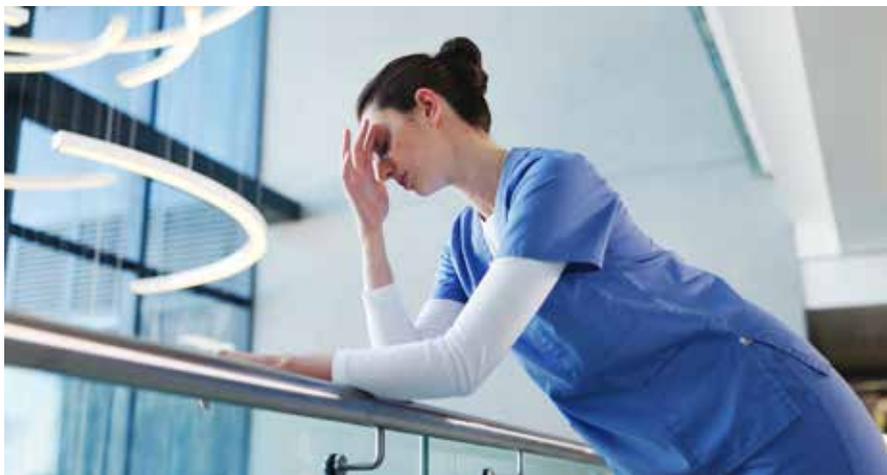


# The Good and Bad of Grief

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In the Coroner's office, we interact and support those who are grieving the loss of their loved one. As a nurse, I have also had experiences of caring for others on the worst days of their life and supporting families. These interactions can bring on a level of stress and trauma due to daily exposure, experiencing vicarious trauma or moral distress, which leads to compassion fatigue, burnout and a high risk of mental health concerns.

However, as individuals, we can all experience supporting our friends or family who are experiencing loss. It may be direct with your own family/friends, or with people you are close to through an online friendship. Online support is seen on social media posts all the time. Usually this is done by a response to others with a genuine "I'm sorry" or "How can I help?". This type of connection to support others or gain support from others has a direct connection to our mental and systemic health in both good and bad ways.

When we offer support to others or show compassion, it is beneficial to our own mental health, because it reduces stress, creates a connection, and provides us with a better understanding of ourselves and others. We use empathy and sympathy to connect and respect what the other person is feeling, and it can sometimes reflect

on a similar experience we have had. At times, our mere physical presence is a powerful tool of healing. For these reasons, we must also remember to support ourselves too. This may involve gaining support from others by sharing our stories or situations, either online, with a friend, a group or in therapy. It is healing for us to know that other people care and support us through whatever we are experiencing.

Taking the time to practice mindfulness or meditation can help us with our own feelings of grief. On the downside, it is important to understand that grief can be irrational, confusing, and make us feel distracted and unfocused. It can also lead to anxiety, intrusive thoughts, physical symptoms, and depression. We must recognize these occurrences in others too. Naturally, our mental health links directly to our physical health.

There is a strong connection between your mind and body when it comes to grief. Usually, the negative consequences come to mind, such as the things mentioned above. However, there can be some positive outcomes from experiencing grief, such as surges of energy or a temporary focus on healing, and the development of healthy coping mechanisms. We might discover that we have a deeper appreciation and understanding

of life/death, or we have gained more empathy for others. Maybe this experience will teach us to re-evaluate our beliefs and what we deem important in life, or maybe we become more resilient.

Systemically, on the negative side of grief, it can disrupt your normal health and sleep routines. It can trigger common stress responses within the body. We become more susceptible to health issues like heart issues, depression, alcohol and substance abuse, cancer, autoimmune responses, and other diseases. It can certainly cause aging and wrinkles too. We hear in the news how grief places physical stress on the body, how cortisol is released, thus breaking down collagen. These negative systemic health effects can obviously be long-lasting.

Overall, a lack of support, not being able to share your feelings, and not practicing compassion for yourself, can also influence all these factors. Sometimes we don't recognize that our unresolved grief is making us feel or behave the way we do. It is not always easy to move through losses that you experience. There are people and resources out there that specialize in grief counseling that can help you journey through it.

Grieving can bring feelings of isolation but remember that grief is experienced all over the world. When we can show compassion and kindness towards others, it actually makes you more content in your life. It will connect you to others in a way that will better your physical and mental health. Think of the power of a 'caring smile' or a 'gentle hug'. I am sending healing thoughts for everyone who is currently experiencing a loss or a past loss, and even an expected future loss.

Lastly, a loss doesn't always have to be a person. Your body reactions can experience the loss in the same way as other types of losses, with some being more or less intense and painful than others. ■