



# Portland Institute

## For Loss and Transition

### Grief Therapy Learning Retreat

March 31 – April 4, 2023 (Fri-Tue)

Baltimore, MD, United States

#### Featured Program Presenters

Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD; Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT;  
Darcy L. Harris, RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT; Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW;  
Evie Lindemann, LMFT, ATR-BC, ATCS; Lara Krawchuk, MSW, LCSW, MPH;  
Rebecca Ladd, MA; Lynne Henry, BA; Lies Scaut, BSW, MFT; Doris C. Vaughans, PhD;  
Reinekke Lengelle, PhD; Carolyn Ng, PsyD, FT, MMSAC, RegCLR;  
Christina Zampitella, PsyD, FT and Jill Harrington-LaMorie, DSW, LCSW

**NOTE:**

- This Retreat offers you a range of Orientation, Techniques, Case Studies and Practicum modules leading to Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction (GTMR), Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy (AAGT), Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses (NDL), Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy (FFGT) or Specialty Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement (GTSB) by the Portland Institute. Simply click: <https://www.portlandinstitute.org/certification> for more information.

 Selected sessions at this retreat have been reviewed and approved by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Office Continuing Education in Psychology (CEP) to offer Continuing Education (CE) credit for psychologists. Full attendance is required for sessions for which you are claiming CE credit. Partial credit is not awarded. The CEP Office maintains responsibility for the content of the program. **CE credits are not valid for psychologists reporting to the New York State Education Department's State Board for Psychology.**

# Grief Therapy Learning Retreat

March 31 – April 4, 2023

Welcome to the *Portland Institute for Loss and Transition*, and our Grief Therapy Learning Retreat, a 5-day, 4-night immersion in experiential workshops designed to add conceptual clarity, hone process expertise, and provide learners practical tools to enhance their practice of grief therapy and bereavement support with a broad range of clients across many contexts of clinical practice. Alongside a rich menu of training options, learners can also explore many modalities for self-renewal as persons and professionals and explore the relevance of a generous offering of arts-assisted methods for engaging grief and loss as a creative context for growth.

Join Robert A. Neimeyer, and his colleagues Sharon Strouse, Darcy L. Harris, Sarah Vollmann, Evie Lindemann, Lara Krawchuck, Lynne Henry, Rebecca Ladd, Lies Scaut, Doris Vaughans, Reinekke Lengelle, Christina Zampitella and Jill Harrington-LaMorie for an international, interdisciplinary Institute that offers a new meaning-focused model of training in bereavement care. Topics include:

- Compassion-Based Approaches to Loss and Grief
- The Body, the Expressive Arts & Somatic Experiencing via Depth Psychology
- The Choreography of Imaginal Dialogues
- Retelling the Death Story with Children
- Self-Compassion: Sustaining the Ability to Care in Challenging Times
- Re-Composing the Self and System
- Writing the Self in Loss and Transition
- Superhero Grief
- The Rowboat as a Metaphor for Meaning Reconstruction
- A Dialogue with Three Bereaved Mothers Following the Traumatic Loss of a Child
- From Corona Confusion to Artistic Profusion
- Self-Led Healing in A Broken-Hearted World
- Art Therapy in Rwanda: Giving Voice to Second Generation Genocide Survivors
- Honoring Milestones of Mourning
- Art Therapy Altered Books
- Nature-Based Rituals

To learn more, just peruse the detailed schedule that follows and the accompanying program for the week. **A supplemental registration form will be sent to all registrants at a later date to indicate their preferred parallel sessions and their interest in joining any of the special activities offered in the retreat.**

## Friday (March 31)

### 10:00-3:20 Eden Energy Medicine: Individual Restorative Sessions (Donna Naslund, RN, RYI; Shannon, RN, BSN & Christina Soares Heffner)

30-minute mini energy medicine sessions offered to ground and balance your body, revitalize your energy, ease stress, and create a wonderful sense of well-being as you arrive and prepare for the retreat.

