

# Secondary Traumatization and Self-Care

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# Disclaimer

The views expressed in this presentation are solely those of the presenters and do not represent those of the Veterans Administration or the United States government.

**The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.**



# The Problems

# Problem #1

## STRESS

- You trained as a helper
- You are working with sexual offenders
- You work in a stressful job
- You may put pressure on yourself not to “fail”



## Problem #2

- You work with people who can be dangerous
  - Many have histories of trauma
  - All have histories of sexual violence
- You are likely to be exposed to their stories
  - Sometimes in deliberate and provocative ways





# Self-Assessment

# Skill Break

**Half-Smile**



# Results of Exposure

# Exposure to Trauma and Sexual Violence Can Be Traumatizing

- Primary traumatization vs. secondary traumatization
- Brownout vs. burnout
- Turnover



# What Do We Mean by “Trauma”? (i.e., primary traumatization)

Trauma results from an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual’s functioning and mental, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

SAMHSA, 2014

Does hearing the stories of sexual offenders make you a victim?

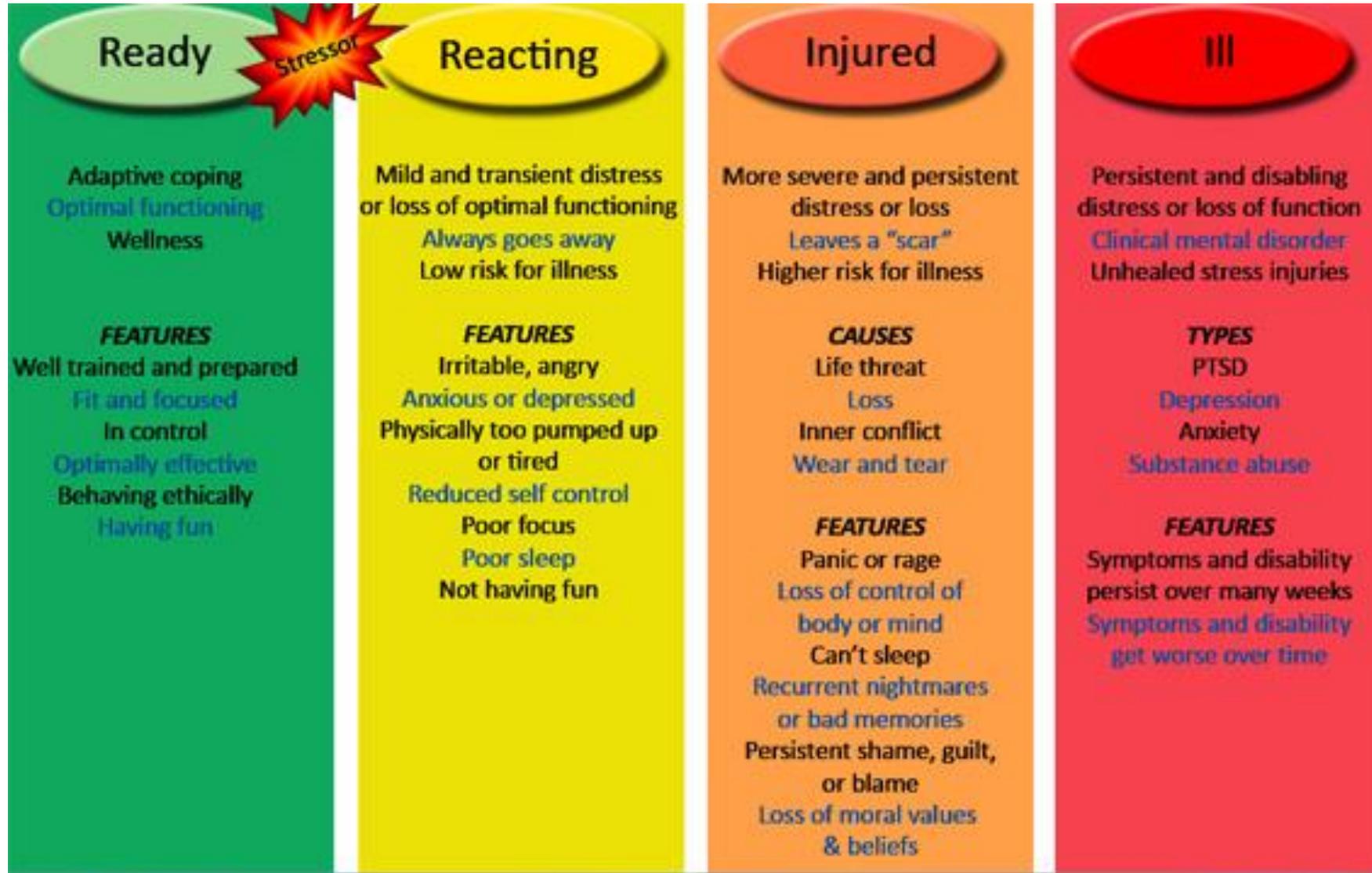
# The Trauma Exposure Response

A trauma exposure response may be defined as the transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet.

