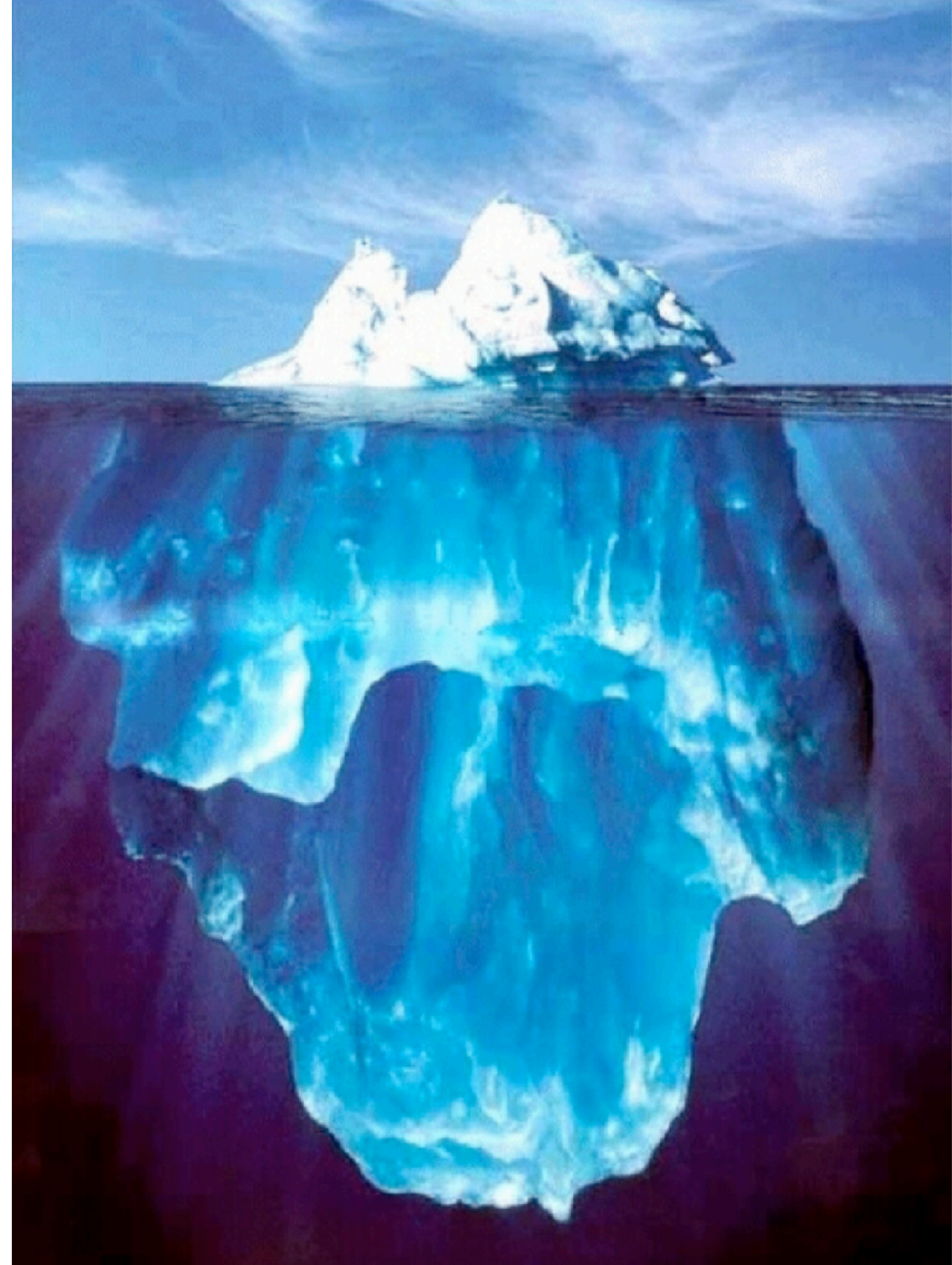
### ***Biopsychosocial Functioning***

- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Somatic concerns
- ❖ Relations with others
- ❖ Self-esteem
- ❖ Work

## Track 2:

### ***Relationship to Deceased***

- ❖ Imagery and memory
- ❖ Affect re deceased
- ❖ Preoccupation
- ❖ Idealization
- ❖ Impact on self
- ❖ Loss process
- ❖ Memorialization







