

# Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction:

*A Trauma-Informed  
Approach*

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Portland Institute  
For Loss and Transition

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In the Humanistic-Existential tradition, our human *presence* is foundational, and fosters the client's:

- Self-exploration
- Experiential reflection
- Responsibility

--Kirk Schneider



# *Mindfulness as a Container*

- For troubling stories
- For difficult emotions
- For unwelcome transitions



# 3 “P’s” of Psychotherapy

*Robert A. Neimeyer*

Procedure without Process =  
Misdirection

Process without Presence =  
Manipulation

## Procedure

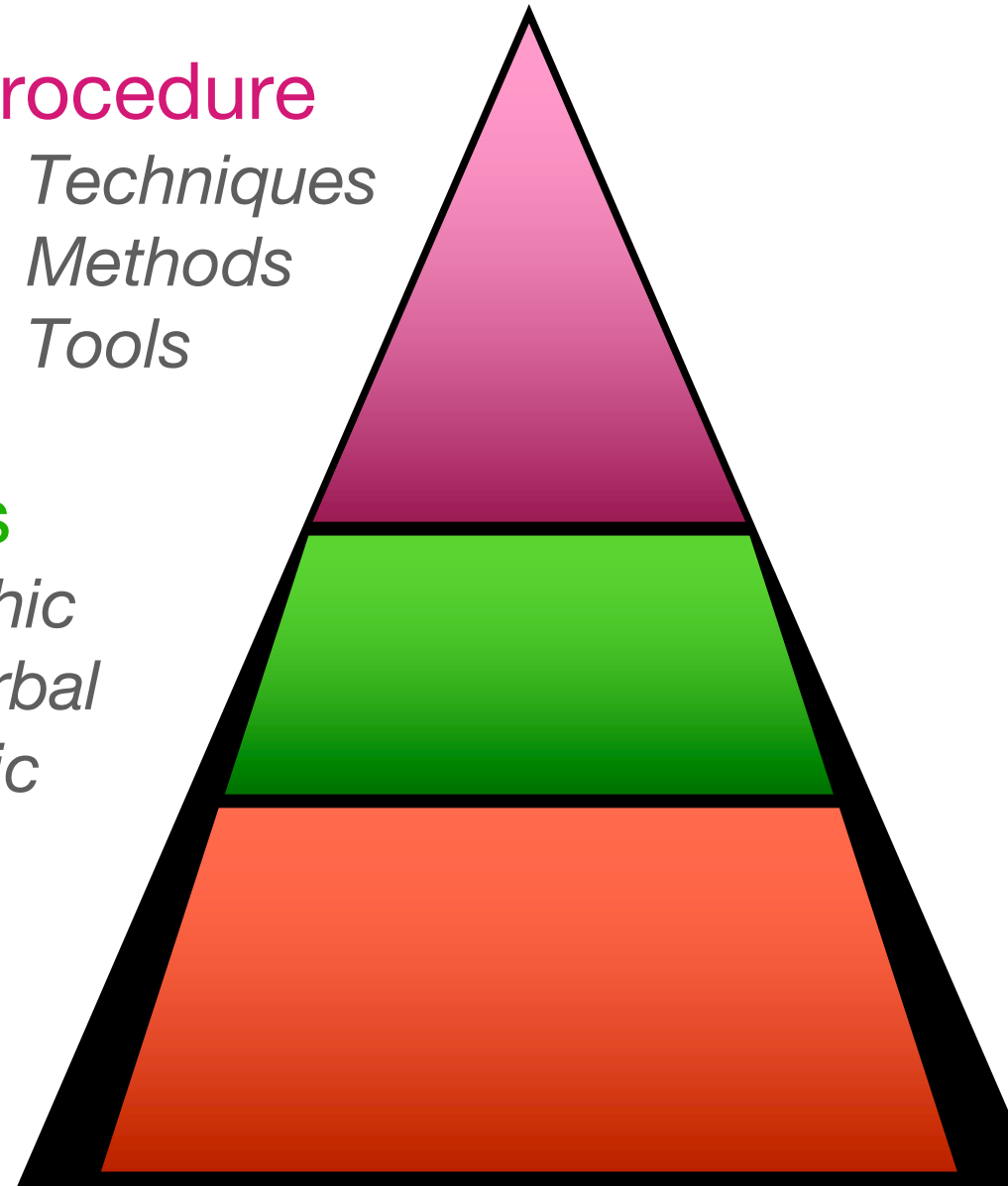
- *Techniques*
- *Methods*
- *Tools*

## Process

- *Empathic*
- *Nonverbal*
- *Somatic*

## Presence

- *Mindfulness*
- *Responsiveness*
- *Vulnerability*



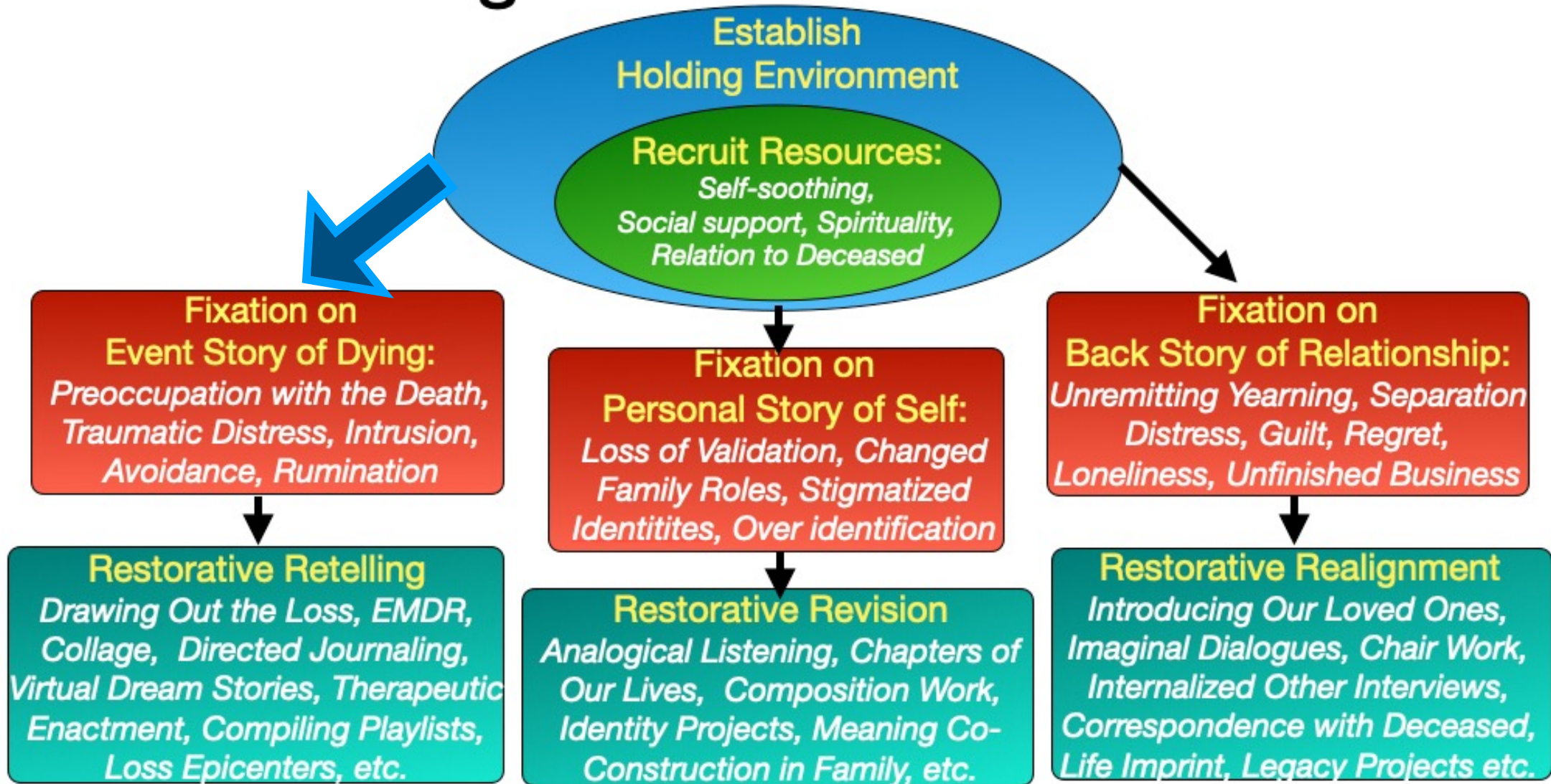


# Goals of Grief Therapy

- **Redress** deepest sources of fixation that impede adaptation to loss
- **Revisit** and reintegrate event story of the death
- **Renegotiate** the terms of attachment to the deceased
- **Review** and revise the self narrative in a recomposed social world
- **Reestablish** a life of coherence and meaning in light of deeply unwelcome transition



# Meaning Reconstruction in Loss





# A Witch's Brew

*...In my own personal bitter experience with Prolonged Grief Disorder it has become so very, very clear that virtually no one is willing to go there, so you, the client, just comply--you just shut it down. And meanwhile you're walking around with a raging witch's brew of imagery and poisonous flashing energy with tripwires everywhere....*



# *Restorative Retelling: Principles and Procedures*



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# Narrative Processes

*Levitt & Angus*



Heidi Levitt



- *External Narrative:* The Objective Story
- *Internal Narrative:* The Emotion-focused Story
- *Reflexive Narrative:* The Meaning-oriented Story



