



## NHS Education for Scotland

Transcript of 'The Compassionate Space in Bereavement Support: Caring for Others and Ourselves in the Process' (NES Bereavement Webinar, 2022) video.

**Chair:** Dr Kenneth Donaldson, Associate Postgraduate Dean for Grief & Bereavement, NHS Education for Scotland.

**Speakers:** Andy Gillies, Spiritual Care Lead, NHS Ayrshire and Arran.

**Kenneth Donaldson (KD):** Hello. Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to today's webinar. My name's Ken Donaldson. I'm one of the Associate Postgraduate Deans for Grief & Bereavement at NES. I'm also Medical Director at NHS Dumfries and Galloway. I'm delighted to welcome you to the 15th NES Bereavement webinar. And I'm also delighted to welcome Andy Gillies, who's going to be presenting and hosting today's webinar.

Andy works as Spiritual Care, Person-centred Care and Staff Care Lead at NHS Ayrshire and Arran and he's passionate about spiritual care, psychotherapy, and reflective practice.

I will let Andy expand further on his interests and passions throughout the webinar.

So, just to let you know, at the start of today's webinar, we're going to run a couple of polls that will precede going into the actual webinar itself. And then at the end of the entire session we will have a final poll just to see what changes there have been.

So, I'm going to hand over to Phil in a second who will do the polls. Then we'll bring in Andy who will do his presentation. And then we'll have the Q&A session at the end followed by that final poll. So, I think that's really all for me to say. I'm going to hand over to Phil Smith from our team who's going to run that first poll, before we bring in Andy. So, Phil, over to you.

**Phil Smith (PS):** Hi, everyone. I hope you can hear me okay. So, we've got two polls, if you'd be kind enough to fill this out before we get going. You should just be able to click on the option on your screen. So, most people have been able to vote. I'll just close the poll now and show the results. Great. So, we have half of people saying they feel very compassionate towards other people, and the others distributed between three and four, so most people quite confident with that. Thanks. I will now launch the second poll. Brilliant. So that's about 90% of us have managed to vote on that.

That's brilliant. So, I will just share the results.

**KD:** That's interesting, isn't it? The first poll we saw almost everybody was at a four or five. And then we see that, compassionate of yourself, we're seeing quite a shift downwards to two and three, with 1% saying not at all and then a small percentage in four. So, that's quite an interesting change from question one to question two.

Okay, Phil, thank you very much for doing that. I appreciate you're going to come in at the end with another poll. But I will hand over to Andy now and I will drop off screen and catch up with everybody at the end of the webinar. So, Andy, over to you. Thanks.

**Andy Gillies (AG):** Thank you, Ken, and Phil as well, and everybody who's joined today. I'm interested in the 1% who said, about compassion for themselves, not at all. Thank you for taking part in an act of improving self-knowledge, reflecting on those two questions and answering them. Thank you for taking time out of your day, making the decision to come to a session about learning, potential learning, or reflection, and welcome to the space. I'm going to summarise the headline of this session. It's called "The Compassionate Space in Bereavement Support, Caring for Others and Ourselves in the Process". There're three main components to today's session and I'll aim after each component to leave enough space if there's a question that you think would be helpful to have answered, that you could ask that. And so that, like we've begun with a poll, hearing where you're at right now with all this, but throughout the session we'll take little stops along the way to hear how we're doing. It's as close to a conversation as we can have in a session like this. So, as an act of kindness to yourself, I'm going to invite you to clear away the space that you're in, if you haven't already. If you've got a cup of tea or a pizza or something like that, get that close by. But if you've got a phone or a pager and you don't need to access it for the next 50 minutes, then put it to the side. Put it out the way and allow yourself to come into this moment.

I'm also inviting you to do this, because we'll all have been places before now and we will all be going places after now. But the invite for you in this session right now is to be here, just to be here, in this moment. I'm going to also ask you to listen to yourself and ask the question, what do you feel right now? Just ask, what do I feel in this moment? And notice what happens in yourself, if you go, "Oh... that kind of question", if you resist it. Notice...if you go and start listening to your body or if you start trying to find a word in your head. Notice what it is that you do when someone asks you how you feel. Notice what you're feeling right now. Notice if it's numbness and you can't actually name a feeling - "I don't know what the feeling is" - or if there's a bit of anxiety or a bit of sadness or a bit of hopefulness. Just notice it. And recognise that as a human being you have feelings and you're not the only human being that has the feeling you've got right now. I notice that I have an anxiety in me, a bit of excitement too. And maybe that is the same feeling.

And I know that I'm not the only one in delivering a session, when you care about it and you care about the people who are attending getting something meaningful from it, that that's the case. And the last thing

I'm going to ask you to do is another act of kindness to yourself. Position yourself comfortably in your chair, in the room that you're in, or the space that you're in, and just maybe give your shoulders a little shrug and just say, "No, I'm here now." And I know I've spent quite a long time doing that. And it's not just as an act of generosity to you, it's an act of generosity to myself.

