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[Letter: Tread warily before using avatars as grief counsellors](#)

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Anjana Ahuja is right to point to the ethical quandaries presented by the new wave of slightly macabre but no doubt well-meaning AI-assisted grieving tools ([Opinion](#), December 21). Building technology to “take the sting” out of death is an honourable mission. But it could do more harm than good. Neuroscience and evolutionary psychology show that the grieving process is important for the human species. It involves the activation of complex brain areas and neuroendocrine disruptions. The grieving process is a complicated, gradual and time-sensitive process. Reminders of lost loved ones activate the brain’s neural reward activity, which can hinder our ability to “move on”. Personalised AI chatbots lack mirror neurons, which are necessary for compassion and affective empathy. Stunted, passing interactions that feel real but lack substance could be dangerous as they interrupt the healthy progression through all grief cycles which are critical for avoiding prolonged grief. We must understand the ethical and neurobiological consequences of such technologies before we dive any deeper.

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