#### *Possible Session Content:*

- Daily Energy Routine (DER): a series of gentle energy movements done to ground and clear the body in preparation for energy work;
- Opening the energy gaits on the hands and feet in preparation for energy work;
- Tracing the meridians and balancing the meridian beginning and end points to restore circadian cycles and ease jet lag. No needles!
- Quickie Energy Balance Routine to restore and balance energy in the body; and
- Either a Black Pearl, Brazilian Toe, or Vortex Revival protocol to create a deep sense of rest and relaxation.

**NOTE:** *Advance booking will be required and will be processed on a first-come-first-served basis. DER will be done standing or seated and the remaining work will be done on a massage table. Wear loose comfortable clothing.*

### 4:00-5:30 Intervening in Meaning: New Directions in Grief Therapy (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD)

Viewed from a meaning-focused perspective, a central process in grieving is the attempt to reaffirm or reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss. As research with bereaved young people, parents and older adults indicates, both natural and violent death losses can leave mourners struggling to process the event story of the death, to make sense of their changed identity in its wake, and to access the back story of their relationship with their deceased loved one in a way that reaffirms their sense of secure attachment or resolves unfinished business with the deceased. In this session, I summarize our group's recent studies of the psychological struggle to make sense of loss, especially in these pandemic times, outline several validated measures of meaning-making problems and processes, and sketch diverse meaning-oriented practices that help people find growth through grief, providing a conceptual frame for many of the clinical and art therapy practices to follow.

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- Summarize research supporting a meaning reconstruction model of adaptive grieving;

- Describe three complementary measures of meaning that can be used to assess struggles in sense-making in the anticipation or aftermath of a loss; and
- Identify four practices to facilitate meaning reconstruction in the context of grief therapy.

NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Orientation Module for [all Certification programs](#).

## Saturday (April 1)

### 9:00-10:30 Exploring Compassion-Based Approaches to Loss and Grief (Darcy L. Harris, RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT)

Compassion-based approaches have been widely supported through recent research in the field with diverse populations. These approaches are of specific interest in situations of loss, grief, and bereavement due to their capacity-building effect for clinicians and clients alike. Training in compassion has demonstrated enhanced ability to tolerate distress, maintain focus, and discern clinical interventions that are appropriate for clients in a variety of contexts. Cultivating a compassionate stance provides clinicians with the opportunity to engage clients with their full attention and presence, allowing openness and receptivity for both the painful and the adaptive aspects of the client's process. This session will provide an overview of how compassion training and practice can be a valuable resource for clients and clinicians.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Define and describe compassion as an entity separate from other prosocial behaviors, with the implications for clinical practice;
- Describe the core components of compassion-based approaches with clients who have experienced significant losses; and
- Identify ways to integrate compassion training and compassion-based approaches in their work and personal life.

NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Orientation Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).

### 11:00-12:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:

#### A. *From Corona Confusion to Artistic Profusion: A Group Case Study of An Arts-Assisted Grief Therapy During the Pandemic (Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT; Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW & Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD)*

This presentation introduces participants to an art therapy peer-support group, formed by five clinicians at the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. Presenters will share their use of art therapy and the virtual group process for expression, exploration, containment and transformation.

Individual and group thematic trajectories will be examined through the lens of meaning reconstruction and restorative retelling. Case studies will include evocative images created in the group. Participants will have the opportunity to create a collage in response to their own pandemic experience, and additional time for theoretical discussions and personal processing.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Identify art therapy-based meaning reconstruction through the use of various media, and the distinctive advantages of each;
- Explain the use of art therapy techniques that foster restorative retelling and integration of perturbing or traumatic experiences; and
- Summarize how art therapy group and individual interventions can assist in the treatment of death and non-death losses across the life span.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Studies Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).



