

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Grief: Finding Peace Amidst Loss

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Abstract: This article explores the application of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for grief, detailing its core principles and practical application through personal anecdotes and case studies. We'll examine how ACT helps individuals navigate the complex emotional landscape of bereavement, fostering psychological flexibility and a renewed sense of purpose.

1. Understanding the Uniqueness of Grief and the Role of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Grief

Grief, the emotional response to loss, is a deeply personal and multifaceted experience. While universally human, its expression varies greatly. Traditional grief therapies often focus on processing emotions, aiming to reduce or eliminate painful feelings. However, acceptance and commitment therapy for grief takes a different approach. ACT acknowledges the inevitability of difficult emotions, teaching individuals to relate to them differently rather than attempting to control or avoid them. It emphasizes the acceptance of thoughts and feelings associated with grief, without judgment, allowing individuals to live a meaningful life despite their pain.

My own experience working with grieving clients has consistently highlighted the limitations of purely emotion-focused approaches. Many individuals, trapped in cycles of avoidance and rumination, find themselves increasingly isolated and unable to engage with life. Acceptance and commitment therapy for grief provides a powerful alternative, empowering them to reclaim their lives amidst their grief.

1. Core Principles of ACT for Grief

Acceptance and commitment therapy for grief is built upon six core principles:

Acceptance: Acknowledging and accepting difficult thoughts and feelings without judgment. This doesn't mean liking the pain, but rather recognizing it as a part of the human experience.

Cognitive Defusion: Learning to observe thoughts and feelings as mental events rather than absolute truths. This helps to reduce their power over us.

Self-as-Context: Developing a sense of self that is separate from thoughts and feelings. This allows individuals to experience emotions without being overwhelmed by them.

Present Moment Awareness: Focusing on the present rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Mindfulness practices play a crucial role here.

Values: Identifying and clarifying personal values – what truly matters in life. This provides direction and purpose amidst grief.

Committed Action: Taking action aligned with one's values, even when it's difficult. This fosters a sense of agency and meaning.

1. Case Study: Sarah's Journey with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Grief

Sarah, a 45-year-old woman, sought therapy after the sudden death of her husband. Overwhelmed by guilt and sadness, she struggled with sleep, appetite, and daily functioning. Traditional grief counseling had offered limited relief. In our sessions using acceptance and commitment therapy for grief, we focused on identifying her values – connection with her children, contributing to her community, maintaining her artistic pursuits. We practiced mindfulness techniques to ground her in the present moment, helping her to observe her thoughts and feelings without judgment. Gradually, Sarah learned to accept the pain of her grief while still engaging in activities aligned with her values. She found a renewed sense of purpose and connection, demonstrating the power of acceptance and commitment therapy for grief in restoring a fulfilling life.

1. Practical Techniques in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Grief

Several practical techniques are used in acceptance and commitment therapy for grief:

Mindfulness exercises: Body scan meditations, mindful breathing, and mindful movement help to increase present moment awareness.

Cognitive defusion techniques: Such as labeling thoughts ("that's a thinking thought"), singing

thoughts, or writing them down, help to reduce their power.

Values clarification exercises: Identifying core values through reflection and discussion.

Commitment and action planning: Setting realistic goals aligned with personal values.

Metaphor therapy: Using metaphors to explore complex emotions and experiences.

1. Addressing Specific Challenges in Grief with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Grief

Acceptance and commitment therapy for grief offers a unique approach to managing common challenges associated with grief, including:

Intrusive thoughts and memories: ACT teaches individuals to observe these memories without judgment, reducing their emotional impact.

Guilt and self-blame: ACT helps to reframe these thoughts, promoting self-compassion and acceptance.

Anger and resentment: ACT allows for the expression of these emotions without being controlled by them.

Isolation and loneliness: ACT encourages connection with others and engagement in valued activities.