Because I've tuned in to all those same things too. So, The Compassionate Space in Bereavement Support, Caring for Others and Ourselves in the Process. I wonder what you think about, what comes to mind when you hear the word 'space' in relation to bereavement support.

What does space mean to you? Does space mean distance? What does the space between us mean? What about the space right now between my webcam, the internet, and where you're physically located right now? What does that space mean? I'm going to invite you to pick up something, anything. So, I'm picking up this headphone case. I'm going to invite you to think about the space between you and the object you've picked up. So, it might be your cup of tea or a pen. The mouse of your computer.

Pick up an object and the gap...This object isn't part of me, it's not part of my body. It was on the desk, and I've then picked it up. And so, there's a relationship between me and the object.

It's here and I'm here. But actually, I'm touching it. And maybe...Maybe this is a little bit like sympathy. "Something's going hard for you? Oh, poor you. Poor you." "That sounds a shame. Poor you." And you're keeping it off at a distance. Maybe empathy's like: "Oh, there's something really hard for you." "My goodness. "Oh, I can't believe that's happening to you." And then maybe compassion is saying, "I hear what's happening to you and I want to help."

Space is accepting that you are not the same as the other person, no. You are not the same. You are not living the exact same experience and they are not an object. Space says there's a relationship between us. When we talk about space in this session, it's the relationship between us and the bereavement support that we offer to other people, so there's space between us and the person. But also, there's space, and what happens in the space between us? What happens between two humans when they come together to be heard or to speak or to listen? And so, the focus is on the space between us, but it's also on the space within us. I believe that, if we're out of touch with the space in ourselves, that it's impossible to hold a space for another. If you have no idea what's going on for you, if you're not in tune with your own feelings, if you don't know why you're there to support someone, and you're not in tune with your intention, I believe it's almost impossible for you to create a space for that person where they truly can be heard and seen.

So, a really good way to get in touch with that space within yourself and to make that space between you not become a pitying space or an empathic-only space where you hear and feel all that emotion, but a compassionate space where I hear your experience, I could feel part of that experience, and I want to help. I believe that the first thing we need to offer is our intention. So, if you are a person who learns by inspiration about... perspiration, you like to write things down, you could write down these words: intention, understanding and reflection. The underpinning principle around about space being that we are not the other person, nor are they an object. That there's something that happens in that relationship. And in order that that relationship can be effective, our part in it is important and therefore our intention is important. So, 'Intention' is the first section. "Why are we giving bereavement support?", "Why are we having that conversation with someone?", is the first part of reflecting on intention. So, you might ask the question around about...why I am. If this is about bereavement support, why am I offering bereavement support? You might also ask the question, where am I offering it? You might ask the question, who is it I'm offering it to? Does it make a difference if I'm offering it to my manager, to someone I'm responsible for managing in the team, for a colleague, for a patient, a relative, a person in the bus stop? When am I offering it?

So, being conscious of all those things are a part of what informs our intention. Is there a difference between offering bereavement support to someone in the corridor versus someone who's come around for a coffee to your office to meet you for an hour? What might it look like if you're in touch with your intention in the corridor? Might it be to say to someone, my intention is...I'm meeting them in the corridor, it's a colleague I work with. My intention is to acknowledge their loss and to tell them I care. So, you see them in the corridor, and you say, "Hey, it's good to see you and I'm sorry about your loss." And you give them a wee nod - and in the old days you might have given them a wee hug - or a knuckle bump, and you give them the chance to move on and say, "Thank you for saying that", or you give them the chance to maybe arrange to meet you at another point. And if someone comes for a coffee, you might say, "Come in for a coffee." "I just want to offer some space for you to talk about your experience. "So, the first part of intention is, the why are you doing it? Why are you having that conversation? Where are you having it? Who is it with? And is that relevant? And when are you having it? Often, I'd be referred people as a Healthcare Chaplain, I'd be referred, I've had referred to me

people who'd experienced a loss and sometimes staff would say, "Please see this person, this patient, "their loved one died and they're sad. You know, we don't want them to be sad anymore." And I would be thinking well, thinking about the when. Their loved one died two weeks ago and they're in hospital themselves. I'd be really worried if this person wasn't sad or numb.

The second part of intention is to think about the purpose of the conversation, and that's ultimately, you're asking the question, what is it I want to offer the other? What is it I want to offer? The compassionate space in bereavement support has asked the question, what am I hoping to offer the other person? The compassionate space that also takes into account you as a worthwhile human being also asks the question, how am I feeling about offering that space? I've almost for ten years I've been a Healthcare Chaplain and I've had lots of experience of being with people who've lost children and babies and loved parents and siblings, parts of their own body, and I'm often very scared and anxious before I go in to see people. I don't spend a huge amount of time wondering why that is. I just notice that sometimes I feel anxious. You know, and it might be that one of my values is caring for people and allowing them to be cared for or getting it right.