*B. The Rowboat as a Metaphor for Meaning Reconstruction (Lies Scaut, BSW, MFT)*

Not everyone who is in the middle of a grief process has words to explain his/her lived feelings and experiences. By using the ‘rowboat’ metaphor in the context of the Dual Process Model, clients are invited to create their own grief landscape. Reflecting on the grieving process while drawing helps them remain in the picture so they may come to an understanding and meaning reconstruction in a creative way. The goal is to assist clients to produce a drawing that visualizes the grieving process in order to see their process instead of talking about it. This means – saying more without words. This technique can be used with individuals, couples and families. Art-based questions like, ‘What does the boat look like? What does the environment look like? Are there any other boats sailing with you? How can you communicate with the other boats?’ will be provided during the session.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Practice therapeutic conversation while creating the image to help the client to make the transition to his/her real grieving process;
- Apply creative arts therapy to assist in the formulation of emotional experience; and
- Identify questions to facilitate meaning making in bereavement.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#).

## 1:30-4:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:

### A. *The Body, the Expressive Arts and Somatic Experiencing via Depth Psychology* (Evie Lindemann, LMFT, ATR-BC, ATCS)

The physical body is the vehicle that carries us through life. It experiences events, feelings, thoughts, and longings every bit as much as does cognition. This workshop explores both the connections and the boundaries between the domains of the mind, the heart, and the physical body. New pathways for integration are revealed using simple art therapy prompts to elicit what is internally significant, locating those insights within the body, and finding body movements to amplify. Specific breath patterns and tapping techniques are used to soothe the limbic system, with expressive writing to anchor what occurs. Dress comfortably and come prepared to play and to learn experientially in new ways that invite the whole self into more profound, meaning-based connection.

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- Name four methods for engaging with the body in grief work processing;
- Describe a theoretical position vis-à-vis somatic/meaning based practices to incorporate these methodologies into your clinical practice; and
- Identify three ways to provide a “safe container” for incorporating body work in clinical practice as well as two contraindications.

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).

### B. *Writing the Self in Loss and Transition* (Reinekke Lengelle, PhD)

We always know more than we think we know. We recognize these moments when we say things like "deep down, I know that..." and "part of me already accepts that..." and "the truth is that I'm afraid of..." but speaking these truths can make them fleeting and ethereal while writing them down slows our process and gives us a literal point of reflection between the eyes and the page. This 3-hour workshop invites those participating to remember what they know and learn about the 'writing the self' process I used to write my autoethnography on spousal loss and resilience. We will explore proprioceptive writing, touch on poetry writing, and playfully engage the wisdom of the voice(s) within. No special creative writing experience is needed.

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- Summarize the writing-the-self process in the context of loss and transition including the theoretical model of "Transformation through Writing" by Lengelle & Meijers;
- Practice writing in ways that embrace the tensions, are informed by conscious and unconscious drives, and show us how to tap into inner wisdom and articulate it; and

- Observe work with others using Writing the Self processes.

*NOTE: This session confers 1 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).*

## Sunday (April 2)

### 9:00-10:30 The Art of Healing: A Dialogue with Three Bereaved Mothers Following the Traumatic Loss of a Child (Robert, A. Neimeyer, PhD; Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT; Lynne Henry, BA & Becky Ladd, MA)

This haunting, heart opening and healing dialogue highlights the art making process, products and mystical experiences of three bereaved mothers whose journey is understood and guided by the tenants of meaning reconstruction, restorative retelling and attachment-informed grief therapy with the deceased. Learners are invited into the inner workings of art making and the creative process with Lynne who shares, at the two-year mark, her journey with James, who died in a fiery car accident on September 5, 2020. Rebecca shares, at the ten-year mark, her journey with David, who died by suicide on January 14, 2010, while Sharon shares, at the twenty-year mark, her journey with Kristin, who died by suicide on October 11, 2001. Powerfully evocative images will highlight each personal, in-depth discussion, followed by the audiences' opportunity to enter this conversation of transformation with the panelists.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Identify unique challenges in integrating the violent death of a child into a parent's system of meaning and attachment;
- Conceptualize the artistic process and products through a meaning reconstruction focus on the event story of the loss and the back story of the relationship with the deceased; and
- Describe elements of the creative process that contribute to continuing bonds with the deceased as a cornerstone of continuing bonds theory.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Studies Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#), [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Specialty Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).*