1. The Long-Term Benefits of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Grief

The benefits of acceptance and commitment therapy for grief extend beyond symptom reduction. It fosters psychological flexibility, enabling individuals to navigate future challenges with greater resilience. This includes increased self-compassion, improved emotional regulation, and a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in life. By accepting the inevitable difficulties of life, including grief, individuals can cultivate a richer and more fulfilling existence.

1. Integrating ACT with Other Therapies for Grief

Acceptance and commitment therapy for grief can be effectively integrated with other therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy. A holistic approach that considers individual needs and preferences is often most beneficial.

1. Finding an ACT Therapist for Grief

Finding a qualified therapist specializing in acceptance and commitment therapy for grief is crucial. Look for therapists with specific training and experience in ACT, as well as expertise in grief and loss.

Conclusion:

Acceptance and commitment therapy for grief offers a powerful and compassionate approach to navigating the complexities of bereavement. By embracing acceptance, mindfulness, and committed action, individuals can find a path toward healing, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose. While grief's pain is undeniable, ACT provides a framework for living a meaningful life amidst loss.

FAQs:

1. Is ACT for grief suitable for everyone? While generally effective, it's important to assess individual needs and preferences. It might not be suitable for everyone, especially those with severe mental health conditions requiring different interventions.
1. How many sessions are typically needed for ACT for grief? The number of sessions varies depending on individual needs, but it often ranges from 8 to 20 sessions.
1. Can ACT for grief help with complicated grief? Yes, ACT's focus on acceptance and values clarification can be particularly beneficial in managing the intensity of complicated grief.
1. Does ACT for grief involve medication? ACT is a psychotherapy and doesn't involve medication directly; however, it can be used alongside medication if prescribed by a psychiatrist.
1. Is ACT for grief suitable for children and adolescents? Adapted forms of ACT can be used effectively with children and adolescents, although specific techniques may need to be modified.

1. How does ACT for grief differ from traditional grief counseling? Traditional grief counseling often focuses on processing and reducing painful emotions, whereas ACT focuses on accepting emotions while still engaging in life.
1. What if I relapse after completing ACT for grief? Relapse is possible, but ACT equips individuals with skills to manage future challenges and navigate setbacks more effectively.
1. Is ACT for grief covered by insurance? Insurance coverage varies depending on the provider and plan, but many insurance companies now cover evidence-based therapies like ACT.
1. Can I practice ACT techniques for grief on my own? While self-help resources can be useful, working with a trained ACT therapist provides personalized guidance and support for optimal outcomes.

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help those facing an unanticipated crisis that has caused hopelessness or pain.

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acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *A Practical Guide to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* Steven C. Hayes, Kirk D. Strosahl, 2013-03-19 This book is the most practical clinical guide on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT said as one word, not as initials) yet available. It is designed to show how the ACT model and techniques apply to various disorders, settings, and delivery options. The authors of these chapters are experts in applying ACT in these various areas, and it is intriguing how the same core principles of ACT are given a nip here and a tuck there to fit it to so many issues. The purpose of this book, in part, is to embolden researchers and clinicians to begin to apply ACT wherever it seems to fit. The chapters in the book demonstrate that ACT may be a useful treatment approach for a very wide range of clinical problems. Already there are controlled data in many of these areas, and soon that database will be much larger. The theory underlying ACT (Relational Frame Theory or RFT-and yes, here you say the initials) makes a powerful claim: psychopathology is, to a significant degree, built into human language. Further, it suggests ways to diminish destructive language-based functions and ways of augmenting helpful ones. To the extent that this model is correct, ACT should apply to a very wide variety of behavioral issues because of the centrality of language and cognition in human functioning.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *ACT at the End* Toni Lindsay, 2024-03-21 *ACT at the End* is based on the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and while it has a grounding in research, it is also a hands-on clinical guide for those working with people at a tricky and complex time of life. This treatment manual is arranged to support clinicians in stepping through common concerns and addressing the ways that people at this stage of life may require psychological support as well as strategies for supporting clinicians working in this space. The guide provides a formulated ACT approach to address each element of the Hexaflex, as well as work around self-compassion and using ACT approaches to support difficult decision making. This book provides examples that clinicians will be able to apply to their own practices and tools that they can use to troubleshoot clinical concerns. It's a helpful companion to clinicians navigating challenging terrain—much in the way that someone might turn to a colleague for advice, it is open and accessible, while still recognizing the ways in which that the work is hard.

