

Reducing the Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout in Professionals working in the Family Court System

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“Vicarious Traumatization, Compassion Fatigue, or Secondary Traumatic Stress refers to the cumulative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events or perpetrators as part of everyday work.

Joy Osofsky, Ph.D.
Frank Putnam, M.D.
Judge Cindy Lederman

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Rookies, Mentors, and Elders...

- Who am I?
- Who are you?
- How long have you been doing this kind of work?
- Why are we here together today?



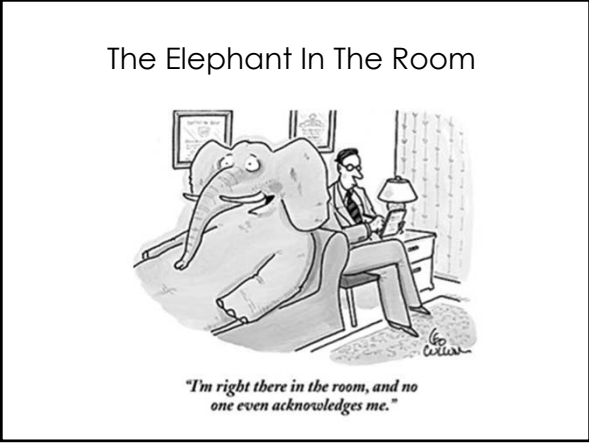
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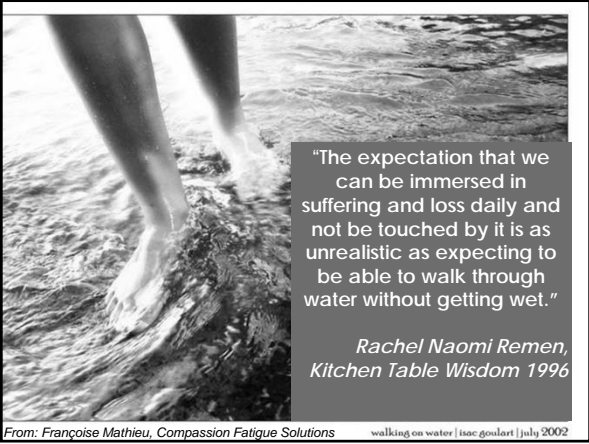
Within the Judiciary and Legal profession, the issue of Vicarious Trauma or Compassion Fatigue is rarely discussed

Prevention or Intervention Strategies related to "Negative Psychological Reactions" are not considered to be a part of the culture

If we look at this through a professional culture lens, there can be a perception that acknowledgement of these issues is a sign of weakness

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Factors That Increase Risk

- Measuring self-work by how much you help others
- Unrealistic expectations of yourself and the system
- Self-criticism, Perfectionism
- Fear of being seen or criticized by others if you show weakness by seeking help for burnout, compassion or decision fatigue
- Reduced ability to give or receive emotional support
- Overextending yourself, Overachieving
- Letting work bleed over into your personal life

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Secondary Traumatic Stress

STS results from exposure to trauma experienced by others, often in the workplace with no real threat of personal harm. Secondary trauma symptoms are often indistinguishable from those of direct exposure.

- Nightmares, triggers
- Avoiding reminders
- numbing, withdrawal
- Hyper-vigilance
- Trouble concentrating
- Quick to anger



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Burnout / Compassion Fatigue

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical **Exhaustion**... Often with feelings of **Hopelessness** and difficulty in dealing with decision making or doing your job effectively.

- Feels like my efforts don't make a difference
- This job is changing me into a different person
- I have a reduced feeling of personal accomplishments
- Often related to high workload or a non-supportive work environment



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Moral Distress

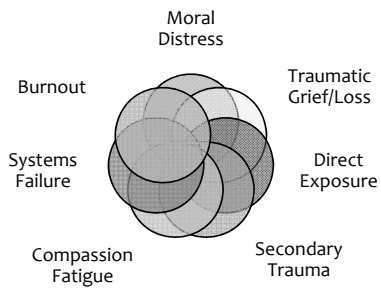
“[...] happens when there are inconsistencies between a [professionals] beliefs and his or her actions in practice” (Baylis 2000)

“when policies or routines conflict with [...] beliefs about [...] professional practice” (Mitchell 2000)



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Multiple Exposure: Increased Risk



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Participant Activity The Dance of Balance



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Psychological signs and symptoms



- Distancing
- Negative self-image
- Depression/Anxiety
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism & resentment
- Dread of working with certain cases
- Feeling professional helplessness
- Depersonalization
- Anger, Mood swings

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Physical Symptoms of Chronic Stress

- problems sleeping
- lower immune function
- headaches
- abdominal pain/GERD/IBS
- back pain
- eye twitch
- bruxing (teeth grinding)
- rashes
- poor concentration, forgetfulness
- hypertension
- cardiovascular disease



Knowing... Engaging... Vulnerability...

