

► Coping with Loss

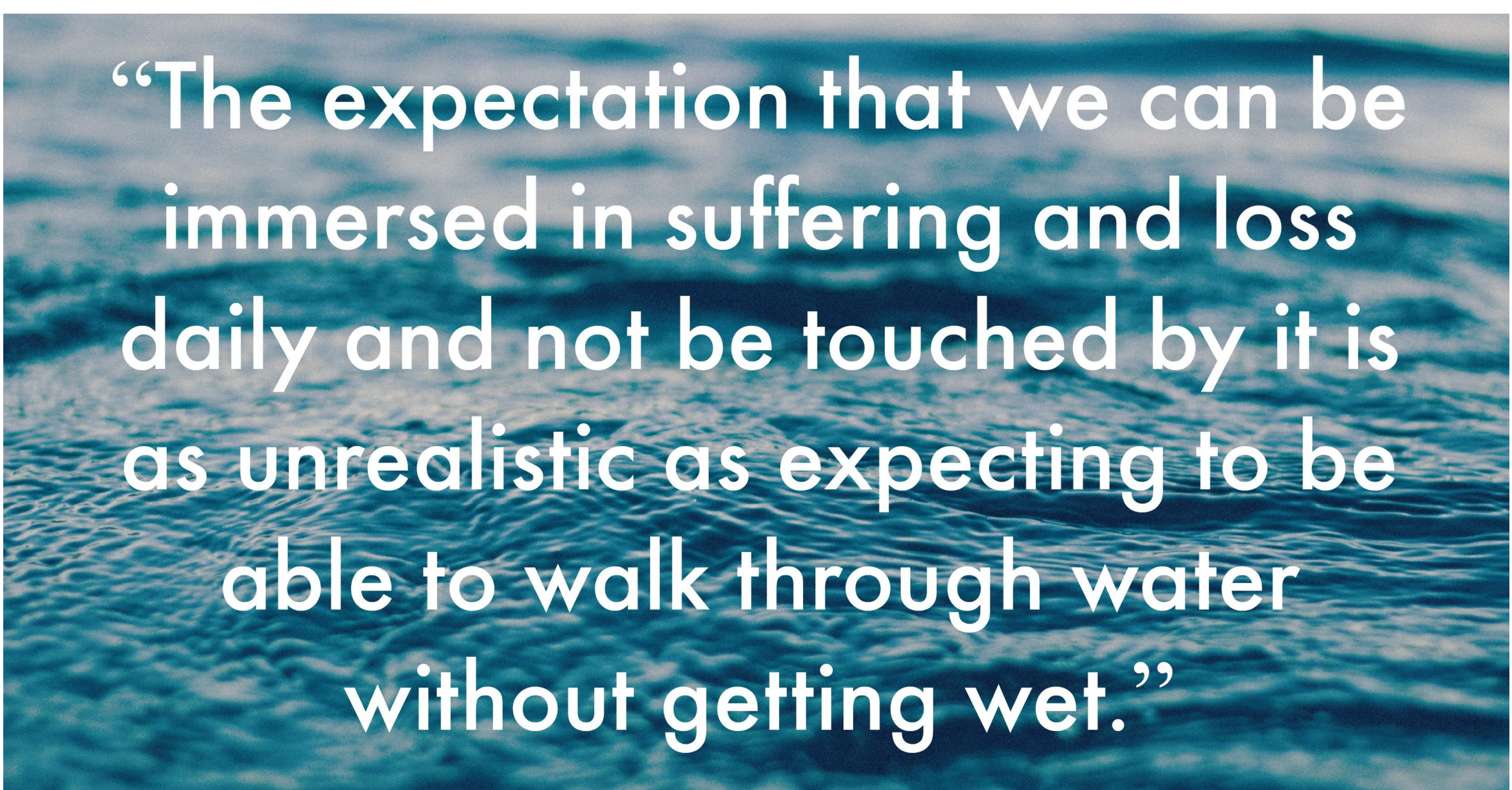
Jill Morris, PhD, LP

Clinical Psychologist

Minneapolis VA Medical Center | PTSD Clinical Team | DBT

Morris Therapy and Consulting, PLLC

Mindfulness Exercise – Self Compassion



“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Overview

- ▶ Factors associated with vicarious trauma and resiliency
- ▶ Ways to cope with loss
- ▶ Strategies that we can use to make space for grief and loss



Factors associated with Vicarious Trauma Reactions

Provider

- History of personal traumatic event exposure (mixed)
- Gender
- Avoidant coping
- Less years of experience/training
- Level of stress of clinical work
- Quality of trauma training
- Regulating rumination - reduce cognitive reproduction of distressing experiences

Organization

- High workload
- High percentage of patients with traumatic event exposure
- Lack of support
- Lower salary
- Less benefits
- (Adams & Riggs, 2008; Bober & Reghlyr, 2006)

Vicarious Resiliency

Witnessing patient growth and resiliency

Affirm value of therapy/profession

Regain hope

Power of healing

Advocacy involvement

Changes in perception of world for the positive, more informed world view

Thoughts about self-care

Views on trauma work and connecting with clients

Sense of purpose and meaning

Factors associated with Vicarious Resiliency

Social support

Mindfulness practice

Active problem focused coping (Adams & Riggs, 2008)