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, 2010



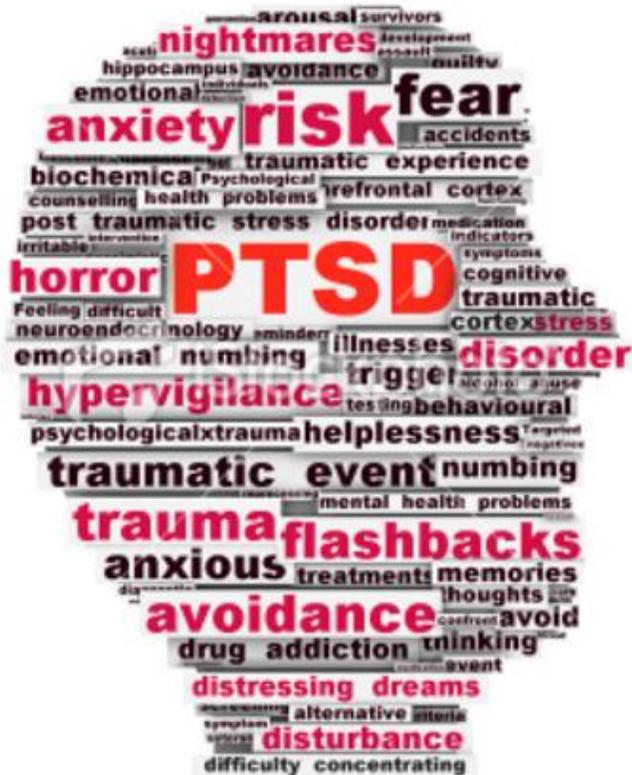
# Post-Traumatic Responses Occur on a Continuum



# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in DSM 5

PTSD is characterized by:

- Exposure to a severe life-threatening event
- Repetitive re-experiencing of the event
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma
- Negative moods and cognitions
- Increased arousal



# Other Versions of Post-Traumatic Responses

## Adjustment Disorder

- With or without anxious and/or depressed mood

## Acute Stress Disorder

- Looks like PTSD, but lasts less than 30 days

## Other Trauma or Stressor-Related Disorder

- Used to be called sub-clinical PTSD
- Has many of the features of PTSD, but not all

## Complex PTSD

- Multiple traumas experienced over time, usually starting in childhood

# What Happens When You Are Exposed to Multiple Traumas?

- We all have a certain amount of resilience
- It can be increased or it can be worn down
- With too much trauma exposure, our cup fills up
- We can only handle so much



# How Does Repeated Traumatic Exposure Affect Listeners?

It hurts.

It can consume your thoughts.

It creates images you can't forget.

It wears away at your resilience.

It can make you pull away from friends and family.

It can make you question their faith.

It may result in secondary traumatization.

# Skill Break

## Drop Three

# Drop Three

- Scan your body for tension
- Drop Three
  - Drop your tongue
  - Drop your shoulders
  - Drop your tongue
- What happens?
- It's invisible



# Secondary Traumatic Stress

# What Is Secondary Traumatic Stress?

Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

NCTSN, 2017

**Secondary Traumatization is a normal response to an abnormal level of exposure to traumatic events.**

# Risk Factors for STS



- Personal history of trauma or something related to the case
- Overidentification with court participants
- Empathic style
- Insufficient recovery time between trauma exposures
- Reactive to children's vulnerability
- Isolation at work
- Lack of systemic resources

## Professional Quality of Life

Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion Fatigue

Burnout

Secondary Trauma

## Assess for STS

- Conduct periodic self-assessments
- Use evidence-based assessment instruments:
  - Professional Quality of Life Scale
  - Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale



## Assess for STS

- Helpers tend to underestimate their secondary traumatic stress
- The best evaluators tend to be their spouses/partners (Jaffe et al., 2003)
  - Also close family members and close friends
  - Ask them if you've changed/if you show signs of STS

# Symptoms of STS

## Re-experiencing

- Intrusive images
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Being triggered by reminders

## Avoidance

- Trying not to talk about it
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Being late
- Missing work
- Not going out in public
- Increased alcohol and drug use

# Symptoms of STS

## Negative Thoughts and Moods

- Numbness
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Helplessness
- Cessation of previously enjoyed activities

## Arousal

- Irritability
- Anger
- Hypervigilance
- Startle responses
- Insomnia

# Other Common Symptoms of STS



- Worsening eating habits (overeating, junk food)
- Ruminative thinking
- Thoughts of retribution
- Fears for own safety and that of loved ones
- Preoccupation with work/working longer hours
- Engaging in excessive screen time (phones, tablets, computers, televisions)
- Feeling cut off from or distrustful of others

# Important Note

It is not unusual to experience one or more of these symptoms from time to time. Normally, these periods do not last more than two weeks.

