

Imagery Dealing with Loss, Grief, and Guilt (Eckhard Roediger)

(Modified from “Contextual Schema Therapy” published by New Harbinger, 2018)

The following dialogue might help your clients dealing with losses and overcome feelings of grief and guilt. The example explores a father dealing with the loss, grief, and guilt he felt after his daughter (Brooke) committing suicide. Sit side by side with the client and place a (empty) chair for the daughter in front of the two of you.

1. Bring up a **vivid image**: *Can you see Brooke clearly? What is she wearing? She’s sitting right in front of you. You can see and talk to her. How does she look? What can you see in her eyes? How do you feel? What do you want to say to her?*
2. Support the client to **express all feelings**: *Of course you felt [for example] abandoned when she decided to kill herself instead of trying to get in touch with you. Tell her how you feel. How did you feel initially, and how do you feel now? Are there some feelings of disappointment, or anger too? You can now convey these feelings to her. She can take it. She’s on the other side! Once your client explores the full range of emotions, ask him to take his daughter’s position in the other chair, and sit close to him.*
3. **Change to the other person’s chair**: *Hello, Brooke. Thank you for coming here. You heard all that your father said. How does that make you feel? What do you want to say to him from the place you’re in now? What do you want him to do? When the response comes to a natural end, ask your client to return to his original chair. Give him a moment to arrive back in the room.*
4. Check the **client’s reaction**, and support the expression of accusations: *How does it make you feel, hearing these messages? Do you believe her? Does this change anything? Now that you’ve been in touch with Brooke, is there something more you want to convey to her? Reflect the angry feelings the client mentioned in earlier sessions, and encourage him to fully express them. Now we have the chance to tell all*

this to Brooke. Go ahead! How does she react? Tell it to her face now. She can now face your feelings from her side, because she's safe over there.

5. How does the **other person react** (hopefully forgiving) to the accusations: *Brooke, you heard what your father said. I'm happy that he opened up to you even more. How does this make you feel? Do you understand him? What do you want to say to him? Knowing these things, what's your message to him now? Do you want to forgive him? What do you want him to do?* Usually the passed away person forgives the client and does not react in a vengeful way. In most cases they wish that the left person carry on with their own life and stop mourning. Then go back to the original positions again.
6. See if the client can **accept the forgiving** and can forgive himself: *You heard that Brooke understands your feelings and can forgive you. What do you see in her eyes now? How does this make you feel? Can you accept what you did in the past? What do you want to say to her now? Can you forgive her, too? Do you want to follow her advice for you? Is there something else to say before we let her go?*
7. **Discriminate** and extract a **take-home message**: *How do you feel now compared to the beginning of the exercise? Try to form one sentence as a principle that expresses the essence of your experience.*

Good luck with practicing this technique!

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