So, maybe there's some anxiety about what if I get it wrong, and what if I can't meet that need? I'm also noticing that in the compassionate space that it's been pretty windy and people's car alarms are sometimes going off. And there's one going off outside the window now.

So be compassionate. Be as compassionate to me as I am with myself until someone presses the wee button in that car. So, asking the question, what is it I hope to offer the other person, is a huge part of intention, because it immediately puts you in touch with your why or your Simon Sinek stuff.

And actually I, in coming into the session today, said, what's my intention? My intentions to offer some space for people to have... to facilitate people having even better conversations around about bereavement and to also help them care for themselves more. And that was my intention. And so, where am I to stick on track with that and I know that I've met my intention.

The final part of intention... And in fact, actually, let's just take this as an example. Let's say that my intention in offering bereavement support is to give someone the space to be heard following a difficult experience. So, if my intention is to make some space for the other person to be heard following a difficult experience, maybe what I'm doing, like Brené Brown in her most recent book in quoting Wittgenstein... Maybe you're helping someone give language to their inner world.

The Wittgenstein quote is: "The limit of our language is the limit of our world." So, maybe if we're saying, I want to offer space for this person to be heard amid their loss, maybe we're helping give that person a language and a name and some words to their inner world that is hugely lonely and swirling about with movement and sometimes heavy and stuck with sadness. Maybe you're giving them the ability to unlimited their world and open that up and have it expressed and understood. And so, when you talk about intention and what it is you hope to offer, you're able to go into the session with purpose and a role. But on top of that, if you were to really ask the deepest question of all, which may be something like, why do I even care that someone's bereaved? What's my reason for caring, for wanting to hold this space in the first place? Why do I even care that people are experiencing loss? And maybe you could answer that question by writing it down on a bit of paper or turning it over more in your head. But why do you even care? That's a really important part of intention. Not only in order that you'd offer more compassion, but you can be compassionate to yourself too. How heavy is it? Like on this poll earlier on today, most people can identify an ability to care more deeply for other people than themselves. So, how heavy is it to put other people first your whole life? In Japan, there's a phrase "ikigai". It talks about what's your reason for being, what is it that gets you up, what are you good at,

what does the world need, what can you do for a living, a vocation. What's your ikigai? And in spiritual care we talk about vocational canon. What is the thing that makes us do what we do? I know that, in my own context, having a faith and a belief that people are made in the good image of God and that everybody is worthwhile simply by existing, it's hugely important for me to be in touch with that, because if I follow that to the nth degree, I'm actually admitting that I'm worth caring for too. And that's important in truly compassionate conversations because compassion is a relationship. It's not you are owning it in empathy and it's not you pitying that they're this poor object out there. It's a relationship, and that relationship doesn't only flow between you and the other, it flows within yourself. Now the payoff for being in touch with your intention is that you will experience a sense of achievement if you live in line with it.

So that's an act of caring for yourself. It shows that you're living in line with your values and that you're an agent with capability to make choices. So, part of being in touch with intention means that the other person gets somebody who's more purposeful about the care they offer, that knows what they're there to do and they don't just slip into that role out of nowhere. They also, the listener, gets the benefit of achievement. I achieved what I set out to do. I lived in line with my values and there's various psychotherapeutic and neurochemical benefits that go along with that, as well as the spiritual thing of being the person in the world that you want to be.

So, I do have an intention to open space for questions at this point, and I don't see any in the chat. But I wonder whether, when we do have space for that later, whether you might just write something down, if you've got a response to anything that's said under the heading of 'Intention'. Actually, I'll give you a really very quick story about that too, that yesterday I was meeting with some colleagues that I care about involved in wellbeing for the organisation, particularly for staff. And we were in the sanctuary, and someone came into the sanctuary who had been given some bad news that they had a... they had confirmed that their illness wasn't going to be treatable and that they would die soon.

And so, part of my intention that morning had been to listen to my colleagues and to share some of my own experience with what was happening. And when this person came into the sanctuary saying, "I need someone to talk to", I noticed my shift in intention, saying, "Let me be an open person that this person can articulate what it is they need." And my colleagues very emotionally intelligently moved out of the space and let the person come in. And they told me that they were scared of dying and that they needed to talk. And so, I just made it my intention there and then to hold at least 30 minutes for that person to tell me what they wanted to tell me.