### 11:00-12:30 Reassembling the Pieces: Responsive Art Following Traumatic Loss (Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT)

Learners in this follow-up to the preceding panel on parental loss of a child to violent death will have an opportunity to engage in response art using collage and other media to further process their own reactions to the lived experiences of traumatic

bereavement presented by the mothers. The session moderator will be joined by another art therapist, Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW, in providing guidelines for this practice, mentoring learners in this practicum, and discussing its implications for using the visual arts to support both clients and therapists in doing such work.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Conceptualize the collage-making process as an aid to processing and gaining perspective on a client's work with traumatic loss;
- Summarize the components of the collage making process that are grounded in Rynearson's Restorative Retelling of the loss narrative; and
- Compare and contrast the function of art making in processing the therapy experience for the client vs. the therapist.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#), [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Specialty Certification in Grief Therapy for Suicide Bereavement \(GTSB\)](#).

**1:30-3:00** Mini-workshops. Choose between:



**A. Re-Composing the Self and System: Composition Work in the Wake of Loss [Part I] (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD & Carolyn Ng, PsyD, FT, MMSAC, RegCLR)**

As the bereaved struggle to re-construct their lives following loss, they can benefit from exploring how this major life transition ushered in a changed sense of identity in a reconfigured family system. This module introduces *Composition Work*, a flexible method for visualizing one's "community of self," which is grounded in the Dialogical Self Theory of Hubert Hermans, and applies it in the context of grief therapy. Using small stones and other natural objects, clients work under the guidance of the therapist to represent their relation to various *I-positions* corresponding to significant roles, emotion states, and internalized others in their family or broader social world. They then trace transformations in the system of relationships that constitute their personal world in response to the loss, as they project into a changed future. In this process clients can discover new internal resources, re-negotiate the bond, and explore possible compositions of their own identity that include the loved one in a new way, even in the person's physical absence. As a result, mourners broaden their understanding of themselves in context, draw on somatic awareness of previously unvoiced aspects of self, and promote personal reconstruction of their post-loss identity.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the relevance of Dialogical Self Theory in conceptualizing identity in the context of significant relationships to relevant others, including the deceased;
- Apply *Composition Work* to access, differentiate and symbolize a variety of self-aspects involved in adapting to transition and loss; and

- Visualize significant shifts in the broader family system as a function of the loss, and promote their adaptive realignment.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#).*

 **B. Art Therapy in Rwanda: Giving Voice to Second Generation Genocide Survivors (Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW)**

This presentation will showcase an art therapy group conducted in Rwanda with second generation survivors of the genocide who were born after the genocide to a parent who is a survivor. Repercussions of the genocide for the second generation often include a sense of inherited loss and trauma. Group participants used the art therapy process to share and explore the impact of the genocide upon their upbringing, family life, and identity formation in a safe, containing, and supportive group environment. Restorative retelling occurred as group members shared, shaped, and took control of their stories. The art therapy process also supported meaning making as described by Neimeyer as “the attempt to reaffirm or reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss.” Themes that arose include a sense of disenfranchised grief and the transgenerational transmission of grief and trauma. The presenter will provide a brief overview of the Rwandan genocide and will describe her process of creating a culturally humble therapeutic frame for this work. Tenets of art therapy will be presented to highlight the use of art therapy in cross-cultural contexts and as a beneficial modality for grief, loss, and trauma.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Conceptualize inherited losses and the potential repercussions of a transgenerational transmission of grief and trauma;
- Discuss the concepts of disenfranchised grief, restorative retelling, and meaning making;
- Review the concepts of cultural humility and cultural competence; and
- Summarize theoretical foundations for using expressive arts interventions with clients coping with trauma and grief.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Studies Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#) or [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#).*

**3:00-4:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:**

 **A. Re-Composing the Self and System: Composition Work in the Wake of Loss [Part II] (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD & Carolyn Ng, PsyD, FT, MMSAC, RegCLR)**

A continuation of the above workshop.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#).*



