



# Vicarious Trauma and Burn-out: Supportive Strategies When Working with Clients in Crisis

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**CENTER FOR  
EXCELLENCE  
IN ADVOCACY**

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# Child Advocates: Who We Are



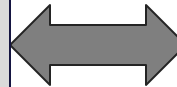
# Support Center for Child Advocates

## Legal Advocacy

- Free legal and social services to abused and neglected children
- Pro Bono Model - team Volunteer Attorneys with staff Social Workers to advocate for children in crisis in Philadelphia
- Protect children by advocating for social services, alternative homes and helping them testify in court.

## Training

- Center for Excellence in Advocacy
- Outcomes in Behavioral Health
- Training for all Child Advocate Volunteer Attorneys
- Develop and offer a variety of training programs for those serving children & families in the justice system.



To advocate for victims of child abuse and neglect with the goal of securing safety, justice, well-being, and a permanent, nurturing environment for every child.



# Disclaimer

- People may have differing levels of trauma-training.
- Discussing trauma can have personal implications. Discussing stress can be stressful.
  - Take care of yourself.



# Trauma & Self-Care Resources

- Sandra Bloom
- Bessel van der Kolk
- Bruce Perry
- Nadine Burke Harris
- Dr. Robert Anda and Dr. Vincent Feletti
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- Harvard University Center for Developing Child
- “Self-Care as an Ethical Imperative” by John Norcross and Jeffrey Barnett  
[http://www.nationalregister.org/trr\\_spring08\\_norcross.html](http://www.nationalregister.org/trr_spring08_norcross.html)
- “Trauma Stewardship” by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky
- “The Compassion Fatigue Workbook” by Francoise Mathieu
- “Victim Advocates Guide to Wellness” by Olga Phoenix



# Learning Goals

- Define trauma exposure response and related concepts of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burn-out and analyze how these conditions impact professional competency.
- Utilize information about trauma exposure response and related conditions to promote self-awareness by identifying triggers, symptoms, and signs of distress.
- View self-care as an integral part of professional ethics and practice supportive self-care strategies to help treatment professionals manage job stress and secondary traumatization.
- Describe how organizational dynamics and systemic factors influence professionals' trauma exposure levels and responses, and identify policies and practices that support helping professionals as they confront trauma in their work.



# Ethical Duty to Prioritize Self-Care

- View self-care as an ethical imperative
- “Use of Self” essential to your work
- Make time for self-preservation practices at home and at work

*“If your job relies on interpersonal communication, making judgment calls, reading other people’s faces, or managing your own emotional reactions —the bad news is that researchers have found that overwork (and its accompanying stress and exhaustion) can make all of these things more difficult.”*

Sarah Green Carmichael for the Harvard Business Review



# Roots of Your Work

What led you to this work?

What are the rewards of your  
work?



# Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion Satisfaction is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well and to being an effective caregiver in your job

(Stamm, 2009-22012 ProQOL Version 5 [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org))

# Recognize the Hazards of Trauma Work

Trauma is a psychologically distressing event, or series of events, that is outside the range of usual human experience, one that induces an abnormally intense and prolonged stress response

# Trauma Exposure Response

The transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet ...when external trauma becomes internal reality.

(van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk, 2009)



# Compassion Fatigue

The overall experience of emotional and physical fatigue that social service professionals experience due to chronic use of empathy when treating patients who are suffering in some way  
(Smullens, 2012).

# Vicarious Trauma

The process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed or responsible to help them. Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.  
(Headington Institute).

# Cumulative Stress

Accumulation of unresolved stress factors (Smullens, 2012).



# Burn-out

State of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress (Smullens, 2012).

Stressed Eric



Burnt out Eric



© hills www.myburnoutthing.com

# Trauma Exposure Response: Not “if” but “when”

**"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet." (Remen 1996).**







# How does it happen?

## Safety-at-risk

- Experiences when your safety is at risk
- Client safety not assured
- Feeling the world is not safe/fair

## Exposure

- Clients' traumatic stories
- Realities of societal injustice
- Systemic failures
- Negative outcomes

## Emotional Toll

- Working in "ocean of stress emotions"
- Overuse of empathetic skills
- One-way caring



# Symptoms of Trauma Exposure Response

- Fatigue
- Sleep Problems
- Cynicism
- Hopelessness
- Numbing
- Easily angered or irritated
- Easily Startled
- Hypervigilance
- Relationship/boundary issues
- Physical ailments
- Intrusive thoughts about client trauma histories
- Diminished joy in other areas of life
- Minimization