My feeling was a bit anxious, a bit surprised. It had been unexpected. And in offering that space to the person... and maybe it was slightly longer than 30 minutes, and so if I were to be in my critical mode I'd say I exceeded the boundary that I'd set, but it was a boundary that was there as a guideline. Someone who's just turned up and just wants to talk, 30 minutes just to say that and have that heard felt important. And the person was able to speak themselves into realising that they were stronger than they realised, that they were capable, that they weren't alone. And I also felt, as right now a Service Lead for various services and opportunities like this today in the here and now and sessions like yesterday supporting someone, are really rare for me and are a huge gift. I felt a huge sense of achievement for that. But in order that you make your intention real, you've got to be able to do something else. So just having intention isn't enough.

You know, I intend to be really kind and then you go round and don't offer any kindness. How is it that you take your intention and make it real?

And that's what this next part is. And if you're a person that writes things down, then this would be headed "Understanding". Understanding is showing the other that you're with them in compassion. It's showing in compassion that you're with the other. Carl Rogers talks about this example of "exchanges of truth are curative" for the person who reveals what's going on for them and the person who with genuineness receives it. So, understanding is to show the other that that intention is real

and to show them that they're being understood and that they're being cared for and that they're being heard, and that they are, you know, subconsciously maybe, "Well, I'm not alone now, am I? I'm having this heard."

So, my question to you is, and I think it's important that you allow your experience to inform part of this, is, when was the last time...just take a second with this, and I've cried when this has been asked of me before, so make sure that you're okay when I ask it. And if you don't want to think about it, then it's okay, don't. But when was the last time you felt understood? Truly understood. You might think about where you were or who you were with or what happened before it. What did it feel like to be understood? And what difference did it make to you when you were understood? If you can stay in touch with that, you will make understanding the other all the more important.

I know when I've been understood I've felt lighter, I've felt seen, I've felt more valuable, I've felt capable, more autonomous, closer to the other person, more worthwhile. I just felt good. You know? And I don't just mean good like a positive feeling. I felt good. I'm a human being and somebody else can see and care for me. Doesn't run away from me. Must be good. So, you can offer that understanding to people. So, say your intention is to make space for someone to be heard.

Well, let's do that by helping them be understood. You can do that by offering the core conditions. There might be more than 400 different therapeutic modalities, and everyone has their own different approach to how they offer themselves in a spiritual care encounter. But there are some core conditions that remain in all of those contexts. One is that you're empathic, you try to understand the person's experience.

So that's number one. A wee bit of an attempt to understand the person's experience. The other one is to be genuine and be authentic. See if someone says to me, "Oh, that must be really hard for you, "I immediately want to just walk away and say, "Get lost." I'm so grateful that in spiritual care... I've worked in Glasgow, in Clydebank, and now in Ayrshire, and I've never been in an environment where people haven't had a really good sense of a lack of genuineness...it just isn't tolerable for people, especially the bereaved, the bruised and the wounded. So be genuine. If someone is really boring when they're telling you about their loss, you can say to the person, "I want to offer space for you to talk. "I'm finding it a bit hard to stay engaged just now." Or if you feel really sad about what the person's said, you can say, "It makes me feel really sad when you say that." You're not making it about you, you're just telling them genuinely where you are. Someone told me recently - this was in the context of bereavement support - something about themselves and something they'd said to their partner.

And two tears on either eye came out and ran down my cheek. If I had resisted that, I would have been an absolute monster, because of what the person told me. And it didn't become about them having to attend to me. Actually, what happened was an exchange of truth happened and it was curative for us both.

The person was generous enough to tell me that that was the case for them too. Another tool that you might use in understanding people and...

Oh, sorry, the last condition is non-judgemental.

So, the core conditions about being empathic: trying to understand, being genuine, and then being non-judgemental. I notice... It's so insidious in our language. People go, "Very interesting" or "Good point" and all that. It's just quite judgemental language. Imagine you attend the session, and you say, "I felt more relaxed during that session." You're revealing your experience. Someone then says, "That was a good session. You made some good points."

That's quite judgemental. So judgementalness, it's bad for you, "It's been six months, you should be over this by now. "Taking judgement out of compassionate understanding is a no-brainer really. And so... Non-judgemental, genuine and authenticity, and trying to understand the person's experience will help you understand people. However, there's... If I was to do, what are the top five things that you need in compassionate listening or understanding, there's... People might like that more. I would refuse to offer a session like that. I'm not a clickbait YouTube video. I think it's important to be tuned in to the deeper stuff. What does space mean? What does intention mean? What does it mean to understand?

But part of what can really help is to notice and wonder with people. I learnt that through Values-Based Reflective Practice, which is something that in spiritual care in Scotland in particular we use to look at really difficult experiences that bring your values into account. Asking the question, what do you notice as the person speaks, what do you wonder about, takes away any judgement and it also allows you to tell the person they are being understood and seen.

Actually, sometimes you might say this word: "I notice you've sat here and told me everything about your loss with a big smile on your face." It might be the first time that person realises that their outer world, what they're presenting, is different to their inner world. "No wonder no-one understands me." Or "By not allowing myself to experience that sadness, what is it I'm holding back from?" And maybe you just give people the chance to be seen in a deeper way. And when you wonder rather than ask or probe, when you wonder, you make it big.

