

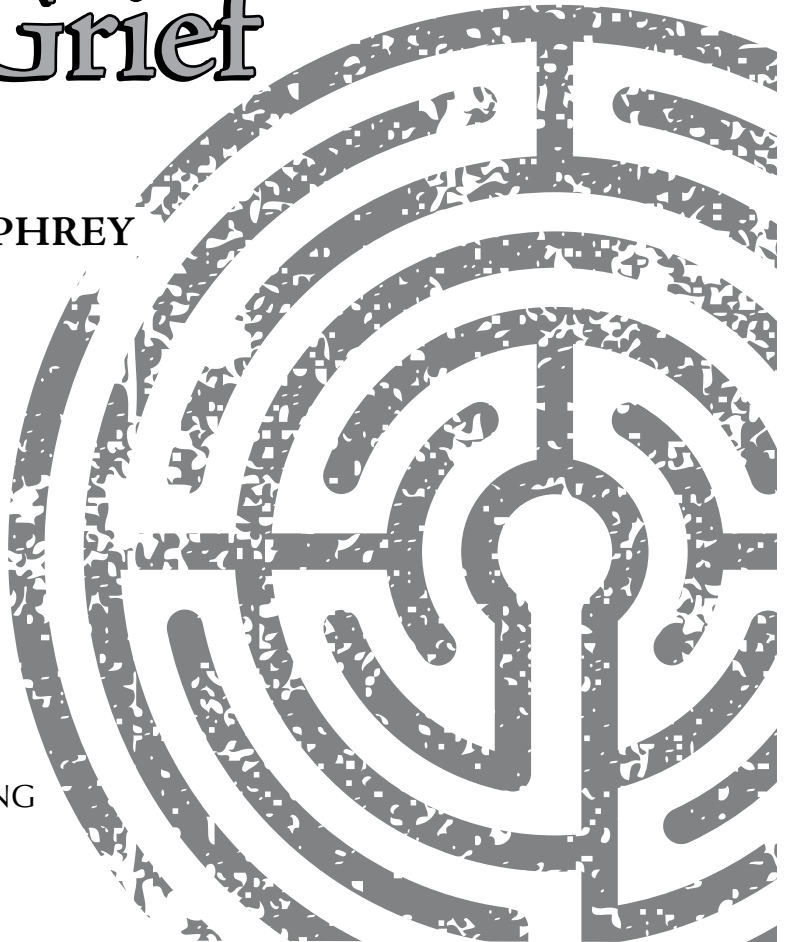
Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief

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Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief

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Dedication



This book is dedicated to the women who shaped me with their presence:

*my mother, Amy Riser Harrington Humphrey,
and my maternal grandmother, Elberta Riser Harrington.*

*And to the woman who shaped me with her absence,
my paternal grandmother, Lela Marie Beller Humphrey.*

Table of Contents



Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
About the Author	xv



PART 1 Unique Grief and Unique Grievers

Chapter 1 • Thinking Differently About Loss and Grief in the 21st Century	3
Loss and Grief Terminology	5
Changing Ideas About Loss and Grief	6
Nine Critical Guidelines for Conceptualizing Loss and Grief	7
Chapter 2 • Listening To and Listening For Loss and Grief	19
Types of Loss and Grief	20
Selected Psychosocial Factors	25
Listening for Clues to Loss and Grief in Psychotherapy	32
Diagnosing Uncomplicated and Complicated Bereavement Grief	33
Chapter 3 • Two Contemporary Models of Loss Adaptation	37
Adaptive Grieving Styles	37
The Dual Process Model	47
Differential Grief in Families	51



PART 2 Counseling Strategies for Loss Adaptation

Chapter 4 • Cognitive–Behavioral and Constructivist Strategies for Loss Adaptation	57
Cognitive–Behavioral Strategies for Loss Adaptation	57
Constructivist Strategies for Loss Adaptation	62

