



Portland Institute
For Loss and Transition

Principle of Practice

Seek secure bases in dealing with loss and change

In the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, while dealing with challenges of *physical and social distancing*, people need to deal with loss and unsolicited change of all kinds. At the same time the necessary isolation to prevent rapid spread of the virus strips us of our most precious resource in times of need: the close presence of trusted others.

The need for support and encouragement through close proximity of significant others dates back to our very early years of being fully dependent on our caregivers. They can become our very first *secure bases* - they not only *care* for us, offering us support and comfort, but also *dare* us to learn from engaging in new experiences. The ability to reach out and seek support from secure bases is crucial. We need secure bases throughout our whole lifespan and in particular during moments of (personal) crisis.

The counselor may be aware that loss and unsolicited change due to the COVID-19 pandemic take place in an already existing context where secure base are, or are not, available to the client. Earlier life transitions of the client can, for better or for worse, be triggered by the current crisis. It is important to realize that while the pandemic can be potentially traumatic, trauma is more likely in the absence of external and / or internal secure bases.

Furthermore, potentially traumatic experiences are strongly mitigated when clients are able to act meaningfully, to exert some kind of control during the situation. The counselor can curiously explore to what extent secure bases are available to the client and to what extent the client already is able to access internalized secure bases and resilience.

Some guiding questions can be:

- Here-and-now: *how are you today? What is going on at the moment? What would help you keep focus now?*
- The essence: *can you tell me in four sentences or less what it is all about for you? What is important for you?*
- Dive deep: *what do you need from me? What can you do yourself?*
- Clarity and focus: *support the creation of structure and time. What structure was there before the crisis and how did that help?*
- Give options: *do you want to talk about it now or at a later moment?*
- Recognize what is going well: *what successes, no matter how big or small, are there to celebrate? What are you learning? For what or for whom were you meaningful today? What are you thankful for today?*



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Some don'ts are:

- *Do not accept it at face value if someone says that 'everything is fine'*
- *Do not be afraid to ask personal questions*
- *Do not dismiss fear with conversation stoppers like 'you don't need to be afraid'*
- *Do not use the word 'trauma' as an excuse to not do anything*
- *Do not avoid subjects like suffering, mortality and death*
- *Do not give advice or solutions unless asked*
- *Never believe that you are indispensable*

Counselors function as special secure bases to support clients through caring and daring to activate or reactivate themselves. Counselors are invited, in these special times more than ever, to reflect themselves on these themes. Only then can they authentically respond to clients who are struggling with how to deal with a crisis situation themselves. Counselors who work in organizations with executives are especially welcomed to explore these themes from a secure base leadership perspective with their clients.

You may also read [Leadership and Managing Fear in Times of Crisis](#) by Riet Fiddelaers-Jaspers and Jakob van Wielink.

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