# Talking the Talk, Walking the Walk

## Bracing

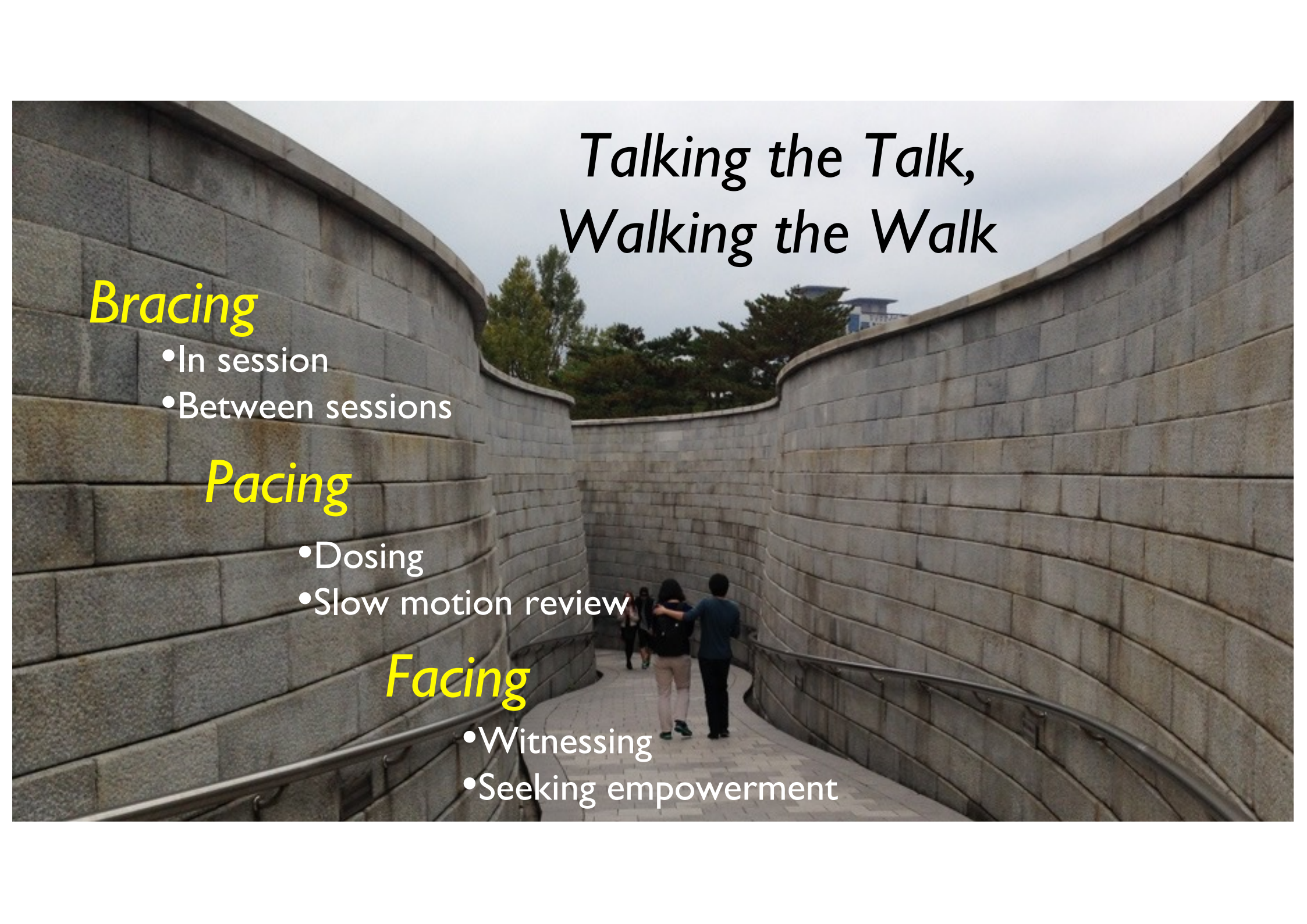
- In session
- Between sessions

## Pacing

- Dosing
- Slow motion review

## Facing

- Witnessing
- Seeking empowerment







“Retelling the story dropped me right back into the scene but at the same time allowed me to have distance, so I didn’t feel re-traumatized or triggered.”

—*Jamie Thower*



# Restorative Retelling

- Retell story of the loss for at least 10-15 minutes, starting when death is imminent or announced, and ending when a natural “chapter” is completed
- May close eyes or use photos to invite strong emotion





# In the Construction Zone



- Mind the gap
- Plant a flag
- Return for later visualization, therapeutic dialogue, consultation with others or journaling

# Revisiting the Recording

Ensure safe entry and exit

Place time limits on revisiting

Process through journaling

Integrate journaling into  
subsequent therapy

Intersperse retelling with  
sessions of processing







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