*It's only*  
**TEMPORARY**

# Skill Break

## The Firehose Technique

- Picture your distressing image
- Pick up the firehose and point it at the image
- Pull back the trigger
- Spray
- What happens?



# Preventing Traumatization: Developing Resilience



# What is Resilience?

- “Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress...”
  - Ordinary not extraordinary
  - It does not mean the absence of distress or emotional symptoms
  - Not a “trait” - involves thoughts, behaviors, and actions

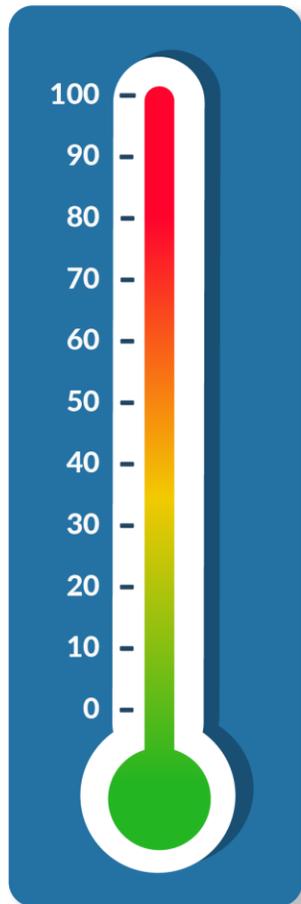


# Factors Involved in Resilience

1. Supportive relationships inside and outside of one's family
2. The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out
3. A positive view of yourself and the confidence in your strengths and abilities
4. Skills in communication and problem solving
5. The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses (i.e., distress tolerance)
6. Engaging in self-care

...In other words, these are **all things someone can cultivate** within themselves....

# Self-Assessment: Subjective Units of Distress



- 100 Highest anxiety/distress that you have ever felt.
- 90 Extremely anxious/distressed.
- 80 Very anxious/distressed; can't concentrate. Physiological signs present.
- 70 Quite anxious/distressed; interfering with functioning. Physiological signs may be present.
- 60 Moderate-to-strong anxiety or distress.
- 50 Moderate anxiety/distress; uncomfortable, but can continue to function.
- 40 Mild-to-moderate anxiety or distress. **\*\*\*Intervene here**
- 30 Mild anxiety/distress; no interference with functioning.
- 20 Minimal anxiety/distress.
- 10 Alert and awake; concentrating well.
- 0 No distress; totally relaxed.

High Distress

Moderate Distress

Low Distress

# Address Systemic Safety Concerns

**SAFETY**



**PLAN**

- Trauma-related symptoms may be the result of feeling unsafe with offenders
- Address practical concerns with practical solutions wherever possible
- Review best practices for safety
- If your facility court does not have a safety plan, create one



