



Keeping Positive and Purposeful in a Tough Job

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Exposure to trauma changes us

- We are changed in ways we do not fully grasp, cannot easily measure, and that others may not fully understand.
- We may experience:
 - A changed view of the world, selfhood, and interactions with others
 - Feelings of isolation, disconnection
 - Anger, frustration, distrust, helplessness
 - Overprotectiveness
 - Inability to forget images

We need to learn how to develop and maintain a long-term strategy that enables us to remain whole and helpful.

The first and most important priority is to develop self-awareness.

Objectives - gain an understanding of:

- Secondary traumatization, empathy fatigue
 - related, but not the same
 - a function of the person
- Burnout
 - a function of the workplace
- Impact of secondary trauma/empathy fatigue/burnout
- Healthy vs. unhealthy vs. adaptive coping
- Improving resilience, restoring balance
- Helpful tools

Disclosure: this speaker has no conflict of interest to disclose relative to the contents of this presentation.

Our ability to function in our role is influenced by:

- Our personal history of trauma
- Other life stressors (moving, illness)
- Attitudes and systems of our workplace
- Attitudes of society
 - Society often doesn't want to see the dark side
- Coordination with other agencies
 - Degree of collaboration, communication and trust

Secondary Trauma Empathy Fatigue

Secondary traumatization

- Being traumatized by the trauma of others
 - Natural feelings that come from “humanness”
- Can develop secondary PTSD
- Our reaction is more extreme to those with whom we feel a closer connection/identify
- Sets into motion a “cycle of damage” to ourselves, our work and our relationships

Terminology

- Sympathy – recognizing distress
- Empathy – feeling distress as if it were your own
- Compassion – recognizing and feeling distress and wanting to do something about it
- “Compassion fatigue” in common usage, but by definition above, compassion is constantly self-renewing and sustaining, so the issue is viewed as “empathy fatigue”.

Empathy fatigue

Extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it is traumatizing for the helper.



Empathy fatigue

- Is an occupational hazard in certain professions/roles
- Absorbing others' trauma is cumulative
- Characterized by:
 - Poor self care
 - Extreme self sacrifice (always “on” phone, pager)
 - Not being able to separate from the work psychologically
- Empathetic people more vulnerable
 - May tap into previous personal trauma
- This becomes unsustainable → drop out

Sense of not doing enough

Feeling that there is so much important work to do, and that one can never do enough, leads to a sense of permanent dissatisfaction with work and life.

“It’s not a feeling, it’s true. If I don’t do it, it’s not going to get done, and if it doesn’t get done, people die. I can never do enough.”

- Attorney working with children

“Many of us might believe, secretly or not so secretly, that our commitment to our work may be measured by our willingness to martyr ourselves.”

- Laura van Dernoot Lipsky
Trauma Counselor

Grandiosity

- “Rescuer Messiah complex”
- Work becomes identity, sense of self esteem
- Feeling of being needed and useful
- Work becomes an excuse to ignore problems with self and relationships
- Keeps people doing the work longer than they ought to

Guilt

- Need to reconcile personal well-being with suffering in the world
- Guilt can block personal emotional growth
 - Feeling happy/vacation may feel like a betrayal
 - Who am I to complain about my life?
- Can cause interpersonal problems by minimizing
 - “Really, honey, a hard day? Let me tell you about people who have a hard day...”
- Manage by putting into perspective

Burnout

Burnout

“Burnout is the result of a chronic mismatch between expectations and results, made worse by trying to cure that mismatch by working harder and harder...in situations where success is impossible and frustration never ends.”



Aspects of burnout

- Burnout is a function of the workplace
- The perception of lack of control is the single strongest predictor of burnout
- Burnout can be acute or chronic, mild to severe
- Personality can influence burnout
- Burnout creeps up and is often unexpected
- Burnout is reversible with workplace change

Common work conditions and burnout

- Unclear or unrealistic or unpredictable expectations
- Constant need to upgrade skills/knowledge
- High stress times with little down time
- Significant consequences for mistakes
- Lack of personal control
- Lack of resources to be successful in job
- Lack of appreciation/recognition
- Lack of psychological safety at work
- Poor communication
- Poor leadership or support

Abuse-specific work conditions and burnout

- Exponential increase in porn – whack-a-mole
- Increasing encryption and expertise of pedophiles
- Increasingly extreme forms of abuse
- Tech industry has enormous potential for good and bad – values misalignment
- Moral distress – having to prioritize due to volume
- Thinking about ongoing emotional difficulties of children and parents
- Turnover of colleagues
- Feeling judged by outsiders – acquaintances, press

Individual burnout characterized by:

- Emotional exhaustion
 - ↓ energy, concentration; moody, irritable
 - Illness, substance abuse
 - Withdrawal from personal relationships – “nothing to give”
- Decreased sense of personal accomplishment
 - ↓ commitment, enthusiasm, belief one’s work is meaningful
- Depersonalization
 - Cynicism, pessimism, callousness
 - Distancing from victims, treating them as inanimate objects

