

Christina West

Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction:

*A Trauma-Informed
Approach
(Part I)*

Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD



Portland Institute
For Loss and Transition

Goals of Grief Therapy

- **Redress** deepest sources of fixation that impede adaptation to loss
- **Revisit** and reintegrate event story of the death
- **Renegotiate** the terms of attachment to the deceased
- **Review** and revise the self narrative in a recomposed social world
- **Reestablish** a life of coherence and meaning in light of deeply unwelcome transition



*The Power of
Presence:
Constructing a
Secure Base*



In the Humanistic-Existential tradition, our human *presence* is foundational, and fosters the client's:

- Self-exploration
- Experiential reflection
- Responsibility

—Kirk Schneider



Mindfulness as a Container

- For troubling stories
- For difficult emotions
- For unwelcome transitions



Heather Stang

3 “P’s” of Psychotherapy

Robert A. Neimeyer

Procedure without Process =
Misdirection

Process without Presence =
Manipulation

Procedure

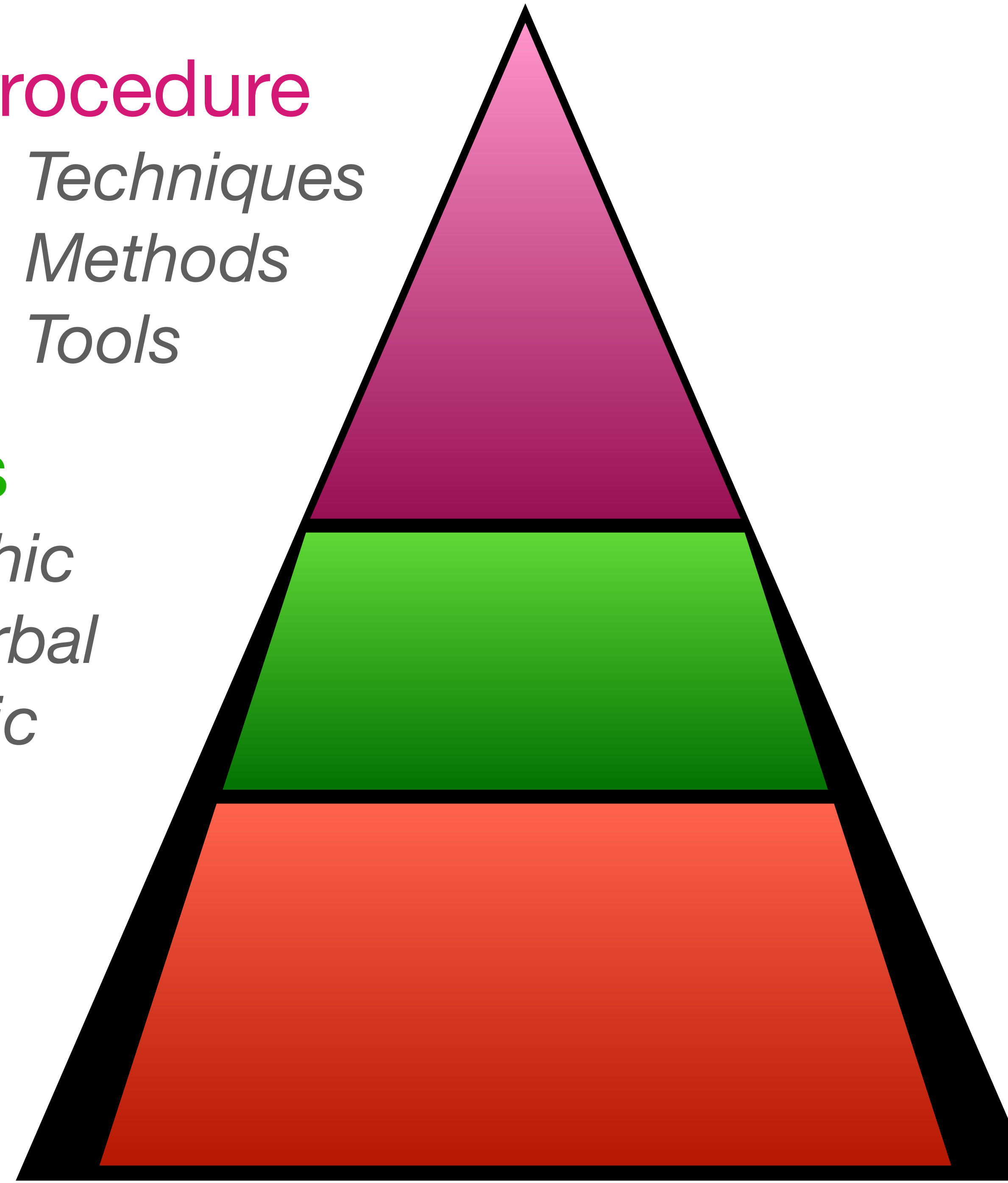
- *Techniques*
- *Methods*
- *Tools*

Process

- *Empathic*
- *Nonverbal*
- *Somatic*

Presence

- *Mindfulness*
- *Responsiveness*
- *Vulnerability*



Meaning Reconstruction in Loss

Neimeyer & Ng

Establish
Holding Environment

Recruit Resources:
*Self-soothing,
Social support, Spirituality,
Relation to Deceased*

Fixation on
Event Story of Dying:
*Traumatic Distress, Avoidance,
Rumination, Reenactment*

Restorative Retelling
*Drawing Out the Loss, Collage,
Directed Journaling, Virtual Dream
Stories, etc.*

Fixation on
Personal Story of Self:
*Identity Disruption,
Meaninglessness, Loss of Social
Interest, Existential Dread*

Restorative Revision
*Analogical Listening, Chapters of
Our Lives, Composition Work, etc.*

Fixation on
Back Story of Relationship:
