



### Sub-module 8.3 - Supporting clients in accomplishing Worden's grief tasks

The grief tasks model, developed by William Worden, provides a structured and dynamic framework for supporting grieving individuals in their adaptation process to loss. According to this model, grief involves accomplishing four essential tasks: accepting the reality of the loss, experiencing the pain of the loss, adjusting to an environment where the deceased is absent, and finding an enduring connection with the deceased while reinvesting in life. As a GRIEF COACH, it is essential to understand these tasks to guide the bereaved on their journey, helping them mobilize their resources and overcome obstacles that may hinder their progress.

The first task, accepting the reality of the loss, involves fully and concretely acknowledging that the loved one has died and will not return. This is both a cognitive and emotional process, which may take time and require tangible evidence, such as seeing the body or participating in funeral rituals. Grieving individuals may struggle to integrate this reality, and continue to look for the deceased, talk to them, or hope for their return. The GRIEF COACH can assist them in moving towards acceptance, encouraging them to verbalize their experience, share their memories, and find concrete ways to honor the reality of the loss, like creating an altar or attending commemorations.

The second task, feeling the pain of the loss, involves allowing oneself to fully experience the painful emotions associated with grief, such as sadness, anger, guilt, or helplessness. This is a natural and necessary process that allows individuals to integrate the loss emotionally and make sense of it. Bereaved individuals may tend to avoid or minimize their suffering, out of fear of being overwhelmed or losing control. The GRIEF COACH can help them welcome and express their emotions, by creating a safe and empathetic space,

normalizing their reactions, and offering appropriate tools, such as expressive writing, art therapy, or mindfulness practice.

The third task, adjusting to an environment where the deceased is absent, involves developing new skills, roles, and relationships to cope with practical and existential changes brought about by the loss. This is a process of adaptation and reinvestment, which can be more or less challenging depending on individuals' circumstances and resources. Bereaved individuals may struggle to take on certain responsibilities, make decisions, or form new connections, due to feelings of insecurity, guilt, or loyalty to the deceased. The GRIEF COACH can assist them in identifying their needs and strengths, setting realistic goals, and celebrating their progress, by encouraging them to try new activities, seek support, and open up to new possibilities.

The fourth task, finding an enduring connection with the deceased while reinvesting in one's own life, involves developing a new internal relationship with the departed loved one, based on memories, values, and legacy, while allowing oneself to fully live one's own life. This is a process of transformation and integration, allows one to maintain a symbolic tie with the deceased while creating new attachments and finding meaning in existence. Bereaved individuals may struggle to find this balance, out of fear of forgetting the deceased, betraying their memory, or replacing them. The GRIEF COACH can assist them in exploring various ways of maintaining a meaningful connection with the loved one, such as creating personal rituals, sharing memories with loved ones, or engaging in causes that were close to the deceased's heart, while encouraging them to allow themselves moments of joy, lightness, and novelty.

An illustrative example of grief task support is that of Sophie, a 40-year-old woman who lost her mother to cancer. In the early days after the death, Sophie struggled to realize that her mother was gone forever. She continued to call her on her phone, buy her gifts, and dream of her nearly every night. In our sessions, I gently welcomed her need to maintain a tangible connection with her mother, while gradually inviting her to put words to the reality of her absence. We explored together memories and objects symbolizing their relationship and acknowledged ways to honor her memory, such as creating a photo album or planting a tree. Gradually, Sophie was able to move towards a more serene acceptance of the loss and express the range of emotions that inhabited her, from sadness to gratitude to anger. She also identified roles and responsibilities that her mother had in her life and developed new skills to cope with them, such as managing the family budget or organizing parties. Finally, Sophie found personal ways to maintain an intimate link with her mother, like practicing meditation or writing letters, while allowing herself to reinvest her personal and professional life, strengthened by the encouragements and values transmitted by her mother.

Supporting grief tasks require great sensitivity and an ability to adapt to the unique pace and needs of each grieving individual. The GRIEF COACH must be able to recognize where

the individual is on their journey and propose tailored interventions to support their progress. They must also be attentive to moments of stagnation or regression, helping the griever to identify the internal or external obstacles that hinder the accomplishment of tasks. This demands keen observation skills, active listening, and creativity in choosing tools and metaphors.

By integrating the grief tasks model into their practice, GRIEF COACHES have a valuable compass to guide grief-stricken individuals on their journey through grief. They can thus assist them in moving towards a serene acceptance of the loss, fully experiencing their grief, adapting to the changes induced by the absence, and finding a satisfying balance between memory and the future. This model reminds us that grief is an active and multidimensional process, which requires a structured, personalized approach respectful of the challenges and resources of each individual.

#### Key Takeaways:

- William Worden's grief tasks model offers a structured framework to support grieving individuals in their adaptation process to loss.
- The four essential tasks are: accepting the reality of the loss, experiencing the pain, adjusting to an environment where the deceased is absent, and finding an enduring connection with the deceased while reinvesting in one's own life.
- The GRIEF COACH assists grieving individuals in moving towards acceptance, expressing their emotions, developing new skills, and finding a balance between memory and the future.
- The support requires great sensitivity, an ability to adapt to each person's pace, and close attention to moments of stagnation or regression.
- The GRIEF COACH uses a variety of tools and metaphors to support the progress of grieving individuals in accomplishing the tasks.
- Sophie's example illustrates how the model enables personalized and multidimensional guidance.
- Grief is an active process that requires a support that is both structured and respectful of each individual's challenges and resources.