We were talking about this in a community of practice recently, that wondering is a bit like wandering. It gives space and exploration to what it is that you see. "I wonder who else you've told about this." "I wonder what you might do about all that you've said." It stops it being, "You'd better go and do this, you'd better go and do that", or "That's really good. You're doing a good thing." "Where you are now in the grief process is good." It might not feel very good if you're just constantly sad or crying. But to say, "I notice how much this is weighing down on you", or "I notice how quickly all this has happened", or "I know what it's like to carry all this", so different to saying, "That's good you feel that."

You can normalise through noticing a word. You can normalise by being genuine too. Being able to say, "I'm noticing that you've got an expectation that you'd be fine now, and I'm thinking how early you in all this process are."

So, noticing and wondering. The core conditions. Really basic tools in creating a compassionate, understanding environment. You can also ask the person... In order to work with understanding you can also ask the person what they want out of your support. It might seem like a ridiculous question, but "What is it you want from me in support or what can I offer you?" Compassionate says, "I'm here and you're there. "How may I help? "If compassion is saying, "I see your pain and I want to help. I feel that with you. I want to help", then why not ask the question, "What's the most important thing I could offer you just now? "They may not say, "I want space to be heard." They might say, "I want you to tell me that it's okay." "I want you to tell me that I'm not losing my marbles." "I want you to acknowledge that this person was a monster." But by doing that, you give people power back.

We don't have the ability to control very much in the world, and certainly not when people die in our life. And so, by offering a bit of control back, it's a bit of healing to people. I couldn't control whether my loved one lived or died, but I can control now what this person offers me. I've got a bit of say in that. But being genuine, if they say, "I want you to give me counselling for the next six weeks", then you're not capable of that and it's not your role. You can say to them with genuineness, "I can't offer that. "I notice that you're saying that, but that's not something I can offer." "I wonder where you might find that." But the key point in understanding and the key point about compassionate understanding is that people are not objects.

They're not objects of our pity: "Poor you." They're not... they're other to us when we relate to them but they're not the bereaved person, they're not that sad case or the widow.

That's not their identity, because truly... Truly, if you believe that if you take the timeline of humanity that each person's body, all the minerals that make up our body and the chemicals we've been through, five supernovas, through the existence of the universe, if you believe that, then we truly are all connected, aren't we? So, the person's not an object. And that means that to be understood with compassion means to be journeyed with and not fixed.

So, if you want to have a mantra of what you're offering someone in understanding is: "I will journey with you and not fix you." To be understood with compassion is to be journeyed with and not fixed. If you can offer that to people... This is a good point to maybe think if there are any questions or reflections under the heading of understanding that you'd like to have. You could write them down or you could send them in to the questions part of this. But the benefit that you'll get out of taking time to invest in closeness... to invest in understanding with people is closeness.

There are some obvious psychotherapeutic benefits, but anything where you get achievement, closeness or enjoyment will improve your neurochemical and psychological state. But also, spiritually you're just a bit closer to someone. You've exchanged reality, you've been there, you've borne witness to another human being. And if you've been genuine, they've borne witness to you.

So, the benefit to you is closeness. That's an act of compassion to yourself. You've been close. You could spend your whole life trying to sell people things on the telephone or making money for a big banking corporation or, like I did before when I worked in the fitness industry, make more money for the gym, increase membership fees, reduce staff hours. Or you could actually live your life where one of the things you do is you get close to people by truly understanding their experience.

That's a huge benefit. And, as someone who's been burnt out, I recognise that losing sight of intention or closeness will accelerate the rate at which your own compassion for yourself drops and your own ability to hold and hear other people's stuff drops. But the key, I believe, to a long and healthy career in supporting other people is to move on to reflection which is the next heading. If you have been able to tune in to your intention, meet that other person with understanding and offer them that time, you'll have the achievement, the sense of closeness, but in reflection some things happen. There are loads of different reflective models. I love VBRP. It's the one that I use most. It's the one that I'm involved in a couple of communities of practice with. It hugely supports and upholds my practice.

It's what my supervisors use when they hear my woes and my joys. Reflection does a couple of things. One thing it does is it uncouples us from the loss as being ours. If you write down your experience of supporting someone and you just write the word "their loss", you're immediately taking it away from being in here, that it's your sadness to carry, and you've allowed it to be theirs. I held a bit of their sadness with them.



When I worked in the old Southern General when I first started as a chaplain, I'd come out, my wife would have maybe sent me a text or a picture of my kid, a new-born baby, or a friend might have sent a joke. And I would resist smiling walking to my car, because I'd seen so much sadness that I didn't want anyone to think I was happy, and I didn't want to be happy, I didn't deserve to be happy. I remember electrical engineers fitting something outside a cancer ward and they were joking about, and I walked past them and said, "What are you joking about?" "Do you understand where you are?" And I was out of touch with it being 'their loss', not my loss. So, reflection helps you do that, which doesn't mean you don't care. It just means you're in touch with reality.