*Separation Distress, Ambivalence,
Loneliness, Unfinished Business*

Restorative Realignment
*Introducing Our Loved Ones,
Imaginal Dialogues, Correspondence
with Deceased, Legacy Projects, etc.*

Restorative Retelling: Principles and Procedures



Portland Institute
For Loss and Transition



Restorative Retelling



Jack Jordan

Ted Rynearson

Narrative Processes

Levitt & Angus



Heidi Levitt



- *External Narrative:* The Objective Story
- *Internal Narrative:* The Emotion-focused Story
- *Reflexive Narrative:* The Meaning-oriented Story

Restorative Retelling



Talking the Talk, Walking the Walk

Bracing

- In session
- Between sessions


Pacing

- Dosing
- Slow motion review

Facing

- Witnessing
- Seeking empowerment





On the Edge: Restorative Retelling of a Traumatic Loss

The Cliffs of Moher
Ireland

Drawing Out the Pain



Restorative Retelling

- Retell story of the loss for at least 10-15 minutes, starting when death is imminent or announced, and ending when a natural “chapter” is completed
- May close eyes or use photos to invite strong emotion



In the Construction Zone



- Mind the gap
- Plant a flag
- Return for later visualization, therapeutic dialogue, consultation with others or journaling

A photograph of three women sitting at a table in a workshop or classroom setting. The woman on the left has short brown hair and is wearing a dark grey sweater, looking towards the woman in the middle. The woman in the middle has short dark hair and is wearing a light-colored knit sweater over a black long-sleeved shirt; she is holding a green folder and a white document. The woman on the right has long dark hair and is wearing a red sweater, also looking at the document. In the background, other people are seated at similar tables, some with water bottles and papers. A blue banner with white text is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