- Secondary Traumatic Stress

"The natural and consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatized event from another person, the stress from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or stressed person."
(Charles Figley, 1995)

- Vicarious Traumatization:

"...refers to the cumulative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events. Anyone who engages empathically with victims or survivors is vulnerable."

(Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)

Cumulative Impact

Think about how your work over time may impact your beliefs

Beliefs About the World/ Social Contract	Spiritual Beliefs	Sense of Self, Groundedness, Emotional Stability
Sense of Personal and Family Safety	Trust of Yourself and/or Others	Judgment/ Decision-Making
Sense of Control	Ability to be Alone, or with Others	Cultural or Implicit Bias

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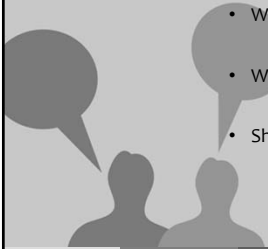
Implicit Bias...



“That’s the racist bone in your body you claimed you didn’t have.”
The New Yorker

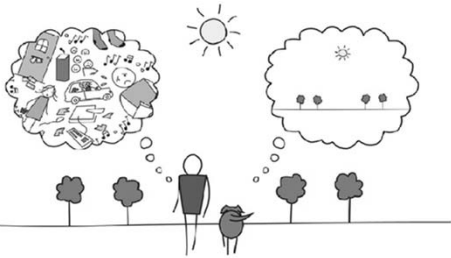
Breakout

- What are your risk factors?
- What are your strategies?
- Share a practice that works for you...



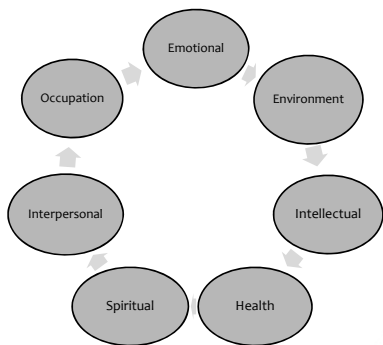
**Addressing CF, STS,
and Burnout:
Key Strategies**



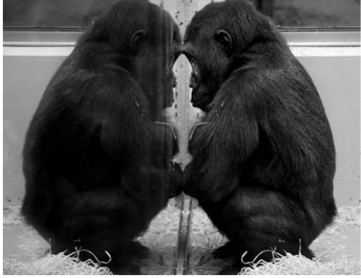


Mind Full, or Mindful?

Wellness Wheel: Work/Life Balance?



Self Awareness



Using Mindfulness to Support Well-Being

Practices and Rituals:

- Relaxation breathing
- Grounding skills (using the five senses)
- Walking meditation or mindful movement
- Mindfulness Apps: Stop, Breathe, & Think; Virtual Hopebox, Insight Timer, Happify, Headspace...
- Orienting thoughts (Who I AM. *These are my values.*)

HEADSPACE




"The key to mindfulness is to stay in the present. Don't get caught up in the hopes of what you'll achieve or how good your situation will be someday in the future. What you do right now is what matters." – Pema Chödrön



Grounding

Movement

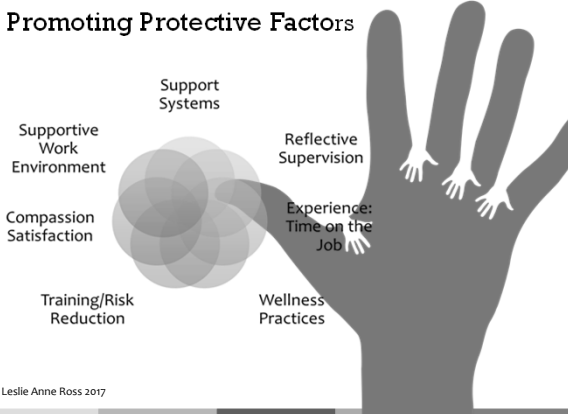
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Promoting Protective Factors



Supportive Work Environment

Compassion Satisfaction

Training/Risk Reduction

Support Systems

Reflective Supervision


Experience: Time on the Job

Wellness Practices

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Organizational Recommendations to Reduce Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout


- Reduce Caseloads
- Adequate opportunities to process and debrief cases
- Explicitly acknowledge job stress, compassion fatigue and burnout
- Provide resources to reduce the impact i.e. mental health services, peer support, etc.
- Provide training and organizational support of wellness practices
- Open communication with organizational leaders about the importance of reducing the risk



**Building Resilience
Reducing Risk**

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What's Next?
What strategies are you taking away today that will help you know...



1. What to do in the moment?
2. What to do in the workplace?
3. What daily practice you can **commit** to in order to increase wellness and reduce stress?

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Thank You!

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