



# Portland Institute For Loss and Transition

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## Course Pack

# Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction [Part I]

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**NOTE:**

*This online course is equivalent to a half-day Core Course leading to all Certification Programs offered by the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition. For further details about the various Certification Programs, simply click: <https://www.portlandinstitute.org/certification>.*

# Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction [Part I]

## A. Secure Base Mapping (van Wielink)

Human beings are wired as social beings yearning for deeply rooted attachment bonds throughout our lives. The attachment figures serve two primary functions – a) a **safe haven** in times of threat; and b) a **secure base** for exploring the world. As reformulated by Kohlrieser, on one hand, these figures offer **caring** when we are in distress by soothing, assuring and protecting us. At the same time, they also provide **daring** to inspire us to take risks and step out of our comfort zone in order to explore life and experience growth. These attachments can be in the form of relations with people living or dead, special places, pets, religious or philosophic perspectives or figures, and more.

People	Places	Experiences	Others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner</li> <li>• Father / mother</li> <li>• Brother / sister</li> <li>• Uncle / aunt</li> <li>• Cousin</li> <li>• Childhood friend</li> <li>• Teacher(s)</li> <li>• Boss / supervisor</li> <li>• Colleague</li> <li>• Self</li> <li>• Therapist</li> <li>• Special friend</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mountains</li> <li>• Home town</li> <li>• Home</li> <li>• Beach</li> <li>• Park / garden</li> <li>• Office</li> <li>• Gym</li> <li>• Church / mosque / temple</li> <li>• Cemetery</li> <li>• Airport</li> <li>• Cafe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marathon</li> <li>• Mountain climbing</li> <li>• Award</li> <li>• Achievement</li> <li>• Performance</li> <li>• Holiday</li> <li>• Career change</li> <li>• A pilgrimage</li> <li>• Giving birth</li> <li>• Graduation</li> <li>• Family reunion</li> <li>• Retreat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companion animal</li> <li>• Faith</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Art</li> <li>• Rituals</li> <li>• Hobby</li> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Symbolic objects</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Money</li> <li>• Routines</li> <li>• Books / quotations</li> </ul>

### Therapeutic Intent

- Help clients recover their profoundly centring connections in the wake of loss;
- Invite clients to reconnect with these security-enhancing sources, from which they draw strength for their post-loss adaptation.

***Clinician's Toolbox: Secure Base Mapping*** (Ng)Crafting of Secure Base Map*Logistics Required:*

- A4 or A3 (letter)-size plain paper
- Coloured pencils or crayons

Invite clients to take some time to reflect on their secure bases across time. Encourage clients to use the colouring materials for more artistic expression and map out their secure bases at three distinct periods of time.

Facilitative Questions

- If you look back to the past, or during your younger days, whenever you were under distress or felt threatened, to whom or what would you turn to for safety, comfort or reassurance? And who or what motivated you or gave you courage to try or explore?
- How about at this present phase of your life? What may remain as your sources of security and inspiration from the past? Are there new additions that you discover during this chapter of your life?
- Looking ahead to your future, what would you like to preserve or carry over for you to continue feeling grounded, as well as daring to experience life? Anything else that you think may help you remain centered while experiencing growth or even breakthrough?

Processing of Secure Base Map

- Was there anything that struck you, as you mapped out your secure bases?
- Now that as you look at your secure base map, do you notice anything special (e.g. any themes or patterns)?
- Looking across all these secure bases, what do they indicate in terms of what you need in times of distress or uncertainty?
- Across time, what do you realize about what have been your sources of strength, courage or drive as you go through different seasons in life?
- What are some lessons or inspirations derived from these secure bases that you can integrate into your own personality or life?
- What are some steps that you would like to take in order to remain connected with these secure bases for ongoing support and encouragement as you move forward?

***B. Object Stories***

The meaning of things – Valued material possessions are not just representations of memories but also signify a source of meaning because

they define the experiences and feelings attached, personalize the deceased, and reflect the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. They act as “identity anchors” or linking objects that help keep the bereaved-deceased bond alive. Alteration of the objects helps reconstruct the bond and instill positive emotions of hope for future wishes and dreams emerging from the loss.

### ***Clinician’s Toolbox: The OBJECT Stories (Ng)***

1. **O**rientation to the Chosen Object
  - “Can you tell me the story behind this object?”
  - “What is the significance of this object that made you choose this item instead of others?”
2. **B**ackground Stories of the Deceased
  - “If you were to further introduce [the deceased] to me, what would you say about him/her?”
  - “What is he/she known for in the view of others?”
3. **J**ourney with the Deceased
  - “How would you describe your relationship with [the deceased]?”
  - “Who is he/she to you after all?”
4. **E**vents with the Deceased
  - “What are your most memorable moments with [the deceased]?”
  - “Were there also challenging occasions in your relationship with him/her?”
5. **C**redits to the Deceased
  - “What do you appreciate [the deceased] most in life?”
  - “How would your life be different if he/she never appeared in your life?”
6. **T**estimony for the Deceased
  - “How would you like to remember and honor [the deceased]?”
  - “What would you like others to know and remember about him/her?”

## APPENDIX

### The Quality of Relationships Inventory: Bereavement Version (QRI-B)

*DIRECTIONS: Please select the item that corresponds with each question to describe your relationship with your deceased loved one.*

	Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Very much
1. How often did you need to work to avoid conflict with this person?	1	2	3	4
2. To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?	1	2	3	4
3. How upset did this person sometimes make you feel?	1	2	3	4
4. How much did this person make you feel guilty?	1	2	3	4
5. To what extent could you count on this person to help you if a family member very close to you died?	1	2	3	4
6. How positive a role did this person play in your life?	1	2	3	4
7. How significant was this relationship in your life?	1	2	3	4
8. If this person were still alive, how close would your relationship be with this person in 10 years?	1	2	3	4
9. If this person were still alive, how much would you miss this person if the two of you could not see or talk with each other for a month?	1	2	3	4
10. To what extent could you count on this person to listen to you when you were very angry with someone else?	1	2	3	4
11. How angry did this person make you feel?	1	2	3	4
12. To what extent could you really count on this person to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?	1	2	3	4
13. How often did this person try to control or influence your life?	1	2	3	4

*Note: This version of the QRI-B is reproduced with permission from Bottomley, Smigelsky, Floyd, and Neimeyer, 2017. All items should be scored using the 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Very much) format presented above. Items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12 can be summed to compute the Closeness subscale. Items 1, 3, 4, 11, and 13 can be summed to compute the Conflict subscale.*



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