



# EMDR and Bereavement

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Fokkina McDonnell  
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# Aims and Objectives

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- Review healthy grieving and mourning
- Examine risk factors for and aspects of complicated mourning
- Explore the use of EMDR in uncomplicated and complicated mourning – basic protocol and special applications
- Examine how EMDR can be combined with other methods

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# Learning Objectives

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- List phases and processes of grief and mourning – the “grief work”
- State the risk factors for complicated mourning
- Describe the use of the basic EMDR protocol for excessive grief
- State special applications for complicated mourning
- List other methods and how they can be combined with EMDR during and between sessions

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# Bereavement

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- **Bereavement** – the objective situation of having lost someone significant
- **Grief** – the emotional response to loss
- **Mourning** – actions and manner of expressing grief (culturally determined)

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# Phases of Grief

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- 1) Initial shock, disbelief and denial
  - 2) Acute mourning period – acute somatic and emotional discomfort and social withdrawal
  - 3) Culminating period of restitution.
- Periods may overlap (cf the early models by Kuebler-Ross, Parkes)



# Uncomplicated Grief and Mourning

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- **Tasks of Grief and Mourning:-**
  - 1) Accept the reality of the loss
  - 2) Work through the pain of grief
  - 3) Adjust to environment in which deceased is missing
  - 4) Emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life

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# EMDR Excessive Grief Protocol

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Standard Protocol (use Float-back or Affect Scan, expect higher min. SUDs)

## 1) **Past Memories**

- Actual events, including deceased person's suffering/death
- Intrusive images
- Nightmare images



# EMDR Excessive Grief Protocol

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## 2) **Present Triggers**

- Triggers/stimuli associated with grief experience
- Issues of personal responsibility
- Safety/mortality – self or others
- Previous unresolved losses

## 3) **Future template**



# Case 1 – Male, early 20s

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- RTA
- Driver and passenger (friend) killed
- Issues: guilt
- *"I don't want to forget my mate."*
- 5 sessions
- During EMDR created a picture of friend on the wall
- Outcome: abstract love for absent one (vs concrete love for one physically present)



## Risk Factors of Complicated Mourning

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- 1) **Circumstances surrounding death:-**
- Sudden, unexpected death
- Uncertain loss - dead or alive?
- Death where no body is available
- Death through murder, suicide, self-neglect
- Death from overly lengthy illness
- Death seen by mourner as preventable
- Loss of child
- Disaster with multiple losses

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## Risk factors of Complicated Mourning

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### **2) Relationship between bereaved and deceased:-**

- Highly ambivalent
- Highly dependent
- Narcissistic relationship – deceased seen as extension of self

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## Risk Factors of Complicated Mourning

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### 3) **Life History of Bereaved Person:-**

- A history of complicated grief reactions
- Experienced several losses in a short span of time



## Risk Factors of Complicated Mourning

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### 4) **Personality of bereaved person:-**

- Avoid feelings of helplessness
- Perceive self as “strong” person

### 5) **Social Factors:-**

- (Perceived) lack of social support
- Death is socially unspeakable or negated – conspiracy of silence

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# Types of Complicated Mourning

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- 1) Absent or Denied Mourning
- 2) Delayed or Postponed Mourning
- 3) Chronic Mourning
- 4) Distorted Mourning
- 5) Somatized Mourning
- 6) Traumatic Mourning

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# Features of Complicated Mourning

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- Vulnerability to separation/loss
- High death anxiety (self/others)
- Extreme arousal, business
- Excessive/persistent over-idealisation of deceased/relationship
- Rigid, compulsive behaviours
- Persistent obsessive thoughts or pre-occupation with the loss

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# Features of Complicated Mourning

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- Self-destructive relationships, e.g. excessive care-giving
- Fear of intimacy/avoidance future loss
- Self-destructive behaviour/acting out
- Constricted affect
- Chronic numbness
- Chronic anger/depression