### *B. Self-Led Healing in A Broken-Hearted World (Lara Krawchuk, MSW, LCSW, MPH)*

Our world is awash in grief. Helping professionals are routinely being asked to witness intense client pain while experiencing our own heartbreak. Many healers report feeling sad, exhausted, and overwhelmed. Others do not feel effective in navigating professional parallel processes. In this didactic and experiential workshop, we will review the basic principles of both the Internal Family Systems (IFS) and meaning making models. We will explore creative ways to combine IFS and meaning making models to effectively support grieving clients. Finally we will make space for open-hearted, compassionate connection with our own struggling parts. We will return to our lives and practices with creative new ideas for supporting clients and tending to our own healing in a broken-hearted world.

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- Summarize a basic overview of the IFS and meaning making models;
- Discuss how to use IFS and meaning making models to support grieving clients;
- Conceptualize parallel process in a broken-hearted world; and
- Practice self-care for our own hurting parts.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).*

## **7:30-9:00 Evening Activity (Optional)**

### *Yoga Nidra (Gina L. Sager, MD)*

Yoga Nidra is a guided imagery practice that has the capacity to turn off the fight / flight / freeze response, our chronic stress and survival mode, and invoke the relaxation response. The deep physical relaxation that is induced in yoga nidra, by closing down all senses except the sense of hearing, allows the release of energy blocks, including physical blocks that may be experienced as muscle tension, as well as the subtle emotional blocks that come as a result of unprocessed, suppressed, or unwelcome emotions and experience.

Every experience that we have in life leaves an impression or an imprint in the subconscious mind. In a perfect world, the body/mind, with its innate wisdom and intelligence, would sort through the imprints of the day during REM sleep, releasing those that do not serve or benefit us in any way and integrating those that are for our greater good. Failure to integrate and sort this voluminous daily information overload leads to a buildup of impressions in the subconscious mind that do not

belong and may contribute to poor health by acting as an “under the radar energy drain”.

Yoga Nidra invokes such a deep state of physical relaxation that it's safe to open the doors of the subconscious without reactivity, to stir it up through a practice of guided imagery and then to allow the imprints or impressions that do not belong to simply be released. It is, effectively, a subtle form of psychotherapy that allows the release of deep energy blocks without having to remember, talk about or potentially be re-traumatized by them. It also reminds your body how to deeply rest and trust, thus restoring balance.

The practice of yoga nidra has the physiologic effect of 2-6 hours of RESTFUL and restorative sleep. Yoga nidra offers deep physical, emotional, mental, physiologic, and metabolic rest – the perfect antidote for the way we live today.

## Monday (April 3)

9:00-10:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:



### A. *Honoring Milestones of Mourning: Utilizing Rituals, Traditions and Culture in Grief Therapy (Doris C. Vaughans, PhD)*

The grief journey presents a myriad of challenges for grieverers that can escalate around special days such as birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and milestones that are a part of human experiences. The path through mourning is unique to each individual and often entails mourning and honoring many, often unpredictable, nonfinite and finite losses. This presentation provides a theoretical underpinning of meaning making and other theories, and considers the role of rituals, traditions, and culture in grief therapy to promote positive outcomes for individual clients, as well as their families and communities.

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- Review theories that undergird work with clients who present with grieving challenges related to special days and events;
- Discuss cultural competence and sensitivity regarding rituals, traditions, and culture for helping grieving clients to manage grieving challenges around special days; and
- Apply these principles and practices to a brief scenario to devise an appropriate ritual that is theoretically based and culturally attuned to the needs of a specific grieving client.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).*

## B. *Retelling the Death Story with Children (Lies Scaut, BSW, MFT)*

This case study illustrates how children can be assisted in retelling the death story in play therapy. Speaking in the third-person position allows children to displace the action into the play world, maintaining a self-distancing narration in which they become the emotionally regulated narrator rather than a helpless bystander. Taking the parent-child system into account and inviting the surviving parent into the session at the right moment is of utmost importance. The task of the parent will be to correct the death story while continuing to support the child. This allows an artful inquiry into the meanings and understandings of a traumatic loss. This workshop starts with a video showing a session of the 5-year-old Kate and her father. Kate's mother died two hours after giving birth to Kate's little sister. Retelling the death story helped her grasp the reality of the death and consolidate the story of what happened and what it implied for the family.