Organizational burnout characterized by:

Negative impact on three levels sequentially:

- Individual employees
 - Health, efficiency, competency
- Employee relationships
 - Communication – backbiting, turfdom, blaming, friction
 - Performance – lack of flexibility and cooperation
- Client/public interaction
 - Professionalism – minimal, impersonal and inconsistent response; apathy; “that’s not my department”

Burnout vs. Stress

Stressed out = “drowning”	Burnout = “dried up”
Over involved	Disengagement
Anxious	Depressed
Hyperemotional	Numb
Can still care about clients	Stopped caring about clients

Burnout vs. Depression

- Burnout has depressive symptoms, and late stage burnout may look like major depression
- Major differentiators
 - Initially burnout is workplace related, whereas depression is pervasive
 - Workplace becomes a dream job in every way
 - Burned-out – “Whoa! How wonderful!”
 - Depressed – “Who cares?”

Consequences

Emotional Impact

- Intense unpredictable feelings
- Irritability, mood swings
- Intrusive images/memories, rumination
- Grief, sadness, depression
- Anxiety, panic attacks, fear
 - Increased sense of personal vulnerability
 - Hypervigilance
 - Sleeping problems, nightmares
- Worsening illness, physical symptoms
- Relationship problems - divorce

Professional consequences of secondary trauma/empathy fatigue, burnout

Negative impact on:

- Competency - poorer quality of work, impaired judgment
- Productivity – absenteeism, procrastination
- Relationships – conflicts with colleagues
- Professionalism – disengagement, hostility, less project coordination
- Higher turnover
- Poorer end result

Need to learn to anticipate, acknowledge
and respond to effects of trauma.

Coping

Coping

- Most important is to recognize and self-monitor feelings – how much distress, and where is it coming from?
- Understanding short and long term effects of trauma leads to less impact
- Remember others are also involved – whole team may be affected – be supportive
- Don't be surprised by persistent thoughts or images – learn coping skills to deal with them

Maladaptive coping

- Denial – most are unaware of how work affects them
- Distraction with increased workload – always in crisis mode leads to false sense of being effective
- Intellectualization *
- Finger pointing, blaming
- Decreased self care
 - Emotional eating or worsened eating disorders
 - Self numbing with alcohol, drugs, sex, shopping, gambling
- Emotional withdrawal
- Anger, taking it out on family, team

Adaptive Coping

- Is stress item changeable?
 - Problem focused strategies
- Is stress item unchangeable?
 - Emotion focused strategies
 - Meaning focused strategies



Problem focused strategies

Workplace:

- Resources available to help manage stress
- Opportunities to debrief
- Formal mechanisms to voice concerns
- Time for self-care
- Control over schedule – permission to say need to stop, diversify workload
- Leadership showing appreciation

Emotion-focused strategies

- Individual or group self-reflection on work impact (provides validation, decreases isolation)
- Personal support from peer, significant other, counselor, religious advisor
- Self-care – sleep, exercise, good nutrition
- Personal stress reduction methods ie calm breathing, creative self-expression
- Ritual for leaving work at work

Meaning-focused strategies

- I am uniquely suited to be able to be of help with this work
- Personal cost of viewing outweighed by the greater good
- Sense of doing important and effective work
 - Being able to recognize success in a different way
- Work to increase trust and respect between professional sectors
- Pursue increasing compassion, self-compassion
- Participate in social change and community outreach

When to seek help

- Anxiety or distress interferes with daily work and relationships
- Remain preoccupied with events
- Abuse substances
- Colleagues, friends or family observe and comment on changes in behavior
- Significantly diminished work satisfaction
- New or exacerbation of old physical symptoms



Resilience

Resilience



The ability to:

- recover from setbacks
- rise above difficult circumstances
- learn from mistakes
- adapt to challenges, change, uncertainty or chaos

“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that don’t work.”
--Thomas Alva Edison

Resilience parameters

- Resilient people do experience distress
- Resilience is a function of the type of stressor and the vulnerability/resources of the person
- Multiple cumulative stressors can have a significant impact as well as a single large stressor

Resilience is a combination of thoughts, behaviors, and actions, which can be learned.

