

Transcript for The Acorn Oak and Stream Podcast
Season 2 – Episode 4
“Chronic Illness and Grief”

Hi, and welcome to The Acorn, the podcast that drops a little bit of psychoeducation so you can gain a better understanding of the therapy world and yourself. So without further ado, let's jump into our episode.

Hello, and welcome to Season 2, Episode 4 of The Acorn. This podcast episode is about chronic illness and grief, and I will be interviewing psychotherapist Mya Moran, who specializes in chronic illness and perinatal mental health. Welcome Mya.

Hi Charlene.

So, let me tell the people a little bit about you, okay?

Sure.

All right. So, Mya is a registered psychotherapist and founder of Mindful Steps Therapy. Her journey to therapy has been shaped by over a decade in health care, which informs her client-centered approach.”

“She believes in honoring each person's unique path and supporting their authentic self through compassionate, non-judgmental care. In her practice, she supports clients navigating challenges like chronic pain and illnesses, trauma, perinatal mental health, grief and loss, anxiety-related disorders, relational issues, professionals in high performance and stress jobs, family conflict, and big life transitions. And she co-creates a safe space for exploration and personal growth.

Mya has focused her professional development on ongoing training in somatic therapy. IFS, ACT, and family systems. And she is in the final phase of her certification.

Ready to sit for the exam for perinatal mental health through the Postpartum Support International. Girl, Mya, right? You are doing such amazing work and it is so needed.

Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome, girl.

Thank you. Thank you. Yeah.

All right. So I'm going to jump right into it, right? Because you have a powerful story and I want to make certain that we actually have the time.”

“We take that time for you to share your story. So let me know what you have experienced and learned as both a patient and as a clinician who has been living with a chronic illness.

Yeah. So, you know, not many therapists will actually disclose, you know, about their personal health issues. So it's kind of taking that brave step forward to acknowledge out loud that I do suffer from a chronic degenerative disorder.

And I've been both on both sides of the coin, being a patient and a person living with a disability and chronic pain, resulting in multiple surgeries just to function and live. And I've been working in health care at the same time through all of that. Since I was 16 in administration, hands-on patient care, and now a health care professional.

Wow. And so one of the things that I know comes up is this idea, this concept of grief, right? So when you're dealing with any kind of a chronic illness, how do you see it showing up in people's life, grief?”

“Yeah, I mean, pain and sickness is inevitable. We will all experience it at one point or another. And I think many now realize how inevitable that is.

So often when addressing pain or illness and the impact on us is grief. And we live in a grief denying society, which expects us to keep moving forward without pause, without respite. And it takes time to recover.

And illness has a way of showing, slowing us down to focus on what truly matters in this world and offers us an opportunity to reshape ourselves and our life and how we want to approach it. Grief is one of those things that can be really devastating and often misdiagnosed as depression.

Yeah, absolutely. And so as you've been sitting with clients, how has compounded grief show up? Because it's not just finding out about an illness and feeling the grief, right?

It's that compounded grief over time. Can you talk a little bit about that?”

“Yeah, so I mean, it is so important for us to look at what is compounding chronic illness and pain. It's not just, you know, the pain itself and the experience of having a diagnosis or going through the process of getting a diagnosis. It's actually going through our health care system, the medical trauma that happens.

I mean, I'm sure you've sat with people who have said, it's hard to get a doctor's appointment or I have to go to the ER to get help. And it's through that trauma or dismissal of doctors not listening or care professionals passing the buck. That medical trauma that doesn't often get named that,

and it gets named PTSD or adjustment disorder, which is why the confounding is also the anxiety, pain, grief.

These all arise out of mismanagement, lacking investigations into our health and poor health care support. So, I think we're not just dealing with the body that's in pain, we're dealing with how do we get help as well, and who will listen.

And for those clients who have been trying to then get that support, but then finding brick walls, what advice do you have for them?"

"Yeah, so advocacy is the biggest issue when it comes to therapy first, especially when you're navigating chronic health issues. Advocacy is where we always start, and navigating the health care system, how it impacts you, and looking towards understanding that we need to find our ways through it. It's not just the one way to do something, we have to pull in our resources, email that doctor, go through different channels and network to find the best care that you need.

Oftentimes, it's breaking that, if I go to the doctor, then they'll prescribe me something and I'll feel better. That isn't the way it's set up anymore. I want to offer hope for those who are now entering the health care system, or struggling to find their way through it, you know, that there is hope, you know, and that there is a way through it all.

Right, absolutely. And let's talk a little bit about resources. So what resources are out there for people struggling with chronic illness?"

"Yeah, so definitely would recommend therapy to help navigate and create those options to resource. But even just the simplest of recognizing that the pain that lives in the body can be slowed down through the breath. Just taking that mini moment, that mini step in a day, just to breathe through it, breathing through the pain, the frustration, breaking it down and acknowledging that just getting up, getting dressed, and taking care of this body is a lot of work, and that is enough, you know?"

And if that's all that you can do, that's what you've done today. And it's such a powerful experience to recognize and give yourself that acknowledgement that I can breathe, and I can do these simple tasks, and that's enough.

And I love that because you're actually helping people to recognize that rather than pushing through the pain, they'll slow down and breathe through it, right? Yeah, and offer themselves grace for the little steps that they can take.

Yeah. I mean, people will still push past. I do it too."

“I'm guilty. But I think that's just part of the human experience, right? But I also recognize that not everybody will find breathing regulating.

So there are so many ways to address that. And it is helpful to go through that internal and self-exploration with a therapist that knows what they're doing to support you to find where it is that's comfortable. Because not all the time when our body is experiencing pain is all of the body experiencing pain.

Sometimes we can just live in the areas and breathe in the areas where there's no pain. And sometimes it takes a little bit to find out how to do that. But the mind is so powerful that we can go towards where there's no pain.

Experience that for a moment. And that reprieve is so great.

Absolutely. And another resource that maybe you can speak to is support system, like friends or family.

Absolutely. I mean, often times it's the people around us who will care for us, you know, that are witnessing and watching, and they want to know how to help. And sometimes it can be a source of a lack of misunderstanding as well.”

“So I think finding the people that you feel comfortable, that actually listen, hold space, can just be in the darkness, be on the couch with you. And that's it. Just breathing together.

You know, it doesn't take too much to be with someone who's in pain or isn't feeling well. That connection goes deep, just as you would with someone who's mourning the loss of a loved one or a pet. There's nothing more to do but just be present.

And that presence is so impactful for someone who's experiencing pain.

Yeah, absolutely. And so as we kind of close out, I'm really curious, are there any takeaways that you have for our listeners?

For sure. So if there's anyone out there who is in a lot of physical, emotional, or psychological pain, there is hope. The best part about understanding one's own experience with pain is a law of impermanence.

It will change. It has to change. And there's a bravery in that first step towards seeking help.”

“And that is often the scariest step. So I think if you're curious enough to take that step, when you can see your pain and recognize, I need help, I need support, it's got to change, seeing that moment of change and taking that step, you're already doing that work. And that's the hardest step.

Yes, absolutely. Mya, thank you so much for coming on the podcast and sharing your wisdom. I really appreciate it.

Thank you, Charlene, for having this space for us.

Happy to have it, right? And so, everyone, you can find Mya at mindfulstepstherapy.ca.”

“Well, this has been another episode of The Acorn. Remember the content in these podcast episodes are for educational, informational, and entertainment purposes only.

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Also, if you need immediate help, contact your mental health provider or call 911. Take care.”

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