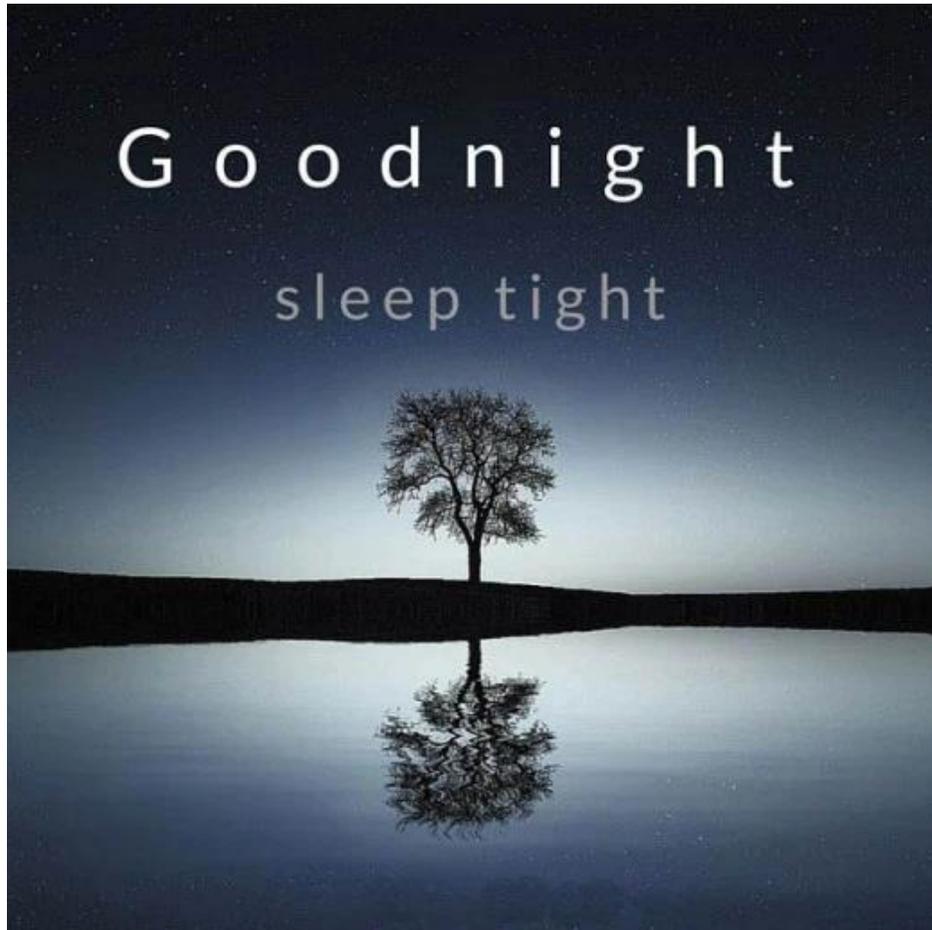
# Preventing Secondary Traumatization

## 3. Take breaks and vacations

- At work:
  - The smokers do!
  - **No screens!!!!**
- Take at least one weeklong vacation annually
  - And a two week vacation every other year



# Preventing Secondary Traumatization



5. Get 6.5-7.5 hours of sleep/night
  - You can catch up for up to two hours/night on weekends
  - Treat sleep problems
    - Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia
  - Treat obstructive sleep apnea

