



A First 6 Sessions Compass

Not a Plan. A Way to Stay Oriented.

Early-career therapists often worry they are moving too slowly in grief work. This compass is not a prescription or a timeline. It is a **directional guide** meant to reassure both therapist and client that slowness is intentional.

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Sessions 1–2: Establish Safety and Capacity

Primary focus:

- normalization of grief responses
- orienting to the nervous system
- establishing grounding tools
- assessing capacity and regulation
- naming grief and trauma as distinct but interacting

Key therapist stance:

“I am not here to rush you or take this away. We will build the ability to carry it together.”

Sessions 3–4: Deepen Regulation and Protective Themes

Primary focus:

- continued somatic tracking
- identifying what grief is protecting
- noticing guilt, responsibility, or loyalty themes
- gently differentiating memory from threat
- pacing emotional contact

Key therapist stance:

“Your grief has reasons. We don’t need to dismantle it to understand it.”

Sessions 5–6: Stabilize Rhythm and Introduce Gentle Meaning

Primary focus:

- reinforcing nonlinear expectations
- supporting daily-life re-engagement at the client’s pace
- distinguishing remembering from reliving
- noticing early shifts in identity or values
- allowing meaning to emerge in fragments

Key therapist stance:

“Nothing is being forced. We’re noticing what’s already changing.”

This compass is flexible. Some clients will need longer in early phases. Others will move fluidly between them. Returning to earlier focuses is not failure. It is responsiveness.

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A Final Reassurance for Therapists

If you are wondering whether you are doing enough, that question itself is often a sign of care rather than inadequacy.

Grief work does not reward urgency. It rewards steadiness.

Techniques are supports, not solutions.

Pacing is an intervention.

Presence is the medicine.

You are not behind.

You are accompanying something sacred.

Disclaimer

This guide and accompanying materials are intended for educational and professional support purposes only. They are not a substitute for formal training, clinical supervision, consultation, or independent professional judgment.

Grief and traumatic bereavement are complex and deeply individualized experiences. Therapists are responsible for practicing within their scope of licensure, training, and competence, and for seeking appropriate supervision or referral when clinical needs exceed their experience or resources.

Nothing in this guide is intended to replace diagnostic assessment, crisis intervention, or medical or psychiatric care when indicated. Clinical decisions should always be made based on the unique presentation, safety needs, and cultural context of each client.

Use this resource as a compass, not a mandate.

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