Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress

Extending the Shelf-Life of those who work with Trauma
Secondary Traumatic Stress

What is it?

What does it look like?

What can we do about it?
Secondary Traumatic Stress

WHAT IS IT?

• AKA: vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue

• It is the resulting effects of chronic exposure to traumatic material

• Symptoms are the same as those experienced by direct exposure

• First noticed in ER nurses who had “lost their ability to nurture” (Boyle, 2011)
It’s just like regular trauma

Hyper vigilance

Abnormal responses to normal situations (triggers)

Withdrawal

Avoidance
Trauma

A person has experienced trauma if:

Must feel fear, helplessness or horror (APA, 2000)

Our response to trauma is innate—our body is built to respond to trauma

“A normal reaction to an abnormal event” that can result in...
An abnormal reaction to a normal situation
Abnormal Responses to Normal Situations

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sOXM80ohM
“Most of us are abnormal in one way or another. The thing that separates us is not the presence or absence of abnormality but rather the depth at which our abnormalities control our lives”

Dr. Greg Moffatt, Survivors, p.50
So about trauma: It’s a biology/chemistry thing
Trauma

It is subjective

And it messes with our thinking
Fight-Flight-Freeze
How do we respond?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdOOIxcUjAs
“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk on water without getting wet. This sort of denial is no small matter”

Rachael Naomi Remen, M.D.
Recognizing STS

MANIFESTATIONS

Emotional
Intellectual
Physical
Social
Spiritual
Work
Recognizing STS

**Emotional:**

- Anger
- Apathy
- Cynicism
- Desensitization
- Discouragement
- Irritability
- Lessened Enthusiasm
- Hopeless
- Sarcastic
Recognizing STS

Intellectual/Cognitive

Difficulty concentrating

Weakened attention to detail

Disorderliness
Recognizing STS

Physical:
- Increased somatic complaints
  - GI, headache, insomnia
- Lack of energy/endurance
- More prone to accidents
- Weariness, fatigue, exhaustion
Recognizing STS

- **Social:**
  - Callousness
  - Feelings of alienation, estrangement, isolation
  - Indifference
  - Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
  - Unresponsiveness
  - Withdrawal from family &/or friends
32 men
1 time paced memory test (active coping)
1 “gruesome” surgical video (passive coping)
1 control TV show

OSU Researchers measured their saliva for levels of S-IgA... immunoglobulin that regulates immune and inflammatory responses and protecting mucosal surfaces against invasion by parasites
What they found

1. Taking the test increased the output of S-IgA
2. Within 10 minutes of watching the video output of S-IgA decreased.

“We conclude that acute stress can have both enhancing and suppressive effects on secretory immunity, the IgA1 subclass in particular”
(Bosch, J. et al; 2001)

Type of stress matters.
Recognizing STS

- **Spiritual:**
  - Decrease in discernment
  - Disinterest in introspection
  - Spiritual awareness
  - Poor judgment
HECK WITH THIS

I'm going home
Recognizing STS

- **Work**
  - Absenteeism/Tardiness
  - Avoidance of intense client/victim/patient situations
  - Desire to quit
  - Diminished performance
  - Stereotypical/impersonal communication
• Negative bias, pessimism

• Loss of perspective and critical thinking skills

• Threat focus – see clients, peers, supervisor as enemy

(Tullberg, 2012)
“My glass is not only half-empty, I'm convinced someone spit in it.”

— Judy Nichols, Sportsman's Bet
System-Level Impact

Distrust among collaborators/co-workers (Hyperarousal) +

Decreased motivation/increased absenteeism (Withdrawal) +

Compromised ability to manage clients’ trauma reactions (Avoidance) +

Loss of perspective and critical thinking (Hyperarousal) =
System Level Impact

Professionals that don’t show up 100% & Poor outcomes
So now what??
Resilience

1: the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress

2: an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change

(Merriam-Webster, retrieved 2012)
Resilience

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have.

