



Submodule 6.5 - Cognitive restructuring and modification of negative or irrational thoughts

Grief is often accompanied by negative, irrational, or obsessive thoughts, which can hinder the emotional healing process and keep mourners in a state of prolonged distress. These thoughts can take the form of ruminations about the circumstances of the loss, incessant questioning, excessive guilt, or pessimistic generalizations about life and the future. As a GRIEF COACH, it is essential to offer your clients effective tools to identify, challenge, and modify these negative thought patterns, in order to help them work towards a more balanced and realistic view of their grieving experience.

Cognitive restructuring, a powerful technique stemming from cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT), is designed to transform negative and irrational thoughts into more appropriate and realistic ones. It is based on the idea that our emotions and behaviors are influenced by our interpretation of events rather than the events themselves. By learning to identify and modify dysfunctional thought patterns, mourners can reduce their emotional distress and develop greater resilience to their loss.

You can begin by helping your clients become aware of their automatic negative thoughts, asking them to jot these down in a diary or verbalize them during your coaching sessions. Encourage them to pay attention to the words and expressions they use to describe their grieving experience, identifying absolute terms ("always," "never," "everyone"), hasty generalizations, or pessimistic predictions. For instance, a mourner may think: "I will never be happy without him/her" or "Life is meaningless now that he/she is gone."

Once these negative thoughts are identified, you can guide your clients through a process of kind and realistic questioning. Invite them to examine the evidence that supports or refutes

these thoughts, consider alternative interpretations, and nuance their statements. For example, you can encourage them to ask themselves: "Is it really true that I will never be happy again? Haven't there been moments, even brief ones, where I have felt some peace or joy since the loss?" or "Has life completely lost its meaning, or can I still find a different meaning through my relationships, commitments, or values?"

It is important to emphasize that the goal of cognitive restructuring is not to deny suffering or promote artificial positive thinking, rather it seeks to develop a more nuanced and realistic view of the grieving experience. It is about helping mourners soften their views of themselves, others, and the world, introducing flexibility and openness where rigidity and pessimism once reigned.

To facilitate this process, you can give your clients practical exercises, such as keeping a cognitive restructuring journal where they record their negative thoughts, the related emotions and behaviors, as well as more realistic and balanced alternative thoughts. You can also encourage them to practice self-compassion, addressing themselves with the same kindness and understanding they would demonstrate to a friend going through a similar ordeal.

By integrating cognitive restructuring into your grief coaching practice, you provide your clients with a powerful tool for transforming their relationship to their thoughts and emotions. You help them to develop greater mental flexibility, challenge thought patterns that keep them in suffering, and cultivate a more balanced and realistic view of their grieving experience. By accompanying them in this process with patience, compassion, and respect, you empower them to move towards greater emotional resilience and improved quality of life.

Remember that each bereaved individual is unique, and cognitive restructuring can bring up resistances or difficult emotions. It is essential to proceed at each client's own pace, respecting their boundaries and guiding them kindly through the exploration of their thoughts and beliefs. Your role as a GRIEF COACH is to create a safe and empathetic space for this delicate work, offering your clients unconditional support in their journey towards greater internal freedom and a better acceptance of their post-loss reality.

Key takeaways:

1. Cognitive restructuring is a powerful technique from cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT) for transforming negative and irrational thoughts into more suitable and realistic ones.
2. The process begins by identifying automatic negative thoughts, paying attention to absolute terms, hastened generalizations, and pessimistic predictions.

3. Clients are then guided through kindly and realistically questioning these thoughts, examining supporting or refuting evidence, and considering alternative interpretations.
4. The goal is not to deny suffering, but to develop a more nuanced and realistic view of the grieving experience, introducing flexibility and openness.
5. Practical exercises, such as keeping a cognitive restructuring journal and practicing self-compassion, can facilitate this process.
6. The GRIEF COACH should create a secure and empathetic space, respecting each client's pace and boundaries, while kindly guiding them in exploring their thoughts and beliefs.