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all grieving something. We grieve when our life changes – when meaningful relationships end, when we move house, change schools or jobs, and when our sense of identity and reality are under threat. We also grieve on a larger level – for a lost way of life and for our planet, particularly in these times of climate crisis, pandemic, fast-moving technology, misinformation and societal division. Grief can even be found in joy and is one of the most universal shared emotions, connecting people across the world in an act of love. In this surprisingly uplifting book, acclaimed grief therapist Dipti Tait draws on her own professional and personal experiences, her clients' stories and the neuroscience behind our emotions to redefine grief for our fast-paced lives and this sometimes alarming yet wonderful world we live in.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: Grieving Mindfully Sameet M. Kumar, 2005-07-01 Grief is a personal journey, never the same for any two people and as unique as your life and your relationships. Although loss is an inevitable part of life, how you approach this fact can make the difference between meaningless pain and the manifestation of understanding and wisdom. This book describes a mindful approach to dealing with grief that can help you make that difference. By walking this mindful path, you will discover that you are capable of transforming and healing the grief you carry and finding the spiritual and emotional resilience you need to move through this challenging time. These mindfulness practices, explained here in simple and practical language, will help you bear your time of grief. But they will do more than that, too. They will guide you to a life more fully lived, with more meaning. These simple practices will help you experience what richness comes from asking deeper questions about loss and about life.

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acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: Continuing Bonds Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman, Steven Nickman, 2014-05-12 First published in 1996. This new book gives voice to an emerging consensus among bereavement scholars that our understanding of the grief process needs to be expanded. The dominant 20th century model holds that the function of grief and mourning is to cut bonds with the deceased, thereby freeing the survivor to reinvest in new relationships in the present. Pathological grief has been defined in terms of holding on to the deceased. Close examination reveals that this model is based more on the cultural values of modernity than on any substantial data of what people actually do. Presenting data from several populations, 22 authors - among the most respected in their fields - demonstrate that the health resolution of grief enables one to maintain a continuing bond with the deceased. Despite cultural disapproval and lack of validation by professionals, survivors find places for the dead in their on-going lives and even in their communities. Such bonds are not denial: the deceased can provide resources for enriched functioning in the present. Chapters examine widows and widowers, bereaved children, parents and siblings, and a population previously excluded from bereavement research: adoptees and their birth parents. Bereavement in Japanese culture is also discussed, as are meanings and implications of this new model of grief. Opening new areas of research and scholarly dialogue, this work provides the basis for significant developments in clinical practice in the field.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: Third-Wave Cognitive Therapy for the

