WHAT THEY SAID

"I feel the closest to my loved one than I ever have post-IADC and I have a renewed relationship around their death with myself and death generally."
– IADC trial participant, female, aged in 40s

"I feel a strong sense of lightness, feeling calmer in my body, mind and soul, I feel the presence of my loved one around me and trust in the experience that they are close."
– Female, 50s

"It felt like a burden had been lifted from me."
– Female, aged in her 50s

"I felt a sense of calm and a knowing that I am going to be OK."
– Female, aged in 40s

"I felt the presence of my loved one very strongly."
– Female, aged in 50s

"I have an increased sense of connection, and feel her presence especially at the grave and in the kitchen. I feel that she is embracing me."
– Male, aged in his 40s

"I feel more at peace and focused on what I'm left to do."
– Female, aged in 40s

"I felt I received messages of love and explanations of why my husband died."
– Female, aged in 50s

"There's something else out there. There is a 'heaven' or other dimension."
– Female, 30s

"I feel very peaceful after releasing emotions of hidden sadness that I thought were dealt with in the past. I feel lighter and more at ease, along with a greater sense of internal peace."
– Female, 50s

A WINDOW INTO LIFE AFTER LIFE

The late Mike Loftus and his daughter

'Transformed my life': widow on after-death therapy

Rebecca Whitfield-Baker

When Amanda Loftus lost her husband – the man who "just understood me and I understood him" – she was devastated, but turned her attention to raising the couple's only child.

Seven years on, the business consultant still feels the loss of her beloved Mike, who died at age 49 after a three-year battle with synovial sarcoma, a "brutal" rare cancer.

But Ms Loftus remains inspired by him to "do something good in the world".

"He was a very kind, community-minded person and someone who was extremely present and always interested in others ... people always used to walk away from a conversation with him feeling better; I couldn't waste my life," the 49-year-old who now provides support to other widows says.

She's recently felt a renewed – and serendipitous – sense of calm after an unexpected "after-death communication" episode while part of an Adelaide-based Induced After-Death Communication (ADC) therapy trial.

"I went in with no expectations at all and I came out with (the treatment) having significantly transformed my life ... that's how I would describe it," the New Zealand native said.

"It has genuinely had a profound impact on me ... I was high-functioning and honestly didn't realise how much sadness I was carrying.

> "I knew he had died ... I felt his presence and I felt him
>
> **Amanda Loftus**
> On losing her husband to cancer

"I call it the art of the 'happy sad', even though you still find joy every day and are genuinely really quite happy in life, you're also equally sad and that's a very, very hard way to live; I was tired all the time."

She says she felt the presence of her "charismatic, beautiful" entrepreneurial husband during the sessions – even had conversations with him.

"It is very hard to articulate what the experience was like," she said.

"It's a bit like when you walk outside in the morning and the sun hits your face and you feel warm; I get that feeling on one side of my shoulder; it's a physical and emotional feeling of my husband ... I know it's definitely him."

Ms Loftus wasn't by her husband's bedside the morning died, delayed by a series of "bizarre things" including a road closure.

"I knew he had died ... I felt his presence and I felt him – it's the feeling you get when you hug someone ... you just know what that person feels like," she says, welling with emotion.

"That was the same feeling (I got) during the study."

Ms Loftus says she has found connection with a lost loved-one can be overshadowed by the busyness of life.

"For me ... just being busy and trying to raise our daughter and be an only parent to her ... my connection to (Mike) was disrupted a little bit and I felt, at times, kind of a bit estranged from him," she said.

"Sometimes ... you question, 'is he still around?'"

Ms Loftus says while it sounds unbelievable, she had "full-on conversations about all sorts of things" with her late husband during the trial therapy experience, including resolving a disagreement.

"It was actually very, very healing ... there was a lot of closure," she said.

"I got a lot of confirmation from my husband that he is still around and he's seeing a lot of things, and he is still parenting ... that I'm not on my own; I can breathe easier and move forward carrying less weight.

"It's funny to think I went into (the trial) wanting to help other people and I actually helped myself ... it really was so transformative.