Managing Repetitive Thoughts and Ruminative Coping: Three Strategies	63
Rational Emotive Imagery for Avoidance	64
Telling and Retelling the Story of Obscured Loss	67
Responsibility Pies and Defense Attorneys Meet Shame and Guilt	71
Loss Experiences Timeline	73
Systemic and Thematic Genograms With Loss and Grief	76
Early Recollections	83
Objects of Connection	85
Therapeutic Grief Rituals	89
Therapeutic Writing for Loss: Giving Sorrow Words	94
Cinematherapy With Loss and Grief	102
Prescription to Grieve	106
Decisional Balance and the Possibility of Change	109
Confronting Secondary Gain	112
Creating a Resilient Image	114
The 2 Questions	116
Breathing Lessons	116
Mindfulness-Based Practices to Manage Distress	118
Using Ecotherapy Strategies for Loss and Grief	124
Client Drawings in Grief Counseling	127
Client-Generated Metaphors	130
Wisdom Chronicles	135
Brief Homework Assignments to Promote Change	138
Shared Reminiscence	140
Loss Characterization to Address Fragmented Identity	141
Using Photographs to Facilitate Meaning Reconstruction	142
Chapter 5 ♦ Emotion-Focused Strategies for Loss Adaptation	147
Respecting Client Differences in Emotional Processing	147
Create a Holding Environment for Difficult Emotions	148
Emotional Processing Challenges in Loss Adaptation	149
General Guidelines for Emotional Processing With Loss Adaptation	152
Using a Feelings List for Grief Experiences	156
Chair Dialogues	157
Focusing: Moving Deeper With Feelings to Awareness	166
Mapping Loss and Grief: Focus on Feelings	171
How My Dark Emotions Have Made Me Strong	171
Chapter 6 ♦ Narrative Therapy Strategies for Loss Adaptation	175
Narrative Therapy Terminology	176
Basic Assumptions of Narrative Therapy	176
Narrative Style Questioning and Externalizing Conversation	178
Implementation of Narrative Practices	179

Chapter 7 ♦ Solution-Focused Therapy Strategies for Loss Adaptation	195
Basic Assumptions of Solution-Focused Therapy	195
Implementation of Solution-Focused Therapy	196
Chapter 8 ♦ Adjunctive Strategies for Loss Adaptation	205
Client Self-Care	205
Therapeutic Massage	206
Labyrinth Walking	206
The Nature Cure	208
Tai Chi and Yoga	208
Creative Activities	209
Mindfulness Meditation	210
Grief Support Groups	210
Chapter 9 ♦ The Counseling Professional Working With Loss and Grief	213
Three Essential Counselor Roles	213
Practical Suggestions for Counseling Professionals	215
The Person of the Counseling Professional: Know Thyself	218
References	221
Index	237

Preface



For years my professional colleagues and I have discussed the need for a book of counseling interventions to supplement the theoretical literature on loss and grief. The vast majority of this literature centers on theoretical conceptualizations of bereavement grief and research on distinct topics (e.g., complicated grief, AIDS-related grief) or the characteristics of distinct populations (e.g., bereaved parents, the chronically ill). Although this knowledge base is essential to our understanding of loss and grief, the literature tends to fall short in consideration of the technical aspects of intervention. Most often authors suggest a direction for therapy, such as examining unfinished business or facilitating emotional expression, but the nuts-and-bolts descriptions of what to actually do with clients in therapy are often disappointingly vague or entirely absent. It is the old challenge of translating theory into practice, and it is the reason for this book.

The purpose of *Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief* is to describe a range of counseling strategies appropriate to the treatment of loss and grief issues in diverse psychotherapy settings. It is based on contemporary understandings on the nature of personal and interpersonal loss and the ways in which people attempt to integrate loss and grief into their lives. The suggested strategies incorporate constructs and procedures from a wide variety of sources, reflecting both time-tested counseling strategies and more recent innovations in counseling theory and practice. Five themes guide this text.

1. Loss and grief are frequently encountered issues in psychotherapy that are inclusive of both death-related and nondeath-related circumstances. Despite substantial attention given to bereavement grief, nondeath-related losses just as often present significant challenges in the lives of clients. "All changes involve loss, just as all losses require change" (R. A. Neimeyer, 2000a, p. 5).
2. The experience of loss and grief is highly individual and intensely personal, reflecting a unique interaction of person, loss event, and the multiple contexts in which that loss and grief occur.
3. The boundary between death-related and nondeath-related loss is permeable so that knowledge associated with each assists understanding of the other. Differences between the two have less to do with the fact of death and bereavement and more to do with the uniqueness of an individual's response to loss and his or her particular grieving journey.
4. The natural extension of appreciating the uniqueness of each person's experience of loss and grief and her or his particular manner of adapting to loss is the importance of tailoring counseling strategies to client needs. If the experience of loss and grief is unique, then counseling interventions that address those experiences must prioritize that uniqueness.

5. It is assumed that counseling professionals regard the strategies described here, like any therapeutic intervention, as inherently adaptable. Sound theoretical conceptualization and a solid working relationship precede selection of interventions, which are then customized to fit the unique needs of clients and the evolving counseling process.