Restorative Retelling

A Practice Session

Revisiting the Recording

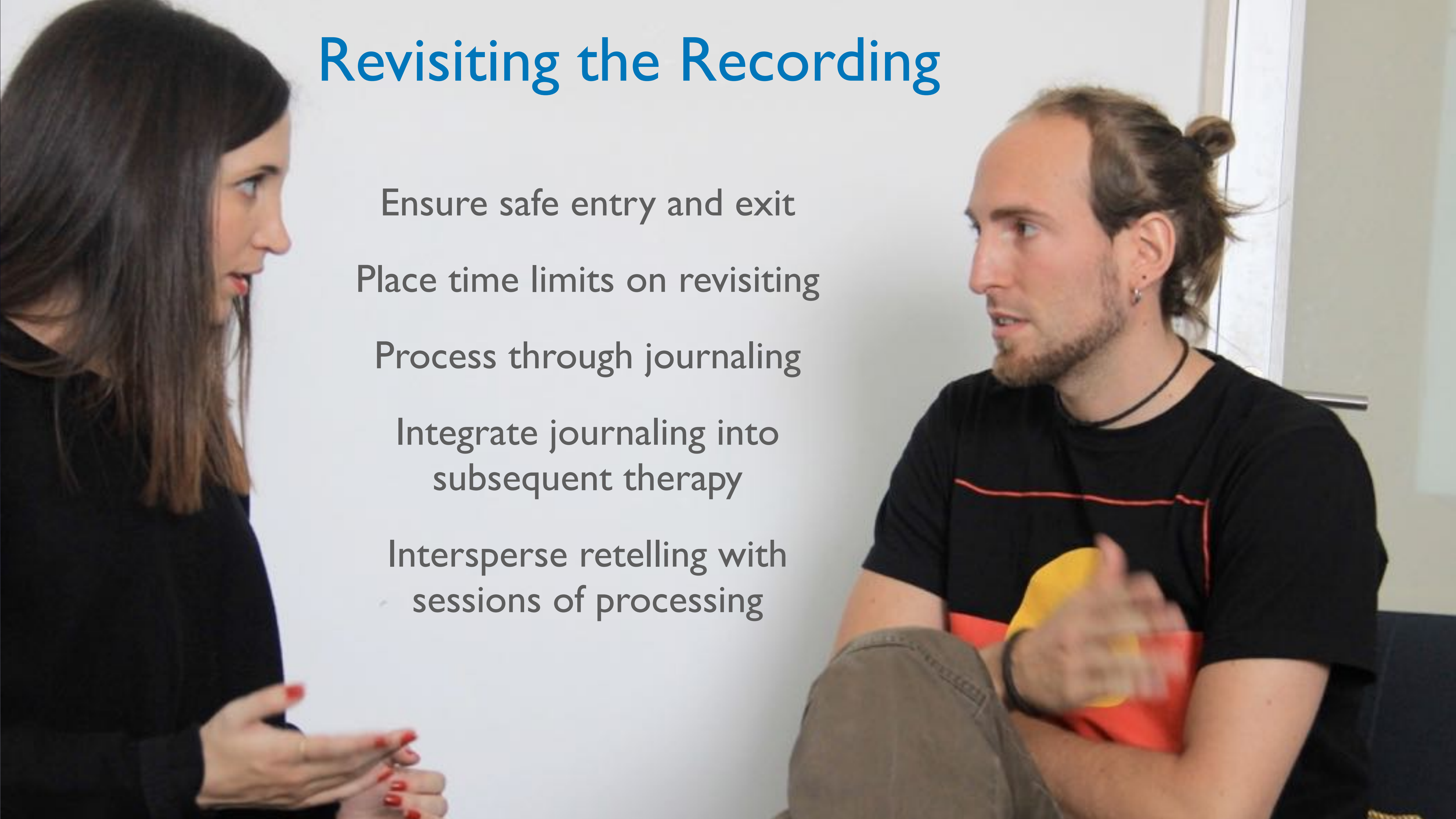
Ensure safe entry and exit

Place time limits on revisiting

Process through journaling

Integrate journaling into
subsequent therapy

Intersperse retelling with
sessions of processing





Portland Institute

For Loss and Transition

www.portlandinstitute.org