## Transitions Team

*Jamison Bottomley, Melissa  
Smigelsky & Bob Neimeyer*



# *Investigating Risk for Grief Severity: Attachment and Relationship Quality*

*Smigelsky, Bottomley & Neimeyer  
Death Studies*





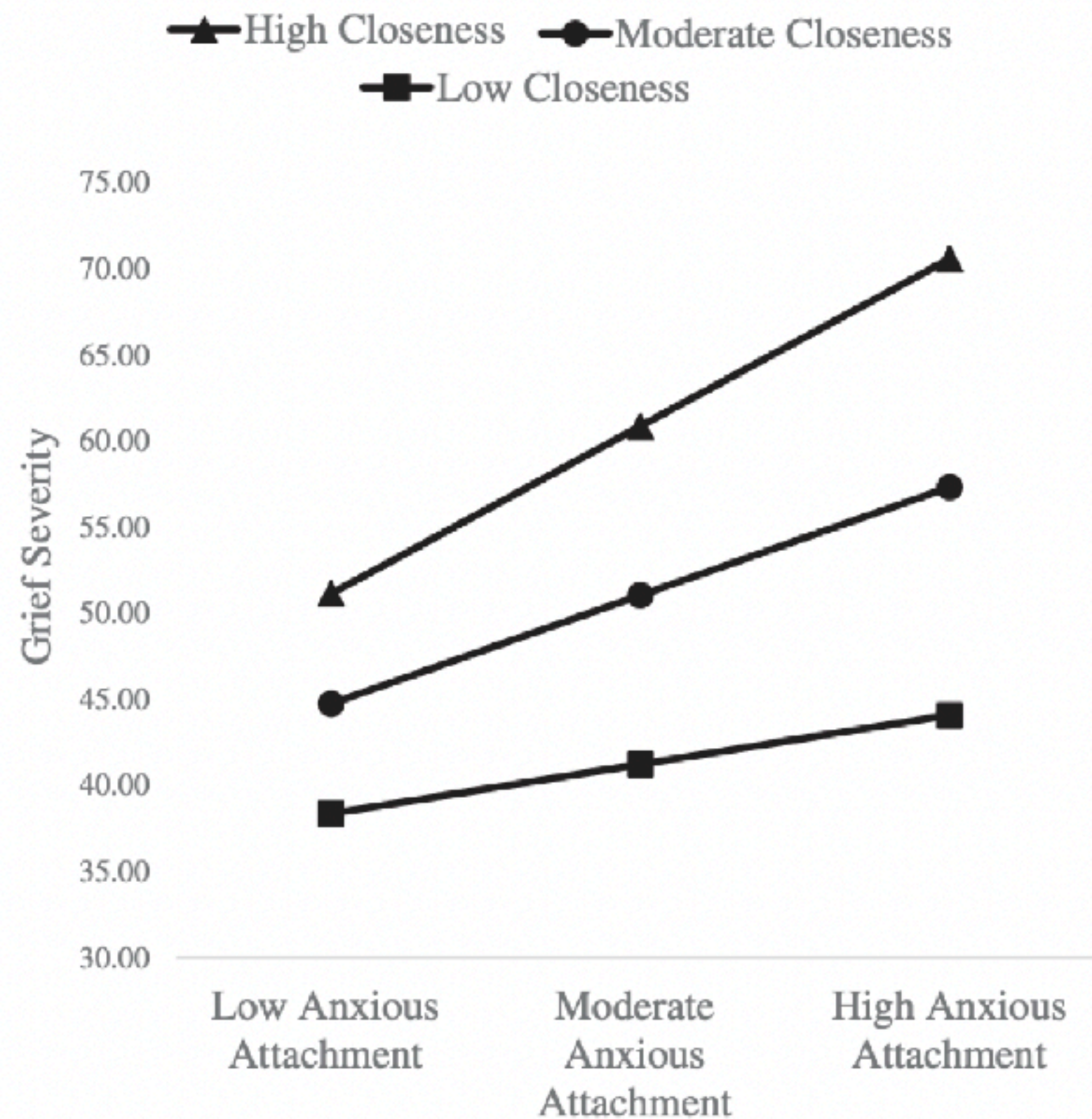
A photograph of two women sitting on a light-colored sofa in a bright, modern living room. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a light blue cardigan over a grey top. The woman on the right has short grey hair and is wearing a light blue long-sleeved top. Both women have their heads bowed and appear to be in a state of reflection or sadness. In the background, there is a wooden shelving unit with various decorative items and a potted plant.