"It completely removed the sadness."

Amanda Loftus lost her husband Mike to cancer seven years ago. She has found solace in new grief therapy, which allowed her to experience after-death communication with him. Picture: supplied

Last goodbye: Talking with dead helps with grieving

SA psychologist pushes new therapy

Rebecca Whitfield-Baker

Adelaide psychologist Dr Tom Nehmy. Picture: Ben Clark

An Adelaide psychologist is advocating for the increased use of an "obscure but fascinating" therapy found to trigger after-death communications to treat people struggling with the loss of a loved one.

Dr Tom Nehmy has spearheaded new globally significant research into how induced after-death communication (IADC) therapy can be successfully incorporated into grief counselling.

Working with a team at Adelaide University, he has trialled the therapy to establish its scientific credibility.

"Our results were remarkable," Dr Nehmy said.

"In just two 90-minute sessions, we achieved reductions in grief symptoms and sadness that are about double what regular psychotherapies – such as cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety or depression – commonly achieve in 12 to 16 sessions.

"Through IADC therapy, we can reduce somebody's sadness significantly, sometimes to the point where at the beginning of the first session they might say they feel '10 out of 10' in terms of the strength of their sadness and at the end of the second session they might report 'not feeling sad at all'."

While not often talked about, Dr Nehmy said after-death communication (ADC), in which a person "perceives the presence of a deceased person", was "a very common and natural phenomenon".

"Estimates of after-death communications in the general population range from 30 to 80 per cent, with at least one in three people reporting they've experienced this," said Dr Nehmy, who encountered it after the death of three of his grandparents.

He said while IADC therapy wasn't targeted at connecting people with lost loved ones, it often emerged as a spin-off.

"IADC is a bit of a misnomer. The primary aim of the therapy is not to induce after-death communications but to reduce the sadness associated with bereavement," Dr Nehmy said.

"The primary mechanism to do this is bilateral stimulation – a method which involves engaging alternate hemispheres of the brain in sequence using eye movements or tapping, which seems to activate a healing mode in our brains.

"There is also this fascinating phenomenon that somehow, when people have this great reduction in sadness and start feeling more calm, more peaceful, very commonly they have this perception of their deceased loved one and feel gratitude and a sense of love. It's like a cherry on top."

Dr Nehmy, widely recognised for his work in preventive psychology and the founder of Healthy Minds, said he had been long interested in the therapy, which was developed in the mid 1990s by Chicago-based clinical psychologist Dr Allan Botkin while treating Vietnam War veterans.

"His very brief (two-session) protocol was very effective in reducing sadness but, unusually, many of his clients reported spontaneously that they perceived the presence of the deceased person in some way," Dr Nehmy said, explaining he was keen to add to the limited scientific evidence.

The SA practitioner worked with Queensland-based clinical psychologist John Daniels to create the study here which involved 43 participants, all known to be grieving.

"Of the 43 participants, 34 of them – almost 80 per cent – reported that they experienced an ADC during therapy," Dr Nehmy said.

"Some described having visual ADCs. For some, it was auditory, and, for others, it was a tactile sensation, like being touched or hugged.

"For some people, it was a purely emotional sense of the presence of the person.

"Significantly, two-thirds of participants who likely met criteria for prolonged grief disorder at baseline no longer met the diagnostic threshold at follow-up."

The results, published in the international peer-reviewed journal OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying, persisted when the participants were retested a month later.

"There's still a lot to learn about this therapy, but this is a significant step forward," Dr Nehmy said.

"Based on this data and our research, it seems to represent a really promising option for grieving people.

"For the 10 per cent of people who get stuck in the state of grieving, who number in the millions around the world right now, this is an option that might be able to help a significant number."

Grief Australia chief executive Christopher Hall agrees that the findings are "incredibly encouraging".

"The combination of strong clinical outcomes, especially the substantial reductions in grief and depression symptoms, with the brief nature of the intervention is compelling," he said.

"The high proportion of participants reporting after-death communication experiences, along with a deepened sense of continuing presence, speaks so powerfully to the human need for connection beyond loss."