(American Counseling Association, 2011)

# Impact on Professional Competence

- Loss of motivation
- Feeling you are not doing enough
- Absences from pro-bono responsibilities
- Feeling trapped in job
- Lack of satisfaction in work
- Diminished confidence
- Blaming others
- Silencing clients

(American Counseling Association, 2011)

# Summary:

## Recognize the Occupational Hazards

- Self-awareness is key to self-care
- Conscious awareness of the triggers & effects of trauma exposure
- Recognize and anticipate “hazardous material”
- Create an early warning system



# Self-Care Basics

- Maintain Physical Health
- Be realistic about scheduling
- Maximize your breaks
- Use your vacation time



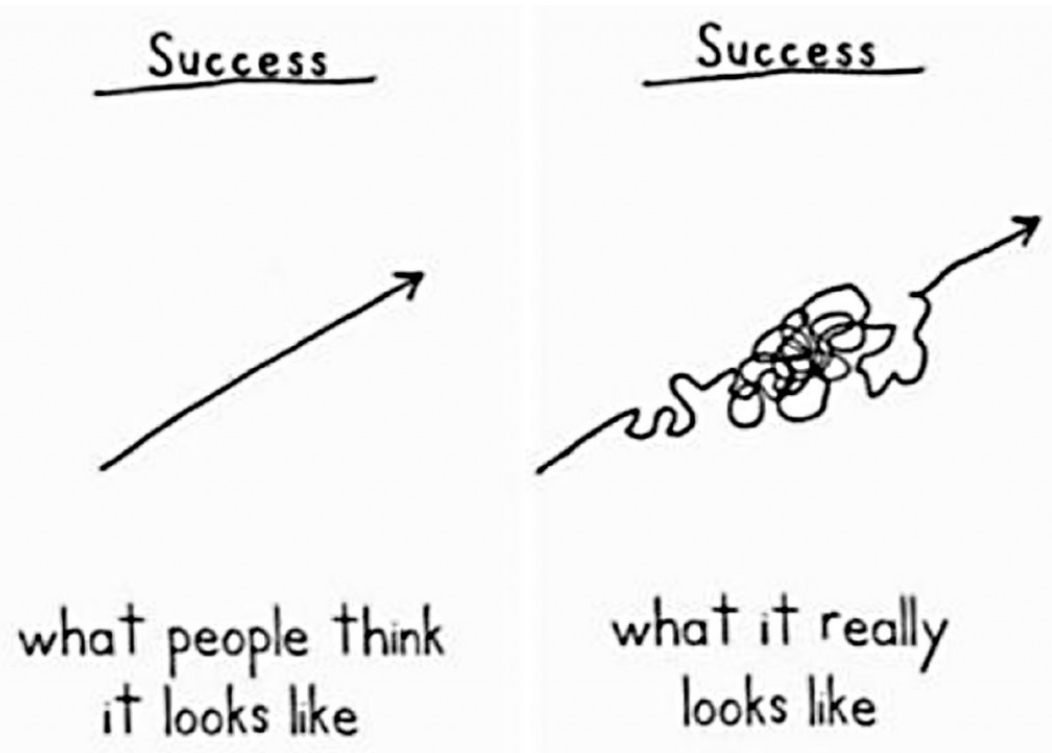
# Self-Care Strategies: Set Boundaries

- Boundaries with co-workers & clients
- Boundaries surrounding job role
- Boundaries to protect work-life balance



# Reframe & Realign

- Reframe expectations and negative thoughts
- Create habits and rituals that allow you to realign after challenging experiences





# Create Positive Habits

- It takes 3 weeks for a change in behavior to become a habit.
- Changes in habit change the way your brain functions.
- Replace negative coping mechanisms with sustainable positive habits.



# It's okay to set boundaries, say no, and ask for help...

“Many of us are willing to extend a helping hand, but we're very reluctant to reach out for help when we need it ourselves. It's as if we've divided the world into ‘those who offer help’ and ‘those who need help.’ **The truth is that we are both.**”

-Brene Brown, Ph.D, LCSW

# How Trauma Impacts Organizations and Systems



# Part of Self-Care is Team-Care

- Be aware of how trauma contagion impacts the organization
- Share and vent appropriately
- Express gratitude
- Formal/Informal team building
- Contribute to a positive work environment
- Model self-care

# “Self-Care as an Ethical Imperative”

“Our lives are works in progress. You can practice self-care wholeheartedly, bringing your self fresh to each moment, each client, and each day. You—and your clients—deserve no less.”

(Barnett and Norcross, 2008)

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