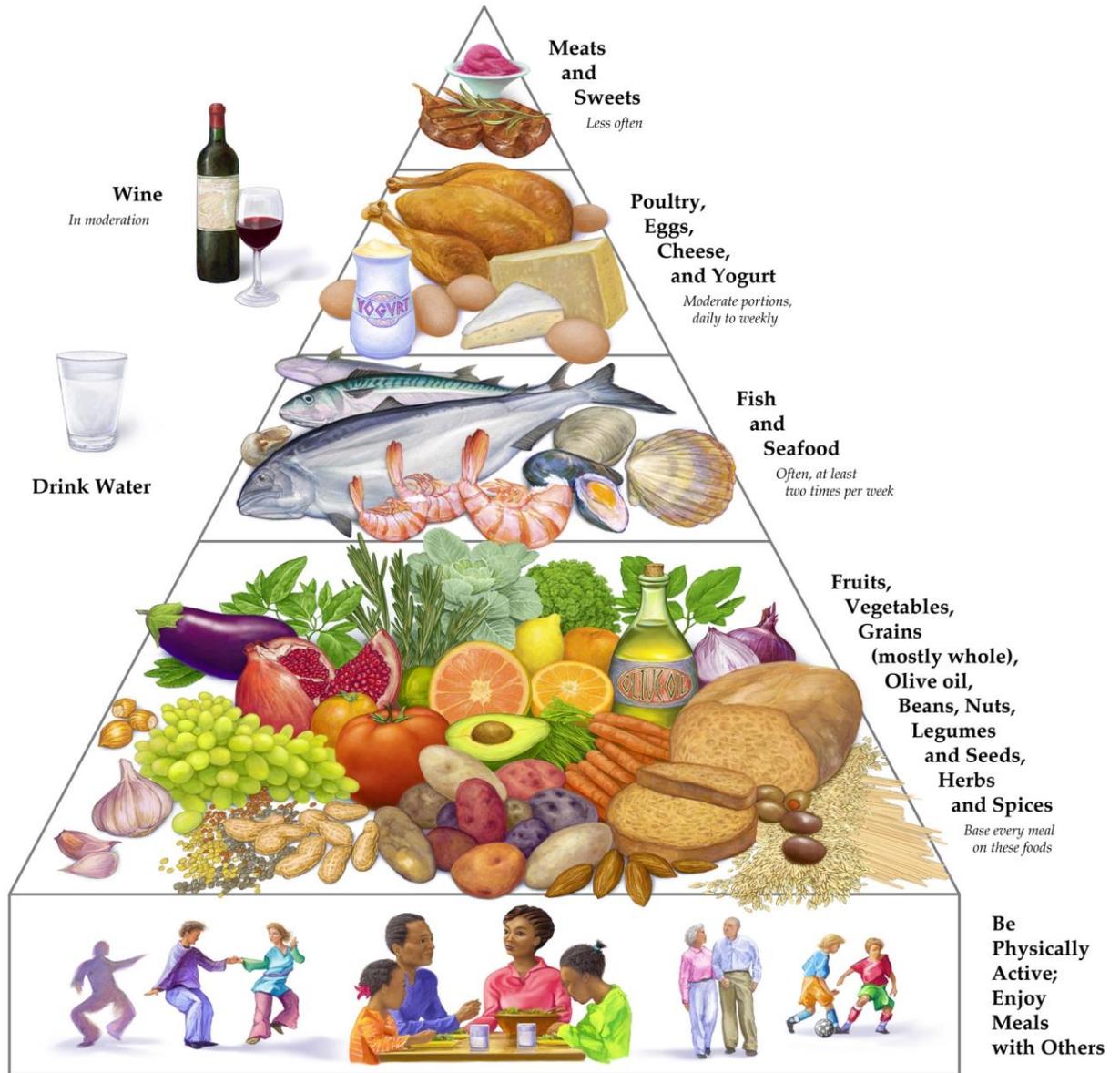
# Preventing Secondary Traumatization

## 6. Eat healthy foods in healthy amounts

- Eat a Mediterranean Diet
- Avoid processed foods
- Read labels
  - 4 gms of sugar = 1 teaspoon
- Avoid stress eating
- Don't eat with a screen
- Allow yourself dessert once a week

## Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

*A contemporary approach to delicious, healthy eating*



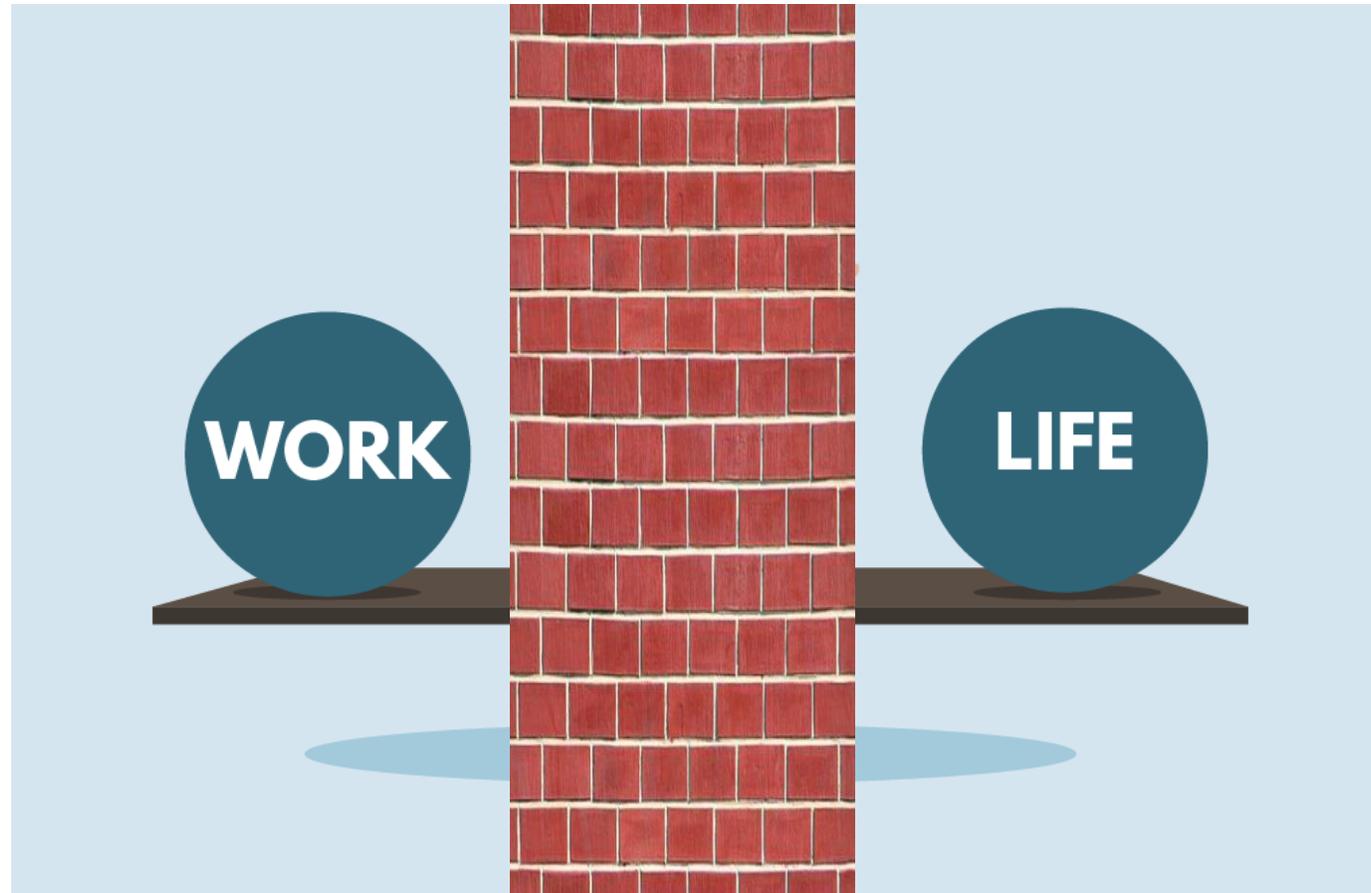
# Preventing Secondary Traumatization

7. Exercise regularly
  - 30 minutes of aerobic exercise four times weekly



# Preventing Secondary Traumatization

8. Set boundaries between work and home





## Preventing Secondary Traumatization

9. Engage in a hobby that has nothing to do with work
10. Schedule and accumulate pleasant activities daily
11. Engage in a spiritual life



# Preventing Secondary Traumatization

12. Take care of your medical needs
13. Avoid using substances to cope
14. Obtain regular training on trauma and its effects
15. Deal with your personal history
  - Consider taking the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale



# Intervening When You Experience STS

1. Engage or re-engage your support network
2. Re-balance work and life
3. Reduce exposure to work-related and trauma-related books, movies, internet content, and news



# Intervening When You Experience STS



4. Practice self-soothing: baths, music, massages, etc.
  - Make folders for calming and happy music
5. Volunteer
6. Say “No” to commitments you can’t manage
7. Be creative: sing, dance, write, draw, sculpt
8. Spend time with healthy children
9. Practice self-compassion

# Intervening When You Experience STS

10. Practice mindfulness meditation
11. Engage in regular yoga
12. Start a Gratitude Journal



*Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.*

*- Jon Kabat-Zinn*

# Mindfulness Meditation

- Mindfulness shifts the brain into a state of calm
- Regular practice shifts the nervous system baseline



*just be in the moment...*

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# THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

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## Physical

 Boost energy levels

 Improves sleep

 Reduces chronic pain

 Improves heart function

 Helps with digestive problems

## Mental

 Relieves stress

 Reduces anxiety

 Improves mood and happiness

 Boosts concentration and focus

 Improves self-esteem

# Mental Health

## *Benefits of Yoga*

**Decreases Stress & Anxiety**

**Helps You Focus**

**Creates Mindfulness**

**Increases Self-Esteem**

**Boosts Confidence**

**Increases Awareness**

**Encourages Self Care**

**Improves Meditation**

**Increases Happiness**

**Promotes Well-Being**



# Skill Break

Mindful Breathing

# Responding to Traumatization



**Q: How do you know when primary trauma and/or secondary traumatic stress becomes a significant problem?**

**A: When your symptoms become constant and/or pervasive.**



**Know when your  
cup is running over.**

# Self-Soothing

## Self-Soothing

(Comforting yourself through  
your five senses)

1. Something to touch  
(ex: stuffed animal, stress ball)
2. Something to hear  
(ex: music, meditation guides)
3. Something to see  
(ex: snowglobe, happy pictures)
4. Something to taste  
(ex: mints, tea, sour candy)
5. Something to smell  
(ex: lotion, candles, perfume)



# Radical Acceptance

Radical Acceptance is the willingness to experience ourselves and our life as it is. A moment of Radical Acceptance is a moment of genuine freedom.

*- Tara Brach, from Radical Acceptance*

- The refusal to accept emotional pain is the basis of suffering
- Accepting reality as it is, not as we want it to be
- Neither fighting reality nor avoiding it
- Letting go of the desire to have things as we want them to be transforms suffering into ordinary pain, which is part of life
- Radical acceptance is an active choice that requires an inner commitment

# Everyone Needs One Person in Whom to Confide



- Trauma dissipates in waves
- Each of us needs one person to talk with:
  - A partner or spouse
  - A close friend
  - A family member
  - A minister/pastor/priest/rabbi
  - A therapist

# Develop a Self-Care Action Plan

- Use the ideas above, and add your own
- Make a plan how you will leave work at work
- Identify your triggers and how you will handle them
- Set aside at least one hour daily for self-care
- What gives you joy?
- What gives you meaning?