Spirituality (Trippany, White Kress, Wilcoxon, 2004)

Loss with COVID-19 Pandemic

- Sense of safety, predictability, control
- Social connections
- Financial security
- Trust in systems (government, education, health care, economic)
- Concerns regarding vaccinations
- Belief we can protect our elderly and other vulnerable communities
- Dreams, plans, rites of passages

Problem solving

- ▶ Problem = Something we don't want
- ▶ Solution = Figure out how to change it, get rid of it, or avoid it
- ▶ This approach works well in the external world, but when we try this with our own unwanted thoughts, feelings, memories it creates problems:
 - ▶ Experiential Avoidance: trying to avoid, suppress, or get rid of unwanted private experiences, even when it's harmful, costly, or ineffective to do so (e.g., disconnecting from social support, not engaging in meaningful activities)

Willingness

- ▶ Making room for painful feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, urges, and/or memories
- ▶ It is not about wanting negative thoughts and feelings, conceding to them, or even liking them.
- ▶ Simply about letting them be there as they are.
- ▶ Stance toward self and others - an openness to the ongoing flow of experiences
- ▶ Dropping the struggle with these experiences

Clean Pain vs. Dirty Pain

- ▶ Clean pain: original discomfort we feel in response to a real-life problem
 - ▶ Normal reaction, no way to avoid clean pain
- ▶ Dirty pain: pain we get when we struggle to control, eliminate, or avoid clean pain
 - ▶ Evaluate or judge our experience (e.g., “This is bad; I shouldn’t feel this way; I’m overreacting.”)
 - ▶ Piles on top of the original clean pain
 - ▶ Adds to the suffering
- ▶ Has judging your emotions ever worked? Made things better?

Strategies to practice willingness

- Allowing: See if you can allow this feeling to be there
- Expansion: Imagine opening up and expanding around the feeling
- Curious Child/Scientist: Observe as if you are a curious child/scientist who has never encountered this before
- Mindful Naming: “I’m noticing sadness. Here is grief”

Strategies to practice willingness

- Normalizing: Tells you that you're a normal human being who has a heart and who cares
- Compassion: Hold feeling gently like delicate flower or crying baby
- Breathe into it: Breathe into the feeling
- Healing Hand: Imagine a healing hand, send warmth to area, making room for the feeling

Questions to ask yourself?

- ▶ At the end of which days this week did I feel energized rather than depleted by the work?
- ▶ What was different about myself (doing, thinking, feeling), the relationship between me and the patient, or the context itself on this day?
- ▶ How am I making sense out of the pain and suffering I witnessed today?

References

- ▶ Devilly, Grant & Wright, Renee & Varker, Tracey. (2009). Vicarious Trauma, Secondary Traumatic Stress or Simply Burnout? Effect of Trauma Therapy on Mental Health Professionals. *The Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry*. 43. 373-85. 10.1080/00048670902721079.
- ▶ Hernandez-Wolfe, Pilar & Engstrom, David & Gangsei, David. (2010). Exploring the Impact of Trauma on Therapists: Vicarious Resilience and Related Concepts in Training. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*. 29. 67-83. 10.1521/jsyt.2010.29.1.67.
- ▶ Mordeno, Imelu & Go, Geraldine & B. Yangson, April. (2015). Examining the Dimensional Structure Models of Secondary Traumatic Stress Based on DSM-5 Symptoms.
- ▶ Skovholt, T. M. (2001). *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for therapists, counselors, teachers, and health professionals*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- ▶ A. Turner, Joseph & Edwards, Lisa & M. Eicken, Iverson & Yokoyama, Kayoko & R. Castro, Jennifer & Ngoc-Thuy Tran, Amber & Haggins, Kristee. (2005). Intern Self-Care: An Exploratory Study Into Strategy Use and Effectiveness.. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. 36. 674-680. 10.1037/0735-7028.36.6.674.
- ▶ Krieschok, Thomas & J Lopez, Shane & R. Somberg, Daniel & J. Cantrell, Peggy. (2000). Dissertation while on internship: Obstacles and predictors of progress. *Professional Psychology Research and Practice*. 31. 10.1037/0735-7028.31.3.327.
- ▶ A. Adams, Shelah & A. Riggs, Shelley. (2008). An Exploratory Study of Vicarious Trauma Among Therapist Trainees. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*. 2. 26-34. 10.1037/1931-3918.2.1.26.
- ▶ Trippany, R.L., White Kress, V.E., & Wilcoxon, S.A. (2004). Preventing Vicarious Trauma: What Counselors Should Know When Working with Trauma Survivors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82 (Winter), 31-37. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2004.tb00283.x.
- ▶ Makadia, Rakhee & Sabin-Farrell, Rachel & Turpin, Graham. (2017). Indirect exposure to client trauma and the impact on trainee clinical psychologists: Secondary traumatic stress or vicarious traumatization?. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*. 24. 10.1002/cpp.2068.