## **385 Bereaved adults completed:**

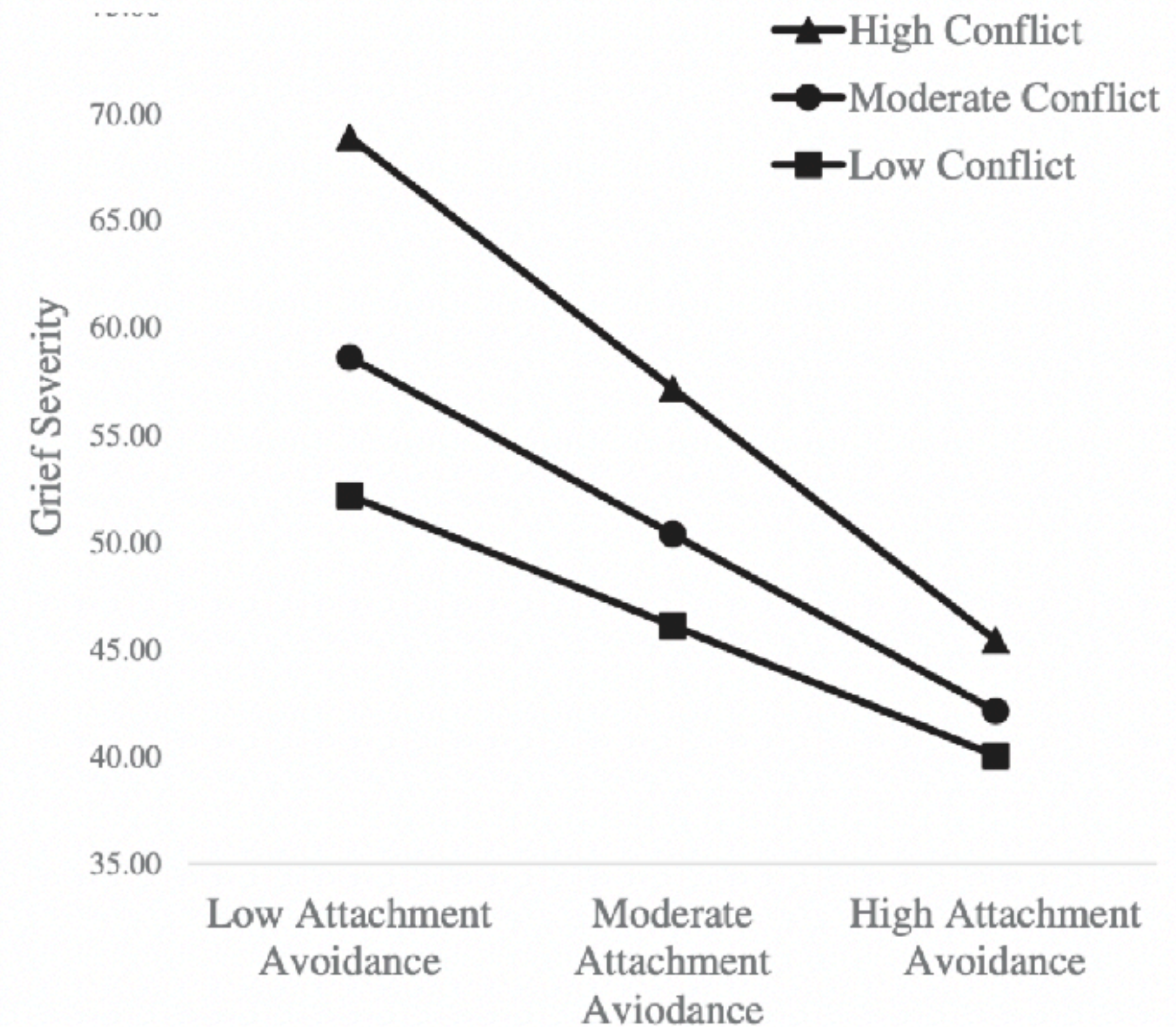
- **Quality of Relationships Inventory**
  - ***Closeness & Conflict with Deceased***
- **Experiences in Close Relationships Structures**
  - ***Attachment Anxiety & Avoidance***



# Attachment Style Interacts with Relationship Quality to Predict Grief



**Figure 1.** Simple slopes of anxious attachment predicting grief severity for 1 SD above the mean, the mean, and 1 SD below the mean of interpersonal closeness.



**Figure 2.** Simple slopes of attachment avoidance predicting grief severity for High Conflict (1 SD above the mean), Moderate Conflict (mean), and Low Conflict (1 SD below the mean).



# Insecure Attachment

- Parental loss, neglect, conflict, undependability or abuse
- Child may develop working model of:
  - Relationships as fragile, unpredictable or dangerous
  - Self as weak or unlovable
- Could adopt a relational style marked by anxious dependency or compulsive self-reliance





*Coming up...*

# Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy

**Part 2:  
Addressing Relational  
Complications**



*Maya Lengle*





# Portland Institute

## For Loss and Transition

[www.portlandinstitute.org](http://www.portlandinstitute.org)