\_\_\_\_\_ 's Self Care Plan

 <b>Mental</b>	 <b>Physical</b>
 <b>Emotional</b>	 <b>Spiritual</b>

***Start a plan  
within the next week***

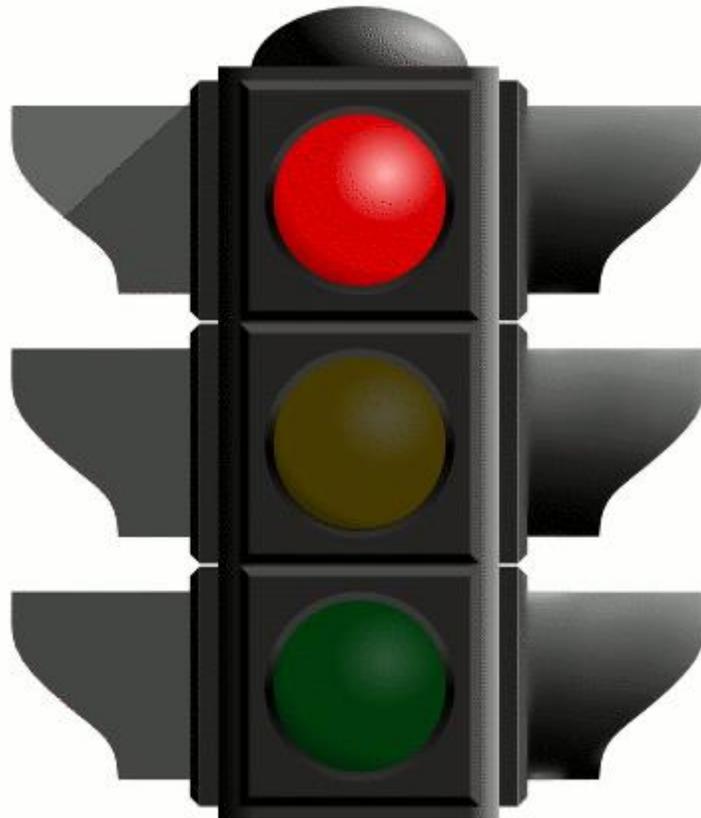
# Skill Break: Waterfall Meditation



or



# Recognizing When You Need Outside Help



# Signs of Deepening Problems

- Drinking more than two standard drinks/day
- Misusing prescription medication
- Using illicit drugs



# Signs of Deepening Problems



- Becoming a couch potato
- Insomnia lasting more than two weeks
- Panic attacks
- Isolation from family and friends
- Despair about the world
- Loss of faith
- Thoughts of suicide

# When STS Becomes a Serious Problem

- Seek consultation from a peer
- Use the employee assistance program
- Engage in psychotherapy



# Brownout

- Brownout precedes burnout
- It occurs when someone disengages, becomes discontent and lethargic, and loses interest in work
- It may result in sick leave and/or vacation in an attempt to recharge
- A survey of 1,000 executives by Corporate Business Concepts found:
  - Brownout is more prevalent than burnout
  - 40% of the population experiences brownout
  - 5% of the population experience burnout



# Top 10 Signs of Brownout



1. You work **long hours**, but without any real interest in your job. The work itself is a dull slog and lacks intellectual challenge or stimulation.
2. You feel as if you **never really finish tasks**. There's always more to do.
3. You no longer know where your career is going and **don't make important decisions**.
4. You **contribute the minimum** in meetings and have little interest in new suggestions. You're the person who pours cold water on other people's ideas.
5. You'll **use any excuse not to show up**. A headache becomes a migraine and a cold is always flu.
6. You check emails when you get up in the morning and in bed before you to sleep. You are **glued to your smartphone** on holidays, on weekends and even during social occasions.
7. **Physically you've started to suffer**. You're out of shape, you eat junk food, you don't get enough sleep and you've given up exercising.
8. You've **lost your sense of humor** and tend towards passive aggressiveness and surliness. If anyone (in work or outside) asks you how things are going, you tend to snap or answer in monosyllables.
9. Family **life is no longer what it once was**. You come home late to watch TV and show little interest in your spouse and children. Friendships have withered on the vine and outside interests have been forgotten.
10. You don't **hate your boss**, but they're moody and unpredictable. You never know whether they'll like or hate a given piece of work.