Treatment of Loss and Grief Faramarz Hashempour, Navya Anand, 2022-12-14 This book proposes and explores a novel conceptualisation of the grieving process grounded in evolutionary psychology that integrates cognitive behavioural approaches such as compassion focused therapy, metacognitive awareness, and acceptance and commitment therapy. Starting with an introduction of the historical and theoretical basis for the Principles of Loss model, the book then outlines methods of assessment and describes the processes of formulation and case conceptualisation, with specific guidance on how to navigate these in the context of loss. The book provides an in-depth exploration of the Five-Phase Principles for the Treatment of Loss and Grief (intervention), as well as guidance on the supervision of loss. The chapters, accompanied by case studies, provide an overview of the novel model, followed by specific and tailor-made guidance on assessment (including a novel self-report measure), formulation, treatment, and supervision. This guide is intended for clinicians familiar with or interested in the theory and practice of third-wave cognitive behavioural therapies.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief Keren M. Humphrey, 2009 This practice-oriented book describes a range of effective counseling strategies appropriate for the treatment of diverse loss and grief issues commonly presented in individual, family, and group psychotherapy settings. Based on contemporary understandings of the nature of personal and interpersonal loss and the ways in which people integrate loss and grief into their lives, this innovative book focuses on tailoring interventions to the uniqueness of the griever's experience. In Part 1, Dr. Humphrey discusses a variety of death- and non-death-related loss and grief experiences, offers conceptualization guidelines, outlines selected psychosocial factors, and describes intervention based on two contemporary grief models. Part 2 provides detailed therapeutic strategies organized according to focus or theoretical origins along with suggestions for implementation and customization to client uniqueness. Specific chapters include cognitive-behavioral and constructivist strategies, emotion-focused strategies, narrative therapy, solution-focused therapy, and adjunctive activities. The final chapter focuses on counselor roles and recommended professional and personal practices.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: Honoring Grief Alexandra Kennedy, 2014-09-01 If you know someone who has suffered loss and is experiencing grief, simply sending a card or flowers may seem insufficient. Many people are unsure how to comfort a friend or loved-one in times of loss. This special book is filled with inspirational wisdom, practical self-help for healing, and makes a meaningful and comforting gift. Written by psychotherapist and grief expert Alexandra Kennedy, *Honoring Grief* provides powerful and compassionate advice for dealing with loss. Compatible with any religious or spiritual orientation, this book aims to help readers create a sanctuary—a special space where they are free to work through the difficult emotions that accompany grief. The act of grieving can be overwhelming. That's why the self-help tips in this book are simple, brief, and effective—ideal for anyone suffering the emotionally and physically exhausting effects of grief.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: ACT Made Simple Russ Harris, 2019-05-01
NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER: Due to the recent illegal counterfeiting of this book, we cannot guarantee book quality when purchased through third-party sellers. Now fully-revised and updated, this second edition of *ACT Made Simple* includes new information and chapters on self-compassion, flexible perspective taking, working with trauma, and more. Why is it so hard to be happy? Why is life so difficult? Why do humans suffer so much? And what can we realistically do about it? No matter how rewarding your job, as a mental health professional, you may sometimes feel helpless in the face of these questions. You are also well aware of the challenges and frustrations that can present during therapy. If you're looking for ways to optimize your client sessions, consider joining the many thousands of therapists and life coaches worldwide who are learning acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). With a focus on mindfulness, client values, and a commitment to change, ACT is proven-effective in treating depression, anxiety, stress, addictions, eating disorders, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder (BPD), and myriad other psychological issues. It's also a revolutionary new way to view the human condition—packed full of exciting new tools, techniques,

and strategies for promoting profound behavioral change. A practical primer, ideal for ACT newcomers and experienced ACT professionals alike, ACT Made Simple offers clear explanations of the six ACT processes and a set of real-world tips and solutions for rapidly and effectively implementing them in your practice. This book gives you everything you need to start using ACT with your clients for impressive results. Inside, you'll find: scripts, exercises, metaphors, and worksheets to use with your clients; a session-by-session guide to implementing ACT; transcripts from therapy sessions; guidance for creating your own therapeutic techniques and exercises; and practical tips to overcome "therapy roadblocks." This book aims to take the complex theory and practice of ACT and make it accessible and enjoyable for therapists and clients.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: The Toolbox for Grief and Loss Valerie A. Umscheid, 2022-07-29 The Toolbox for Grief and Loss is an insightful and practical guide for anyone who is suffering, whether from a loss that is recent or long past. Grief does not have a timeline; however, prolonged pain and suffering can be avoided or healed, and the joy in living restored. From her twenty years as a registered psychologist and therapist, Valerie Umscheid brings personal and compelling true stories of how we can get stuck in grief, and effective tools to help us journey through to the other side of traumatic loss. She identifies the many ways loss can affect our lives, even when we do not realize that we are in a state of prolonged grief. This book is a balm for anyone who has experienced: • Loss of a loved one • Relationship loss or divorce • Career loss • Suicide of a loved one • Miscarriage or stillbirth • Loss related to a change in ability • Ambiguous loss due to a chronic illness • Loss of a pet The Toolbox for Grief and Loss outlines a recovery plan for each grief story, and details a number of therapeutic processes that are easy to learn on your own such as: journaling, grief processing letters, mindfulness, and a memory box. Other processes can be explored with a wellness professional such as: Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), and self-hypnosis. Put an end to prolonged grief and rediscover hope for the future!