Perhaps it is useful here to point out what this book does not attempt to do. It is not intended as a comprehensive treatment manual in which a set of prescribed interventions from a standardized theory are applied invariably to every client, family, or group. There is no laundry list of goals and objectives from which to pick and choose and no stereotypical list of cultural characteristics that obscures individuality. Instead, this book describes a broad range of counseling strategies that are adaptable across various theoretical orientations and includes practical suggestions for increasing their effectiveness.

Whom This Book Is For

Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief is intended primarily for counseling professionals and clinical supervisors working in diverse psychotherapy settings. It also provides a valuable, practical resource for graduate trainees in counseling and counseling-related professions, where issues of loss and grief are inadequately addressed (Humphrey, 1993). The counseling strategies outlined here are most appropriate for adolescents and adults and are primarily aimed at individual therapy situations. However, suggestions for using these strategies in group and family therapy settings are provided. Additional resource recommendations specific to certain topics are also included throughout the text.

Terminology in This Book

Sometimes the terminology associated with professional psychotherapy services can be confusing, so the following clarifications apply in this text:

- ♦ *Counseling* and *therapy* refer to psychotherapeutic intervention services provided by qualified mental health professionals. No distinction is made in this text between counseling and therapy as long as services are delivered by a qualified mental health professional.
- ♦ A *qualified mental health professional* possesses at least a master's degree in counseling or a counseling-related field (e.g., psychology, social work) and national certification or state licensure. *Counseling professional*, *therapist*, *counselor*, and *psychotherapist* are interchangeable terms describing qualified mental health professionals.
- ♦ *Grief counseling* and *grief therapy* refer to psychotherapeutic interventions involving both death-related and nondeath-related grief.
- ♦ *Strategies* is the preferred term for counseling interventions described in this book. The word *techniques* implies something done to clients by counselors without input from clients, whereas *strategies* suggests a more respectful and collaborative therapeutic activity, tailored to the uniqueness of clients, that is consistent with effective counseling for loss and grief.

Organization of the Book

Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief includes two parts. Part 1, *Unique Grief and Unique Grievers*, orients readers to current thinking about loss and grief and the implications for professional counseling practice. Chapter 1 summarizes the shift from traditional to contemporary grief models in the form of guidelines for conceptualizing loss and grief. Chapter 2 highlights diverse aspects of loss and grief that merit special attention by counseling professionals. Chapter 3 outlines two contemporary grief models—adaptive grieving styles and the dual process model—with suggestions for using these models to enhance counseling services with grieving clients. Part 2, *Counseling Strategies for Loss Adaptation*, offers detailed descriptions of various interventions appropriate in counseling for issues of loss and grief, distinguishing them by focus or theoretical origins. Chapter 4 provides strategies that focus on cognitive and behavioral interventions, drawing largely from cognitive-behavioral and constructivist therapy models. Chapter 5 provides strategies that focus primarily on emotional processing. Chapters 6 and 7 offer strategies derived from two contemporary therapies arising from postmodern and constructivist thinking: narrative therapy and solution-focused therapy. Chapter 8 describes a number of recommended adjunctive activities that are especially beneficial to grieving clients, their adaptation to loss, and the counseling process. Finally, Chapter 9 addresses the challenges of working with loss and grief for the counselor as a person and a professional.

Acknowledgments



It has been my good fortune to work directly or indirectly with grieving people in a variety of settings over several careers. I remain in awe of those individuals and families who willingly shared their dying and their grief with me so many years ago in my first career as a parish minister. This book began with you.

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About the Author



KEREN M. HUMPHREY, EdD, NCC, LPC, LCPC, has more than 25 years experience in the helping professions as a parish minister, probation officer, professional counselor, and counselor educator. In addition to a private psychotherapy practice, Dr. Humphrey has provided counseling, supervision, and consultation services in the corrections field and on college campuses. A popular national and international presenter on grief counseling and counselor preparation, Dr. Humphrey is also the author of numerous journal articles, coauthor of *Problem Solving Technique in Counseling* (CD-ROM), and coauthor with Deborah Davis of *College Counseling: Issues and Strategies for a New Millennium*. She has held various leadership positions in the American College Counseling Association and has been a representative to the Governing Council of the American Counseling Association. She is the recipient of the Outstanding Professional Leadership Award and the Award for Dedicated and Outstanding Service from the American College Counseling Association. Recently retired after nearly 20 years as a counseling professor at Western Illinois University and Texas A&M University–Commerce, Dr. Humphrey is the CEO of 4 Directions Consulting, Rockwall, Texas.