### *Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the typical interaction between bereaved parents and children;
- Summarize how to assist a child in retelling the death story and facilitate meaning reconstruction through play therapy; and
- Explain how to engage parents in play therapy sessions to enhance children's post-loss adaptation.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Case Studies Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#).

## 11:00-12:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:

### A. *Superhero Grief (Jill Harrington-LaMorie, DSW, LCSW)*

Central to almost every superhero origin story is the experience of the traumatic death of a parent or loved one and the emergence from the depths of profound loss through a powerful transformative grief process. Like most myths and legends born of fiction, superhero narratives are ultimately stories about ourselves, as creators of fictional universes manipulate the superhero worlds to explore the most intricate of all human experiences. Forged by fire, superheroes are popular and relatable, as they are born through a process of life-altering experiences. At their finest, they inspire hope, provide models of coping, and demonstrate vulnerability while emerging to find meaning in their loss through the use of newfound strengths and abilities in service to the greater good. Loss and grief serve as a pathway for the superhero to transformation. One of the greatest lessons in superhero narratives is that even superheroes cannot escape loss. *Transformative Grief* demonstrates that grief is one of our greatest teachers, and that the painful experience of grieving provides us the unique opportunity for self-discovery, finding deeper meaning, awareness of our own resilience and post-traumatic growth. This module will teach participants about principles, concepts, themes, theories of grief, loss and bereavement as well as

cinematherapy/bibliotherapy strategies through the use of modern superhero narratives that can be incorporated into clinical practice or death education.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Relate the goals of fictional cinematherapy and bibliotherapy as a therapeutic and/or educational tool;
- Define the concept of *transformative grief* and implications for practice;
- Identify principles, concepts, themes, and theories of grief, loss and bereavement throughout the superhero universes; and
- Describe superhero lessons of loss and discover unique approaches to incorporate superheroes in grief therapy.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).*



*B. Art Therapy Altered Books: A Narrative Reframing after Traumatic Loss (Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT & Sarah Vollmann, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW)*

Struggle is common in the aftermath of traumatic loss. In this didactic and experiential workshop, we will review evocative art therapy case studies of altered books and explore their therapeutic benefits for survivors. Altered books are books that have been transformed from their original formats and reinvented as unique art objects. They are replete with symbolism and metaphorical meanings and become mixed media works of self-expression, deconstructed and reconstructed with mediums such as collage, paint, drawing or sewing. The book's original text can be expanded or obscured, and pages further embellished with stamps, photographs, envelopes or cut outs. Survivors of traumatic grief may alter books into reimagined narratives, fostering restorative retelling, meaning reconstruction and coping with the dual processes of loss and restoration in grieving. Participants may create an altered book in the Open Art Studio subsequently to explore and experience this creative process. No artistic skill is required. Further discussion and exploration of the creative experience would be facilitated.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the key elements of the Dual Process Model as evidenced in one of the altered book case studies;
- Identify three key elements of Rynearson's restorative retelling and its importance in the treatment of traumatic loss, as evidenced in one of the altered book case studies; and
- Summarize how art therapy altered books, in group and individual interventions, can assist in the treatment of death and non-death losses.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#).*

## 1:30-4:30 Mini-workshops. Choose between:



### A. *The Choreography of Imaginal Dialogues: A Case Study in Chair Work* (Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD)

In meaning-focused grief therapy, reconstructing the terms of attachment to the deceased is frequently a central goal, both to reaffirm constructive bonds in a sustainable, non-physical form, and to resolve unfinished business in relationships that are more ambivalent. Facilitating symbolic dialogues with the dead using *imaginal dialogue* and *chair work* with grieving clients can promote both of these aims. We will begin by clarifying the *architecture* of such interventions, as well as the conditions necessary for clients to deepen into the subjective reality of this work. We then formulate advanced guidelines for the *choreography* of the session, focusing on visual and vocal cues for directing the client's performance of relevant parts, ventriloquism of the voices of both client and deceased, and the use of props to enhance clients' attention. Finally, these principles are demonstrated in a case study featuring a full-session of imaginal dialogue with a bereaved son, which will be thoroughly processed with workshop participants to reveal markers of readiness for imaginal work, and how such deep experiential methods can be used safely in online sessions.