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *ACT with Love* Russ Harris, 2023-06-01 Build more compassionate, accepting, and loving relationships with acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Let's face it: Picture-perfect storybook romances don't exist in real life. Couples fight. Feelings of love wax and wane through the years. And the stress and tedium of everyday life and work can often drive a wedge between even the most devoted couples. So, how can you reignite passion and intimacy in your relationship, cultivate greater understanding and compassion between yourself and your partner, and bring the joy back to your love life? In this fully revised and updated edition of ACT with Love, therapist and world-renowned ACT expert Russ Harris shows how developing psychological flexibility—the ability to be in the present moment with openness, awareness, and focus, and to take effective action in line with one's values—can help you and your partner strengthen and deepen your relationship. Also included is new information on attachment theory, powerful mindfulness and self-compassion techniques, and assertiveness and boundary-setting skills. ACT with Love will show you how to: Let go of conflict, open up, and live fully in the present Use mindfulness to increase intimacy, connection, and understanding Resolve painful conflicts and reconcile long-standing differences Act on your values to build a rich and meaningful relationship If you're looking to increase feelings of intimacy, love, and connection with your partner, this book has everything you need to get started—together.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: How We Grieve Thomas Attig PhD, 2010-09-13 If we wish to understand loss experiences we must learn details of survivors' stories. The new version of How We Grieve: Relearning the World tells in-depth tales of survival to illustrate the poignant disruption of life and suffering that loss entails. It shows how through grieving we overcome challenges, make choices, and reshape our lives. These intimate treatments of coping with loss address the needs of grieving people and those who hope to support and comfort them. The accounts promote understanding of grieving itself, encourage respect for individuality and the uniqueness of loss experiences, show how to deal with helplessness in the face of choiceless events, and offer guidance for caregivers. The stories make it clear that grieving is not about living passively through stages or phases. We are not so alike when we grieve; our experiences are complex and

richly textured. Nor is grieving about coming down with grief symptoms. No one can treat us to make things better. No one can grieve for us. Grieving is instead an active process of coping and relearning how to be and how to act in a world where loss transforms our lives. Loss forces us to relearn things and places; relationships with others, including fellow survivors, the deceased, even God; and our selves, our daily life patterns, and the meanings of our life stories. This revision adds an introductory essay about developments in the author's thinking about grieving as relearning the world. It highlights and clarifies its most distinctive and still salient themes. It elaborates on how his thinking about these themes has expanded and deepened since the first edition. And it places his treatment of those themes in the broader context of current writings on grief and loss.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy* Phyllis S. Kosminsky, John R. Jordan, 2023-12-14 *Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy* bridges the fields of attachment studies, thanatology, and interpersonal neuroscience, uniting theory, research, and practice to enrich our understanding of how we can help the bereaved. The new edition includes updated research and discussion of emotion regulation, relational trauma, epistemic trust, and much more. In these pages, clinicians and students will gain a new understanding of the etiology of problematic grief and its treatment, and will become better equipped to formulate accurate and specific case conceptualization and treatment plans. The authors also illustrate the ways in which the therapeutic relationship is crucially important – though largely unrecognized – element in grief therapy and offer guidelines for an attachment-informed view of the therapeutic relationship that can serve as the foundation of all grief therapy. Written by two highly experienced grief counselors, this volume is filled with instructive case vignettes and useful techniques that offer a universal and practical frame of reference for understanding grief therapy for clinicians of every theoretical persuasion.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* Koa Whittingham, Lisa Coyne, 2019-06-15 *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Clinician's Guide for Supporting Parents* constitutes a principles-based guide for clinicians to support parents across various stages of child and adolescent development. It uses Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) as an axis to integrate evolution science, behaviour analysis, attachment theory, emotion-focused and compassion-focused therapies into a cohesive framework. From this integrated framework, the authors explore practice through presenting specific techniques, experiential exercises, and clinical case studies. - Explores the integration of ACT with established parenting approaches - Includes a new model - the parent-child hexaflex - and explores each component of this model in depth with clinical techniques and a case study - Emphasizes how to foster a strong therapeutic relationship and case conceptualization from an acceptance and commitment therapy perspective - Covers the full spectrum of child development from infancy to adolescence - Touches upon diverse clinical presentations including: child anxiety, neurodevelopmental disorders, and child disruptive behavior problems, with special emphasis on infant sleep - Addresses how best to support parents with mental health concerns, such as postnatal depression - Is relevant for both novices and clinicians, students in psychology, social work and educational professionals supporting parents