The other thing that reflection does is it allows you to learn. You can ask the question, what went well in offering that bit of time to the person and giving them the space to be heard? What would have been even better if...? So those are quality-improvement, assets-based questions to ask. What went well and what would make that even better? And those are actually another opportunity for us to stand against the typical thing that humans do, the negativity bias, and all the evolutionary biology that goes along with remembering and naturally attending to the negative more. Asking that reflective question, what went well there, is a question we sometimes don't even ask ourselves at all. And if I'm going to the managers, then we do ask it. They do ask it. The other thing that reflection does is it's a form of processing. It allows you to speak back to what you experienced, it allows you to look at what were the significant points in it for you, and it allows you to give voice and give name to the experience, a bit like what the person who's maybe been understood gets to do, but you get to do it.

And if you add it to your processing a reflection on your values, you also start to... understand what matters to you all the more. Another thing that reflection really helps with, when you're offering a compassionate space in bereavement support for the other and for yourself, is it lets you hone your practice too, doesn't it? Then you become less reflective thinking back on it afterwards and you become more reflexive, where actually in the here and now with someone you can go, "Actually this isn't working well. What I might ask is this." So, it allows building on reflexivity as well as reflection. It also lets you practise non-judgement of self. If you reflect and you use noticing and wondering language, you practise not judging yourself as being a good or a bad practitioner or focusing on all the negative.

By noticing and wondering and reflecting, you actually practise a self-compassion, a component of self-compassion. The first component of it really is to be mindful, just to be aware of what's going on for you.

When you reflect, you start to develop your ability to be mindful, to be heartfelt, as Thomas Keating calls it, and be in tune with what's going on for you in any given moment. One of the things that people forget is that, when you're suffering and you share it with someone else, you don't want the other person to be squashed. Very few people want you to carry all their pain and all their sadness and all this judgement on yourself. So, there's not an invite to carry all that sadness and judge yourself.

There's an invite for you to say, did I live up to my intention? Is my intention realistic based on what's happening in my life right now? Those are important points and questions.

The last thing about reflection, and this is just coming up towards the end of my input into this session today, is that reflection allows spiritual growth. Mature practitioners don't just keep receiving stuff. CPD is a minimum.

Safe practice is a minimum. These are basic competences. Fitness to practise and reflexivity and being in tune and being spiritually grown and knowing why you're in the role and doing your best and

offering true compassion and care and being able to see and feel and know what it's like and to know why you do it, that stuff is beyond basic competence.

That's the stuff of life. It's the life-giving stuff. Actually, the benefit and payoff for you is joy. It is not... to keep chords of hedonia and eudaimonia. Hedonia is, like, joy of just partying. You know... cocktails, you've got your beer cap on, and your Hawaiian shirt on the dancefloor. Or extreme retail therapy. It's not hedonia.

The joy I'm talking about is eudaimonia. It's the deep joy that comes with living in line with your values. It's the deep joy that comes with being compassionate to others and to yourself. And it's not too complicated. Taking time to tune in to why you're doing something, tune in to how you are in the moment, taking time to understand, are huge gifts to offer other people, but they're also huge gifts to offer yourself. So that concludes my input in the session today.

I will invite Phil and Ken to bring forward any questions that maybe you've got for the session or any reflections that people have.

So, I will open up that wee section of the chat now.

**KD:** Andy, thank you so much for that. And there's so much to just think about there. One thing I found just listening to you was... The purpose of these webinars and our group is around bereavement, but so much of what you were saying is applicable to everything day to day. Of course, bereavement in particular, but A) there's so much of bereavement that's not been around losing a loved one in the last few years, but just loss of so much in our lives that we've been used to, and people are struggling with. The skills you've just been telling us about are so applicable to that kind of day-to-day... just, yeah. I'm very conscious that... Sure, it's abated at the moment, but there's a lot of breakdowns of relationships and people struggling, just because everybody's had such a difficult time.

And all you've just been outlining I feel are some of the skills I need to be applying to my day-to-day work, just to try and help people, including myself. Be compassionate to myself and then be compassionate to each other.

And I think it's interesting from our survey that people clearly struggle with that self-compassion more than compassion to others. But you're right, that's key to it.

Right. I will stop talking and look at questions. It's over to everybody on the call to... And I'm seeing quite a lot. Phil, you've been our question master in the past. Shall I hand over to you to run through some questions?

**PS:** That's fine, Ken. Thank you very much, Andy. We're seeing plenty of comments and how much your presentation has resonated with people, especially the idea of the importance of compassion for yourself. I'll make sure you see all of those. For the time being, I'll pick out a couple of questions.