# General Treatment Principles

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- The bereaved person has attempted to deal/cope with loss, but in an unhealthy way:-
  - 1) Hold on/avoid relinquishing the lost one
  - 2) Deny, repress, avoid aspects of loss, the pain and the realisation of the implications of the loss
- Complicated:- it has gone wrong, but can be corrected

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# General Treatment Principles

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- Give recognition for the loss, give permission, be there
- Provide psycho-education
- Do **not** try to take away the pain
- Take a wider (family/system) view
- Confront the “myths” of mourning
- Teach self-help techniques/strategies

# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 1) **Absent or Denied Mourning:-**

Issue:- To start grief

- Explore reasons (e.g. absent body)
- When will you know?
- Use of language “was” > “is”
- Work to allow reaction - retelling, use visualisation, exposure to concrete memories (e.g. video)
- Farewell letter
- Hold session at the scene of event

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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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- Blocked Processing/Interweave:-

“What is it about what happened that you **need** to hold on to, and what do you **want** to let go of?

(Steve Lazarove)

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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 2) **Delayed/Postponed Mourning**

Issue: to start grief once time is there

- Explore reasons (lack of support, safety), preoccupation for welfare of others (e.g. children)
- Fear of losing control
- May need to install resources first

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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 3) **Chronic Mourning**

Issue: to end the grief

- Provide psycho-education to counter myths
- Is there a grief competition?
- EMDR and skills coaching for new behaviours
- Explore the meaning of pain
- CI – the balance of scales
- Give permission for mourning to end

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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 4) **Distorted Mourning**

Issue: to get access to full spectrum of reactions

- Two types – anger and guilt
- Get under the emotions
- EMDR and Gestalt for unfinished business
- Psycho-education on difference guilt and guilt feelings – if guilt, make reparation
- Performing a ritual may help

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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 5) **Somatized Mourning**

Issue: translate symptoms to mourning reactions

- “The good and important reason”?
- If pain could talk, what would it say?
- Dialogue with pain/draw pain
- Breathe into/Healing Light
- NB Facsimile Illness as Masked Grief



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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 6) **Traumatized Mourning**

Issue: to resolve the trauma and get on with the loss

- Intrusive images and thoughts – EMDR, imagery techniques, thought stopping, distraction/control techniques
- Increased arousal – EMDR, Safe Place, Hypnosis, Relaxation/breathing techniques

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# Complicated Mourning - Treatment

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## 6) **Traumatized Mourning (cont'd)**

- Avoidance reactions – Gradually approach the memories/thoughts
- Planned re-exposure of event, gravesite
- Imaginary exposure
- Rituals
- Other methods – art, writing (letter, diary)

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## Case 2

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- Female
- Husband died as result of RTA
- Emotions: guilt, anger towards husband, anger towards mother
- Skills coaching, psycho-education
- One-handed interweave with ritual
- Reparation

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# Other Methods of Grief Work

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- Gestalt techniques (empty chair)
- Inner dialogue with deceased
- “Re-grief work” – use of linking objects (e.g. picture of deceased)
- Writing assignments – can be combined with other methods
- Can all usefully be combined with EMDR

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# Grief and Mourning in Children

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- May blame themselves (magical thinking)
- Behavioural problems/acting out
- Young children: child/adult/carer tells biographical story/historical account with BS
- Older children: standard protocol



# Grief and Mourning in Children

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- Early interventions important:-
    1. Death through suicide/murder
    2. Child witnessed a death
    3. Child was responsible for the death, or the dead person, or was with the person who died
- (Dyregrov)

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# Grief, Mourning and Rituals

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- **Ritual – specific action that expresses feelings and thoughts in a symbolic way**
- Legitimate release of emotions
- Safety and containment
- Structure: beginning, middle, end
- Gives permission for closure
- Types:- Separation, Transition, Incorporation

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# Poems and Storytelling

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- Storytelling provides explanations:-
  1. Causal
  2. Motivational
  3. Justifying
- Potent myths, archetypes
- Individual or as group work



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# Resources

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