

## Utilization of EMDR Therapy with Grief and Mourning

This workshop will focus on integrating EMDR into the treatment of grief and mourning. A traumatic loss can disable the ability to cope, impair functioning, compromise the ability to adapt, and add significantly to the mourner's distress. Trauma also complicates the mourning by interfering with the processes necessary for the assimilation and accommodation of the loss.

EMDR can be integrated into treatment of grief and loss through processing a) the past memories that underlie current dysfunction b) present triggers, c) future template for adaptive behavior. Past memories include the moment of realization of the loss (e.g. when the mourner heard the news), but can be past traumas or losses that are complicating the current clinical picture. For example, research has shown attachment issues stemming from early childhood can complicate grief, necessitating the processing of past memories connected to current problems (e.g. hyperactivating or deactivating strategies). Present triggers include the situations, people, and places where symptoms are experienced. For each present trigger, future templates for adaptive behavior are applied. EMDR processing seems to allow the client to experience, express and discharge the pain. This is necessary for the eventual adaptive shifting resulting from the linking in of other networks with positive, adaptive information (e.g. healthy accommodation).

A loss can be so distressing that access to memory networks containing positive memories of the loved one are blocked. With processing of distressing moments, experiences, and memories, these memory networks become accessible and play a vital role in accommodation of loss. Memories of the deceased serve as an essential bridge between the world with and the world without the loved one and are the building blocks of adaptive inner representations, continuing bonds, and meaning.

This presentation will discuss grief and mourning, the processes the mourner has to go through for adaptive assimilation and accommodation of the loss, factors that can complicate bereavement, and how EMDR can be integrated into an overall treatment plan.