So, we had someone ask: If you feel that someone's expression has changed on their face and you feel there's something wrong, how should you handle that matter?

**AG:** That's interesting. The Wittgenstein quote about the limit of your language also reflects the limit of your world. I think if we limit our expression of our inner world only to our words we miss out on so much. I don't know whether it's a pop psychology quote about only 7% of the words you say are true communication and the rest is all tone and body language.

So, if you notice a big change in someone's facial expression, the key phrase for me is notice and wonder.

So, I notice when you talked about that that your face changed or that you looked down or that your face fell or that your eyes lit up.

And then being able to say to the person, "I wonder if that connects with you in any way." That way you non-judgmentally but attentively address what you've seen. People's bodies express their language all the time. Sitting there with folded arms. You might be saying, "Well, I looked at that FBI profile in the YouTube video and that just means they're defensive and they're hiding something."

But you've no idea. You could say, "I notice that your arms are crossed" or "I notice you crossed your arms when I asked you how you felt". Maybe that crossing of the arms means they feel they need a hug.

So, taking away judgement isn't just about making people feel better, it's about getting to deeper realities. That's a great question. I don't know how good an answer that is, but I think it is something that I would definitely fall back on as a basic, to notice and to wonder. And if someone says something or someone shows something, it's out for a reason. It's okay for that to be noticed and wondered upon. If the person says, "I don't want to talk about it," it's okay.

**PS:** Great. Thank you, Andy. We have another question. Other than what has already been said, do you have any hints or tips on how to do this when working remotely by phone or on video?

**AG:** I think that apparently cognitive dissonance is when you're unable to pick up the thousands of micro-signals that someone's body language presents when you're in a room with them, as well as the electrochemical field that comes out of someone. So, you do miss a lot. No doubt about that. I think there are some good guidance documents out around about supporting people on the phone and some of the things that can happen when people don't see another person's face, that they can potentially overshare without realising what they're saying, because it's like a sounding board, what you can do with it.

But I think we're talking here about the compassionate space. So, I think the one thing you can really do is invite people, when you're supporting them online or on the phone, is to say to them, "Sit in a comfy..." Make sure they're sitting in a comfy position. So, you can offer compassion that way. You can invite them to put their camera off if they want to.

You can invite people... say, "Do you want to get a drink, because maybe I would offer you a cup of tea when you came into my office normally?" You can do all that basic stuff. And then in terms of... So, this applies I think for therapists, people offering bereavement support, people attending to the spiritual needs of people. You can just name that you don't absolutely see everything. You can just say, "I can only see your shoulders and your head, so I don't know what's going on for the whole of you, but where is this experience in your body?" You can just ask that, or you can admit the limitations. "I'm sorry that I can't meet you in person. I think there's something lost."

Many people have said to us in staff care and in spiritual care here in NHS Ayrshire and Arran that they quite like the remoteness, that they can come, and they can tell it all. They don't have to walk down a corridor or drive and worry about the traffic. So, sometimes our own presumption is that people might not like it and sometimes they do. I've noticed that there's a lot of people, who wouldn't typically ask for help online, have taken that up recently. But the core message I think for me is name what you're not able to offer, name that you notice that that's missing, and be creative about how you might find more of that person. So, maybe, if you were... "Where would you like to be having this conversation?"

Some people would rather be out for a walk. You can ask questions like that to people too.

Being compassionate to yourself - I'm doing my best with what I have at this moment.

**PS:** Thanks, Andy. We have another question. Would you be able to say something about creating a compassionate space in a busy environment, like a ward corridor or a multiple-bedded room?

Yeah. Yeah. I saw someone yesterday talking about how little time there is when you're in a very fast-paced, busy ward to actually access wellbeing services. And there was something about, how do you marry up your needs with reality in that moment?

And I think it's the same in terms of things like being creative about that and also investing time where you do have the ability to do that are important.

But if you're in a busy multi-bedded bay, and somebody has a bereavement-related issue and they do want to talk, you can just name it. You can say, "I know there's lots of people around, but I hear what's happened to you and I care."

You can also, when you're really short on time, say to someone, "Today's quite a full day and I've got two minutes, but I want to give that two minute to just hear how you are."

And if you've ever tried this, just sit and not say anything for two minutes when someone talks, often people run out of things to say, if you don't get in the way and you don't interrupt.

So, I think that how I would describe it is being bounded, tell people that you have limited time, then offer it.

If it's the multi-bedded bay, you say, "I do care", the person might... Say, "Would it be appropriate for you to say a wee bit more now?" "I know it's busy here. Would you like to say some more?"

Give the person the power. I remember being an in-patient down here in Ayrshire and Arran. And the nurses were giving me quite a good... we're giving me a slagging. And I really appreciated it. I felt really human and really seen.

And I quite liked it, but I also had quite private things to talk about and I was okay with it.

