



MORTUARY AFFAIRS AND GRIEF ISSUES

Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors

OBJECTIVES

Participants will learn:

- The challenges and positive aspects of working in Mortuary Affairs.
- The symptoms of grief, compassion fatigue and ways to cope.



AGENDA

- Positive Aspects of the Job
- Challenges of the Job
- Effects on Personal Stress
- Symptoms of Grief
 - Emotional
 - Physical
 - Behavioral
- Compassion Fatigue
- Coping Methods
- When to Seek Help



“There is no greater honor than to serve those who have made the ultimate sacrifice”



POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE JOB

- The honor of serving those who have made the ultimate sacrifice
- Pride in your service to your country
- Knowing you have handled the service member's belongings with the utmost respect
- Pride in knowing you have served the families of the fallen
- Pride in your mission of honoring the fallen and providing respect and comfort for families



CHALLENGES OF THE JOB

- Lack of Closure
- Complicated Grief
- Feeling Invisible
- Little Connection with “Battle Buddies”
- No Time to Regroup
- Feelings of Isolation
- Specific cases that may have a particularly profound emotional affect



EFFECTS ON PERSONAL STRESS

- It's important to be mindful of stress-related issues outside the job
- Personal stress and struggles may be compounded by the job in mortuary affairs and vice versa

Personal stressors can include:

- Financial
- Family
- Relationships
- Additional grief issues



SYMPTOMS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF - EMOTIONAL

- Numbness, the sense that none of this is real
- Feelings that life is meaningless
- A sense of anger, injustice, or helplessness about the situation
- Feeling “shut down” or irritable



SYMPTOMS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF - PHYSICAL

- Difficulty going to sleep or waking in the middle of the night
- Fatigue
- Loss of motivation
- Anxious feelings
- Difficulty focusing and making decisions
- Short-term memory problems
- Weight loss or gain; over eating or under eating
- Headaches, chest pain or racing heart
- Upset stomach or digestive problems



SYMPTOMS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF - BEHAVIORAL

- Withdrawal from social groups/events
- Addictive or reckless behavior
- Avoidance of certain places and people



COMPASSION FATIGUE

Definition:

- The cumulative impact of hearing about, caring for, and helping to alleviate the suffering and misfortune of others.

Characterized by feeling:

- Trapped
- Overwhelmed
- Out of control



COPING METHODS

- Talk with supportive others about your experiences
- Develop a support system
 - Reach out to colleagues (“battle buddies”)
 - Reach out to family and friends
 - Accept help and support
- Practice self-care
 - Seek balance in your life
 - Exercise
 - Eat a balanced diet
 - Practice some form of relaxation
 - Give yourself some down time
 - Participate in recreational activities



COPING METHODS

CONTINUED

Find a way to honor the memory of the service members you process.

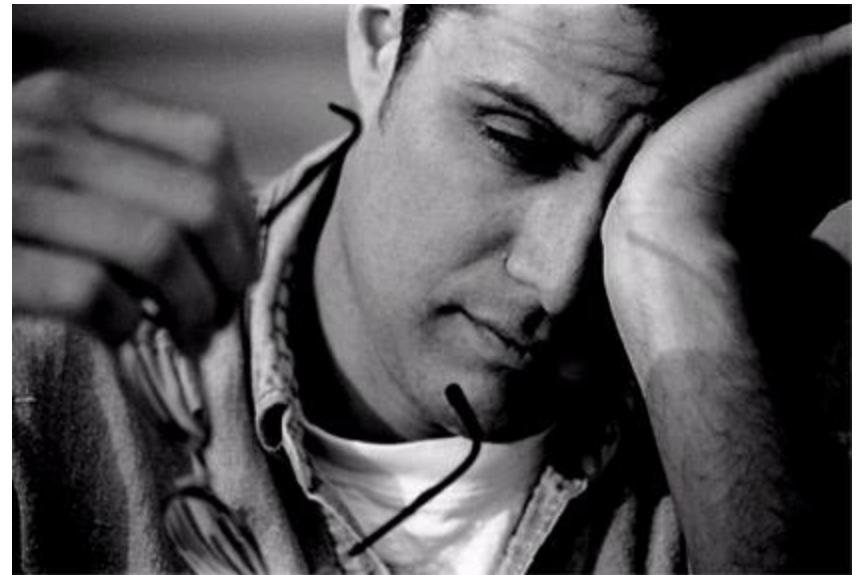
For example:

- Run a mile in their honor
- Volunteer a day or ½ day's labor in the community
- Light a candle
- Create a memento in their honor.



WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- The signs of grief persist and are interfering with your ability to function
- Usual coping methods don't work
- You are having thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else



SUMMARY

- While there are many positive aspects of the job, there are also many challenges as well including:
 - Lack of Closure
 - Complicated Grief
 - Feelings of Isolation
- Coping methods can include:
 - Developing a support
 - Practicing self-care
- Remember, don't be afraid to seek help if grief symptoms persist and usual coping methods don't work





QUESTIONS?



REFERENCES

- Complicated Grief/Prolonged Grief Disorder, www.grief-healing-support.com/complicated-grief.html
- The Hardest Job in the Army, From the May 19, 2003 issue: Meet the men and women of Mortuary Affairs, www.weeklystandard.com





THANK YOU