It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. (APA, retrieved 2012)
Individual Level

- Compassion Satisfaction
- Social Support
- Positive emotions
- Intentional Optimism
Managing STS

Compassion satisfaction

A sense of reward, efficacy and competence in the role of helping others

Killian (2008)
ProQOL

http://proqol.org
Social Support

Check in with colleagues
- they understand your language/humor
- confidentiality

Have “normal” friends
- reciprocate

Formulate an “A-Team”
Positive Emotions

They are developed in times of safety and rest.

Positive emotions have the ability to undo the negative effects of traumatic stress:
- Decrease heart rate, vasoconstriction, blood pressure
- Increases cognitive ability
Positive emotions

JOY
Positive Emotions

GRATITUDE
TURNS WHAT WE HAVE INTO ENOUGH

Thank You

There is always, always, always something to be thankful for
Positive Emotions

SERENITY
Positive Emotions

INTEREST
Positive Emotions

AMUSEMENT
Positive Emotions

INSPRIATION
Positive Emotions

AWE
Positive Emotions

PRIDE
Positive Emotions

HOPE
Positive Emotions

LOVE
Intentional Optimism

To interpret situations in the best possible light

Anticipate the best possible outcomes

On purpose
Perspective is everything

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms- to choose one’s own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

Viktor Frankl, 1945
Intentional Optimism

when i get sad,
I stop being sad and be
AWESOME instead.

TRUE STORY.
Train Your Brain

Practice intentional optimism

Anticipate the best possible outcomes...

On purpose.
Louis CK on perspective:

http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=aba_1332656862
“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms— to choose one’s own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

Viktor Frankl, 1945
And one more thing...

Mindfulness is good for your brain.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-IZArfQHOo
Supervisor Level
Organizational Level

Change in work culture

Top level “buy in”

Difficult case processing/ formal & informal

Trauma Informed Care
Organizational Level

• Why should they care?
• What can they do?
How does your organization support you with your stress?
Stress Reduction Kit

Bang Head Here

Directions:
1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
4. If unconscious, cease stress reduction activity.
Impact on Organizations

• Prevent worker turnover
• Costs of hiring and training new employees
• Long-term effects on the mental and physical health of people
Impact on Organizations

• Addressing the occupational hazard of STS is in the best interest of all involved:
  – Vulnerable children
  – The organizations responsible for their care and protection
  – The workers doing the work
  – Society
Organizational Risk Factors

- Extraordinary high caseloads
- High administrative burden
- Difficult clients
- Conflicts with co-workers or supervisors
- Climate of pervasive, ongoing change
- Excessive emphasis on efficiency, cost-effectiveness and competition
- Unforgiving environment. “If you can’t handle it, move aside….you’ll be replaced”
Organizational Strategies for managing STS

• Work-related stress is accepted as real and legitimate
• Problem is owned by organization (not merely “problem” workers)
• Secondary trauma responses are recognized as normal responses
• Focus is on solutions (not blaming)
• Support and tolerance clearly expressed to worker
• Other “climate” issues (caseloads, official policy, EAP)

» Source: Sexton, 1999
Other Organizational Responses

- In-service training
- Policy on secondary trauma
- Ongoing program to manage secondary trauma
- Regular supervision, consultation and support groups
- Professional development opportunities
- Rotation in caseload and job responsibility
- Health care plan with adequate health care coverage

» Source: Nelson-Gardnell & Harris, 2003
Other Organizational Responses

- Enhance the physical safety of staff
- Workplace self-care groups
- Flextime scheduling
- Creating external partnerships with STS intervention providers
- Train organizational leaders and non-clinical staff on STS
- Provide ongoing assessment of staff risk and resiliency

» Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network
• https://www.dmegov.org/Departments/POLice/Pages/DMPDPeerSupport.aspx
• http://safecallnow.org/
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9ZvAjk9_INQ
Self-care is not selfish or self-indulgent. We cannot nurture others from a dry well. We need to take care of our own needs first, then we can give from our surplus, our abundance.

Jennifer Louden
“It's not selfish to love yourself, take care of yourself, and to make your happiness a priority. It's necessary.”

-Mandy Hale
Final thoughts

Questions?
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