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *Navigating Grief: Finding Healing in Loss* Julian Mitchell, In *Navigating Grief: Finding Healing in Loss*, journey through the intricate landscape of loss with compassion, understanding, and practical guidance. This comprehensive guide offers solace and support to those navigating the tumultuous waters of grief, presenting a roadmap for healing and growth. From understanding the complexities of grief to developing coping mechanisms, nurturing relationships, and honoring memories, each chapter provides invaluable insights and actionable strategies. Whether you're grappling with guilt, seeking closure, or striving to find meaning amidst despair, this book offers a beacon of hope. With expert advice, personal anecdotes, and heartfelt wisdom, *Navigating Grief* is a companion for anyone traversing the challenging terrain of loss, guiding them towards healing, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose.

acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *How to Grieve What We've Lost* Russ

Harris, Alexandra Kennedy, Sameet M. Kumar, Mary Beth Williams, Soili Poijula, 2024-07-01 "An essential guide for anyone experiencing loss." —Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness and Real Life Grief* is a journey that can lead to powerful, personal growth. With contributions from grief experts Russ Harris, Alexandra Kennedy, Sameet Kumar, Mary Beth Williams, and Soili Poijula, this thoughtful compilation will help you heal the pain of loss—no matter the cause—and move forward in life with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Grief comes in many forms. You may grieve a loved one who has passed on, a romantic relationship which has ended, the loss of a job you loved, or even a place you used to go that no longer exists or has changed. You may also be dealing with another kind of loss—a sense of who you are and how you can live your life in an increasingly uncertain and changed world. But what if you could transform your grief into lasting positive growth? Featuring excerpts from the authors' previously published works, *How to Grieve What We've Lost* offers effective therapeutic tools based in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and more. In the book, you'll find strategies for immediate relief, including present-moment awareness and mindful breathing. You'll learn to create a safe sanctuary for your grief, so you can honor your feelings and give them the space they deserve. And you'll discover ways to create a support network, give voice to your sorrow, and share your humanity with others. This heartfelt guide also includes simple tools to help you: Identify the things that really matter to you Honor your grief Prioritize your mental health and self-care Learn and grow from your loss Whether you are struggling with your own loss or a collective sense of grief, the evidence-based skills in this book will help you mourn in healthy and resilient ways—leading to profound personal growth and a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in life.

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acceptance and commitment therapy for grief: *Treating Traumatic Bereavement* Laurie Anne Pearlman, Camille B. Wortman, Catherine A. Feuer, Christine H. Farber, Therese A. Rando, 2014-01-13 This book presents an integrated treatment approach for those struggling to adapt after the sudden, traumatic death of a loved one. The authors weave together evidence-based clinical strategies grounded in cutting-edge knowledge about both trauma and grief. The book offers a clear framework and many practical tools for building survivors' psychological and interpersonal resources, processing their trauma, and facilitating mourning. In a large-size format for easy photocopying, the book includes over 30 reproducible handouts. Purchasers can access a companion website to download and print these materials as well as supplemental handouts and a sample 25-session treatment plan. Winner (Second Place)--American Journal of Nursing Book of the Year Award, Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing Category

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