And actually, I'm an introvert. However, in another setting I might not have been okay with it.

So, I think key is give the person the ability and think about boundaries. If you're limited for time, don't offer them something you can't. That's part of your core conditions about empathy" I want to understand your experience. I don't want to judge you, but I also need to be real here. I've only got two minutes." I think you can get huge amounts of...

You can get huge amounts of connection with people in two minutes. And actually less. For example, if you gave somebody two minutes every single day for a year... Imagine they were in for a year.

If you gave them two minutes of listening every single day, we're over 700 minutes of being heard.

People who've done Spaces for Listening will know, because is that not two minutes, the Spaces for Listening session here?

Huge amounts can be heard. So that's one of my offerings to that.

**PS:** Great. Thanks, Andy. I'm conscious we don't have a lot of time left. But hopefully at least one more question.

So we have a question: I don't feel judgemental, but I'm very aware the language I use could be inappropriate, even though I don't feel judgement. Is there something I could read to guide me in judgemental words?

**AG:** Yeah. Do you know what? If you just stuck to saying I notice and I wonder, you'd be amazed at how much less judgement you will spout. And if you start to reflect on, was that a noticing and a wondering, or was that a thinly veiled judgement?

You know like, to give an example, someone comes to their manager and says, "I'm finding it really hard today," and the manager says, "You always find it hard, you need to toughen up a bit."

That person goes to the manager and the manager says, "I notice that's the third time this week you've talked about it being hard." "I wonder what you might do about that."

It changes everything. But if you say to somebody, "I notice you're always doing that," it's just another way of doing it.

Try to stick to what you absolutely notice at the level of fact that is indisputable.

So, noticing should be indisputable. It's fact. There is no interpretation added and it's the closest thing you can get to purely pointing out the obvious. Part of the idea is that we don't really connect until our inner worlds meet.

So sometimes we need to have a common ground which is reality, which is what's out there and seen.

So, right now, let's say, I notice that the sun is out.

But if I was to say, I notice it's a really good, sunny day, there's judgement in that. Practising that can help.

I think there's also something about, if you don't feel judgemental, it's often the case that we...

I remember saying to a young man whose sister was dying in intensive care in my first week as a healthcare chaplain... He told me his sister and him had been estranged and hadn't spoken for years and now she was about to die, and I said to him, "I'm so sorry." "Don't feel guilty, because you're here now."

I went back and said it to my boss. I said, "Here I am doing a great job." "I said to the person, 'You shouldn't feel guilty.'" And he said, "How much judgement was laden in what you said?"

"You told the person what they should and shouldn't feel, and you brought guilt into the room."

And because of his courage to notice in me my judgement, I had so much growth, and especially in that first six months or a year of the job. That's why formation is so important in any role where you're caring for other people, because it's dead easy to unconsciously judge people beyond measure and actually offer things that aren't helpful. So, I think it takes immense courage and bravery for someone to even ask that question of themselves, and say, "Am I being...? Yeah, I do that." So, look up noticing and wondering, or do your essential tools with VBRP and sit with it for a while.

**PS:** Thanks, Andy.

We are reaching the half past mark, so you should be able to see our third and final poll of the day. We'd really be interested in getting your feedback on this.

**KD:** Thanks for that, Phil.

That's pretty encouraging, I would say. I'm sure you'd probably agree, Andy, that that hopefully has certainly influenced some people, and there's a recognition about how important it is to be compassionate to yourself.

So, thanks for doing that, Phil. I'm conscious of time. Is there anything you want to comment having seen that poll?

**AG:** Well, I just notice the 'unsure' column. I love that. I love that people don't just hear something and absorb it or swallow it.

Turn it over, chew it over, think about it. I also wanted to thank my colleague who sent me this autobiography of Harry Styles. I said I didn't know who Harry Styles was. And out of compassion he sent me his autobiography in hardback form. So, I really wanted to end with that positive note from Harry Styles.

**KD:** Well, that's a good point to end on, Andy. Thank you.

Just a couple of closing comments. I'm aware of time. Just the events page on the Support Around Death website. We'll have more information and registration links for upcoming webinars later on this year.

Most of the topics and speakers are to be confirmed.

Also on the website you'll be able to listen to previous webinar recordings and access lots of additional learning resources. If you'd like to receive information on bereavement-related training resources events from NES, you may wish to sign up to receive our quarterly newsletter, which you will see Phil has kindly shared on the screen the link to get that.

OK. So, really just, Andy, thank you so much.

That was a fantastic session. Lots and lots to think about. I've taken loads of notes and I'm going to do a bit of reflection on all of that.

So, thank you so much. It's lovely to see you.

Hopefully, we'll catch up in person soon.

Take care. Thanks again.

**AG:** Thank you, everybody.

The film was produced in February 2022 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or <https://vimeo.com/686730331>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or contact [supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk)

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