

The Grief Toolbox

oscillate between loss and restoration

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Manual Grief Toolbox

The Goal

The toolbox and scale are used as tools to lead conversations with people going through a grieving process. Grief is learning how to intertwine an irreversible loss in your life. Grief is not only about losing a person. Different experiences can lead to grief. Think of divorce, a break up, slowly losing a person due to dementia, having to leave your home country, loss of health, losing your job, and so on. It can also be the loss of a dreamed future, when you cannot get pregnant for example.

The toolbox and scale are based on aspects of grief that are described in literature. The theories explain how grieving people can react. The theories are not meant to explain how people should grieve. The same goes for the toolbox and scale. Everyone grieves differently and therefore the toolbox and scale can be used in a way that works for them.

There are already various tools in the world of grief therapy. The toolbox and scale can be seen as a great addition to this world. Having a specific focus on students, using icons to resemble restoration activities specifically for students. However, the tools are not limited to students only. The grief toolbox can be used to familiarize people with the dual process model of grief.

The Theory

In the following subchapters I will explain the theories I used as inspiration for my toolbox and scale.

Dual Process Model of Grief

Stroebe and Schut developed the Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe & Schut, 2010). This theory explains how the grieving process has two orientations, the loss oriented and restoration oriented side. Grieving is the oscillation between the two orientations. This is often visualized using two islands at which the mourner alternately moors. Eventually more balance is created when the mourner has room for both aspects. In my tool the loss and restoration sides are two bowls with one of each on the opposite side of the scale.

Poppetjestaal

Poppetjestaal (doll language in English) is a technique widely used by grief therapists (Werken met Poppetjes, n.d.). This technique mentions the importance of making the (grief) context visual. This method puts the client in control over their own story without becoming overwhelmed by trauma reactions (De Kontekst Gooise Meren, 2021). Every symbol represents a meaning, given by the client. This dynamic process gives the client trust in themselves and the ability to face reality.

You might think that this method would mainly be used for children however, the examples given in the book: Poppetjestaal (Fiddelaers-Jaspers, 2017) and when talking to therapists they explain that this method works for every age (Systeem Academie, 2021). When using the method it is important to let the client look at their situation from a helicopter position. Working in the third person helps to not directly experience the trauma. Therefore the therapist has to stay in this third person perspective throughout the session. In the book and during the expert interviews it was also mentioned that pictures are often taken at the end of each session. This makes it easier for the client to reflect on their current position and being able to see the progress they are making.

Explanation and Application

The Toolbox

The Grief Toolbox consists of the pouches with the different icons. For each icon there are 3 different sizes of pouches, with different weights. The small pouch is the lightest and the biggest pouch is the heaviest. It is up to the client to find the pouch with the icon resembling the loss and restoration activities. Then they can decide the amount of weight each activity feels for the client. The search for the 'right' icons is part of the therapy session. The client has to find the icon fitting the words and activities of their grieving process.

The Scale

During the therapy session, the client is filling the bowls of the scale with the icon pouches. One of the bowls represents the loss oriented side and the other bowl represents the restoration oriented side. It is up to the therapist to decide if it is better to start with the loss oriented or restoration oriented side.

While filling the bowls it is important to put emphasis on the oscillating movement of the scale. The oscillation resembles the resilience people have to build during their grieving process. It is important for the client to both visit the loss oriented and the restoration oriented side of grief. The scale is a tool to familiarize the client with the dual process model of grief. In the end the scale is used to cultivate resilience between the loss and restoration oriented side.

Disclaimer: It is important to note that the scale doesn't need to be in balance. It is important for the client to visit both sides of grief. So it is normal that the scale is in disbalance.

Information Leaflet

In the end when the session with the toolbox and scale has been discussed and has come to an end, the corresponding drawer of the toolbox opens. In this drawer an information leaflet is located. The client can fill in this leaflet with the loss or restoration activities, depending on what is relevant for this client. When the icons are filled in, the client can add some extra information, to remind the client on what helps them in their grieving process. The client can take this leaflet back home to reflect on the therapy session. When the toolbox and scale are used again in a next session a new information leaflet can be filled in. In this way the client collects their grieving process over time which can help them reflect on their process.

Legend of Icons

The toolbox has pouches with 30 different icons. These icons are picked with the intention to resemble a certain activity or emotion. However, I realized it is not about the meaning and intention I have with the icons. It is about the meaning the client gives to the icons. Therefore the icons are open for the interpretation of the client. There are also blank pouches in the toolbox. These are for the client to give meaning to themselves in case something is missing.

References

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2. Fiddelaers-Jaspers, R. (2017). Verlies in Beeld: Therapeutisch werken met poppetjes bij verlies. In de Wolken.
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