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- Describe the structural phases of imaginal dialogues and the circumstances under which they can be effectively utilized as a powerful experiential intervention in grief therapy;
- Discuss the essential process-oriented skills required by the therapist to deepen the client into such work, foster realignment of the relationship with the deceased and ensure safety in entry into and exit from the encounter; and
- Adapt imaginal dialogues for use in both in-office and telehealth settings.

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Case Studies Module leading [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Family-Focused Grief Therapy \(FFGT\)](#).

### B. *Open Art Studio* (Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT)

The Open Studio is a safe space for creative exploration, play and reverie. Art making, in the company of others, invites learners into the world of imagination where the process of making and shaping what is given promotes a sense of wellbeing. It is a place to explore innermost feelings and thoughts in a community where relationships support the powerful medicine of being seen and heard. This informal yet energy infused open studio offering will focus on the art making process, stimulate the relationship to art materials and serve to empower each learner as self-determined artist. Through practicing a specific creative technique, learners explore themselves in a container of thoughtful absorption and then share their process and product with faculty. This life affirming action of making, shaping and sharing is rooted in empathy

and compassion. No artistic talent is required, only curiosity, willingness and presence.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Create and engage in an art-based modality of learner's choice;
- Process the art making experience and the art product with faculty; and
- Discuss possible applications in learner's clinical practice.

*NOTE:* This session confers 1 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy \(AAGT\)](#).

## Tuesday (April 4)

**9:30-11:00** Mini-workshops. Choose between:



**A. Self-Compassion: Sustaining the Ability to Care in Challenging Times (Darcy L. Harris, RN, RSW, MEd (Couns), PhD, FT)**

Clinicians who work with people experiencing loss and grief are often defined by their compassionate nature and ability to care for others in incredibly difficult situations. The ability to sustain this compassionate stance begins with self-compassion. There is a growing body of evidence supporting the cultivation of compassion-based practices as a buffer to fatigue and burnout that can be readily experienced when working with vulnerable individuals in organizational settings. This session will introduce participants to practices that are designed to enhance the cultivation of a greater sense of compassion for themselves and those in their care.

*Learning Objectives:*

- Identify how losses at the personal, professional, and organizational levels affect the ability to provide care;
- Describe the components of compassion and how they relate to professional practice and personal perspectives; and
- Explore practices for the cultivation of self-compassion as a form of professional competence.

*NOTE:* This session confers 0.5 credit of Practicum Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).



**B. Nature-Based Rituals (Christina Zampitella, PsyD, FT)**

The integration of ecopsychotherapy and therapeutic bereavement rituals are explored in this presentation. While bereavement rituals are plentiful across cultures and spiritual orientations, nature-based interventions remain a secular, trans-

theoretical, and cross-cultural available resource that can be effectively integrated into grief therapy. Participants will leave the presentation understanding ecopsychotherapy, rites of passage as they relate to the bereavement process, the interface between nature-based interventions and ritual, and a practical intervention aimed at transformation and meaning-making in the bereavement process.

*Learning objectives:*

- Integrate the rite of passage model with the meaning reconstruction model of bereavement;
- Differentiate between personal and collective functions of rituals; and
- Apply and demonstrate the use of the Development of a Nature-Based Ritual form.

*NOTE: This session confers 0.5 credit of Techniques Module leading to [Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction \(GTMR\)](#) or [Certification in Grief Therapy for Non-Death Losses \(NDL\)](#).*

## 11:00-12:30 Closing Ceremony