



# the business of practice

## MEMBER Spotlight

Kara Bowman, LMFT, CT, CCTP, C-GC is a therapist and certified grief and trauma counselor in Santa Cruz, CA. Although this column was mostly written before the COVID-19 crisis, Kara has devoted much of her practice to helping clients navigate the impact of this difficult situation on their pre-existing grief and trauma. Kara's recent article, *How to Not Let COVID-19 Steal Your Mental Health While You're at Home*, can be found on her website, [www.karabowman.com](http://www.karabowman.com).

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your career journey so far.

My career journey has been the equivalent of traveling from New York to LA via Buenos Aires and Nome. I began with a career in banking, consulting, and finance. I then felt a strong desire to do something more meaningful and opened a very large day care center in Portland. After moving to California, I had a few more non-profit financial and management jobs and ended up homeschooling my children for many years, which was the pleasure of my life.

When a friend told me she was returning to school to become a therapist, I realized I was jealous and applied to the program within the week. I didn't even know about the supervised hour requirement and thought I would be licensed when I graduated. I'm usually a big researcher and somewhat cautious so I think my impulsivity



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was a sign that this field was really calling to me. All of what has gone before is useful in this career because it helps me relate to clients.

### What is your specialty and why?

My private practice is focused on complicated grief and trauma, which includes both traumatic incidents and developmental trauma. As with most of us who specialize, I was drawn to these fields by my own personal background. I can use my visceral understanding of grief and trauma to make therapeutic guesses that can seem intuitive and amazingly accurate to clients.

I have varied interests within the broader subjects of grief and trauma as well. One of my areas of interest and learning is suicide bereavement. Another recent exploration has been finding broader alternatives for assessment, such as the ACES trauma questionnaire which is a helpful tool, but can also miss the mark for many of our diverse clients. I'm also a certified Thanatologist, which means I am able to assess the effects of the death and the dying process from multiple perspectives—medical, physical, psychological, ethical, spiritual, and more.

I feel it is important to always be learning and growing professionally. I also love to share my knowledge. When therapists started seeing clients online due to the Coronavirus lockdown, I developed a presentation about crisis mental health therapy which includes PTSD prevention. I've presented it online several times free of charge because I am touched and humbled by those of us who are supporting our communities in so many ways.

### What is your favorite part of your job?

My favorite part of the job is the magic that happens when I learn a concept, synthesize the information into something useful, and pull it out at the right moment for the right person. When I explained the physiological and neurobiological reasons why meditation might not be effective for a severely traumatized client, and what might be helpful, she dropped years of self-blame and became more hopeful about the future.

Because of the powerlessness inherent in death and trauma, I often have to work in the areas of trust and empowerment. I love providing a reparative experience and seeing the results blossom. Once, a client told me that he didn't want to discuss a girlfriend who had died by suicide 50 years ago. I completely accepted his decision with respect and understanding. The next week he decided to talk about it for the first time in his life.

### What advice would you give to someone interested in your specialty?

Get comfortable with intense emotion. You should be able to keep a larger picture in mind that includes the client's resilience, strengths and future well-being in order to hold authentic hope for the client when the client doesn't see it.

I would only advise someone to become a grief and trauma therapist if they have an emotional resonance with this population and have an insatiable curiosity about grief and trauma. Knowledge is exploding in

the intersections between psychology and neurobiology, physiology, mindfulness, trauma, and attachment. If this doesn't fascinate you, this isn't the field for you. Trauma-informed therapy and complicated grief therapy can differ from other therapies, and clients deserve a therapist who understands the differences.

### Who or what inspires you?

I am primarily inspired by my clients. Their capacity to grow, even when it is the more painful path in the short term, always leaves me in awe. Given some of the experiences they have had, their trust and willingness to engage in therapy gives me daily faith in the human drive to grow, heal, connect, and find meaning.

I have also been inspired by many of my fellow therapists and others in the healing professions. There are so many caring, intelligent, curious, empathetic people who find great meaning and purpose in helping others. It connects me to goodness in the world at a time when that's sorely needed.

### How do you practice self-care?

Sometimes I feel like my entire life is designed around self-care. It's taken all of my 57 years to learn how to best support myself. In my work, I try to maintain variety because that keeps me motivated. I see some grief and trauma clients, and I see other clients who want to work in modalities I have been trained in, such as Focusing. I volunteer for our local hospice in critical incident response and grief counseling, I am a Non-violent Communication Trainer, and I love giving talks, trainings, and leading groups.

I enjoy pilates, taking walks, listening to Tara Brach podcasts, and have many regular group and individual avenues for support. I just started a monthly emotional support group for therapists so we can have a place to talk about issues that are particular to our line of work among others who understand.

An important part of my self-care is also monitoring my internal perspective. Since I work in a field that can be very intense, I take pains to keep my perspective realistic. I remind myself daily that most people aren't facing death and trauma and that those who do face trauma, are most often resilient enough to get through their hard situation and possibly even come out with growth. In addition to perspective, I constantly work on presence, somatic self-connection, non-judgment, observing and questioning my thoughts, and helpful self-talk.

### What is one fun fact about you that few people know?

I have a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees from major universities but I never graduated from high school. It's a great fact for party games. 🍷

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If you are a CAMFT member in good standing who would like to be considered for the *Business of Practice: Member Spotlight* column, email your submission to [articles@camft.org](mailto:articles@camft.org).