Qualities of resilience (APA)

- Healthy coping and problem solving skills
 - Persistence, adaptability, flexibility, able to compromise
- Self-knowledge
 - Learning and accepting who you are, self respect
 - Identity doesn't depend on externals
- Motivation/personal meaning
 - Sense of values and purpose, that life is worth living
- Optimism
 - Sense of hope, sense of enjoyment of life
- Strong relationships
 - Support from family and friends, good social skills
 - Able to ask for help

Improving happiness

- Trait happiness is 50% genetic, 10% external circumstances, 40% within our control
- Positive and persistent results for:
 - Every evening, write down 3 good things that happened that day
 - Receive hugs (reduced cortisol and blood pressure)
 - Start off the day by writing 3 things you are grateful for
 - List 5 personal strengths, and apply them in a new way every day for a week (↑ happiness continued 6 months later)
 - Perform random acts of kindness; be nice to people
 - Practice forgiveness/ let go of resentments





Money improves happiness
when it lifts a person out of poverty,
but no benefit above that

Learned Optimism

- Sense of hope – ability to believe there is a solution in adversity, that problems are surmountable
- Sense of confidence, cheerfulness, positive outlook
- Can be learned
 - List and appreciate the things you are grateful for
 - Notice the goodness in people
 - Thank people
 - Volunteer/do something nice for someone else
 - Let go of things you cannot change
 - Be curious



Other helpful factors to consider

- Be realistic about the job and what you yourself can accomplish
- Realize that it is natural to have a stronger reaction to and memory of negative events
- Realize this is the same for everyone
- Utilize your team – share the burden
- Seek out mentors
- Create variety in the day – schedule mini-breaks, vary jobs/clients, talk w/family
- How inviting is your physical environment?
- Adopt a long perspective

Make Lemonade

- Emotional insight, traumatic growth
 - Recall why went into this
 - Reaffirm a sense of meaning and purpose
 - Wiser and more aware
 - Appreciation for family and friends
 - Count blessings, gratitude journal
 - Clarify life priorities
- Seek better self care
- Improve processes
 - Get to interact with a variety of individuals
 - Learning patience and communication skills
 - Remember your strengths and accomplishments
- Strive to be “better” rather than “bitter”



“I focus on what I was able to do that day.
What went well, what changed.
And the rest I leave behind.”

- Advocate at domestic violence shelter

Useful Tools

Self testing

- PROQOL– Professional Quality of Life Scale
 - Measures Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue
 - http://www.proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL_5_English_Self-Score_3-2012.pdf
- Self-compassion
 - <https://self-compassion.org/test-how-self-compassionate-you-are/>

Relaxation and coping tools (see handout)



Humor

Why is sense of humor so important?

Sense of humor correlates with degree of compassion.

**The day you can't laugh anymore,
is the day you shouldn't be doing this work.**



Possible benefits of laughter

- Stimulates “reward” area of brain
- Decreases pain perception
- Improves immune functioning
- Lowers cortisol levels
- Decreases blood pressure
- Decreases muscle tension
- Decreases blood glucose spike in diabetics
- Increases coronary blood flow



Find ways to increase humor in your life

Summary

... the bottom line

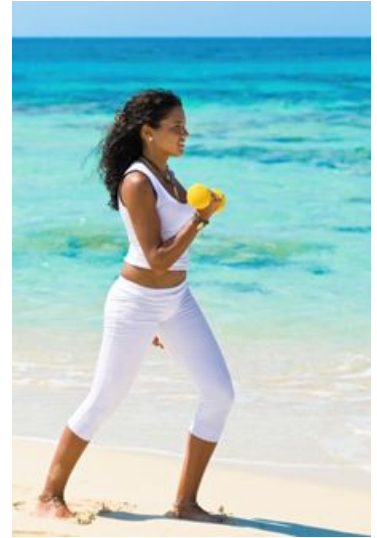
We CAN make a difference without suffering

Watch out for:

- “Becoming a toxic sponge filled with other people’s suffering”
- Keeping feelings hidden from family
- Anger at unrealistic expectations from public, government
- Confidentiality is isolating
- Rarely see people at their best – may color perceptions of society and humanity
- Feeling “selfish” if take time to self nurture
- Family resents your time and energy for others
- Feeling like you alone have to meet everyone’s needs

Counteracting secondary trauma/ empathy fatigue/burnout

- Take some time off
 - Postpone critical decisions
- Take care of yourself !!!
- Keep your hours reasonable
 - Learn to say no
 - What are your priorities?
 - Recognize that your occupation is not your life
- Focus on the parts of your job that you love the most
 - Find something interesting about each day



counteracting burnout cont.

- Be generous in forgiveness – for self and others
- Create a positive support system at work and at home
 - Look for positive people to associate with
 - Be able to ask for help
 - Remember you are not alone
- Remind yourself of your goals
 - Review goals once a year
- Keep learning



Coping awareness

- How do I know when I am coping?
(qualities of resilience)
- How do I know when I am beginning to not cope?
(warning signs)
- How do I know when I am not coping?
(red flags)
- How do I refocus and return to being able to cope?
(coping mechanisms)

Chinese proverb

- If you want happiness for an hour – take a nap;
- If you want happiness for a day – go fishing;
- If you want happiness for a month – get married;
- If you want happiness for a year – inherit a fortune; but
- If you want happiness for a lifetime – help someone else.

Take the time to look around you....



“With each breath we take,
our lives begin anew.”

-- Jon Kabat-Zinn



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Thank You