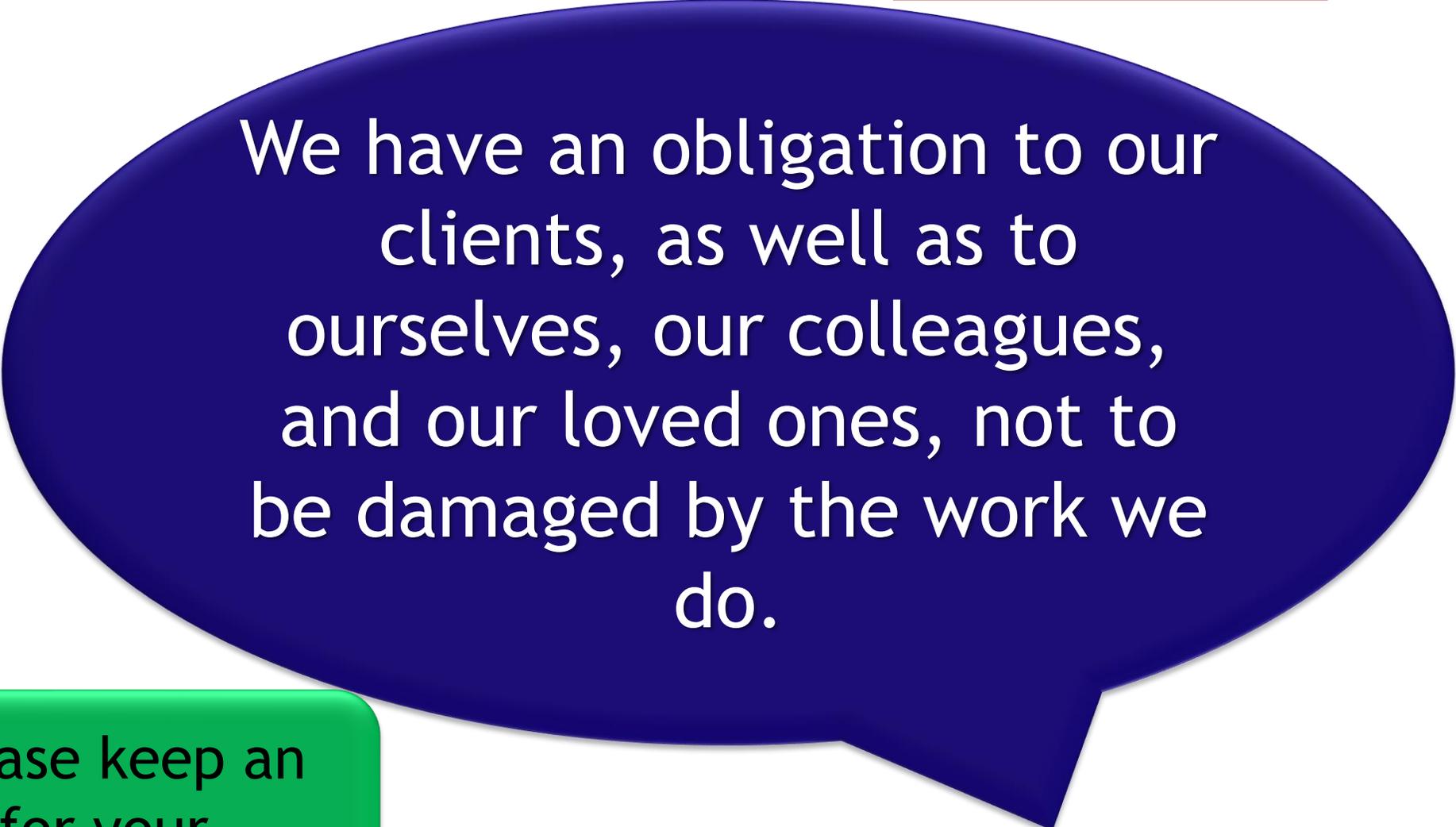
# THE EXHAUSTION CYCLE



## Signs of Burnout

- Chronic exhaustion
- Problems with attention and focus
- Headaches, stomach aches, chest tightening, dizziness, etc.
- Increased illness
- Loss of appetite or heavy overeating
- Cynicism and detachment
- Feeling ineffective

# A Final Thought



We have an obligation to our clients, as well as to ourselves, our colleagues, and our loved ones, not to be damaged by the work we do.



P.S. Please keep an eye out for your colleagues, too.

Karen Saakvitne and Laurie Pearlman, 1996

# Skill Break

## Thought Defusion

# Resources

# Self-Screening Tools

- Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale:

<https://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/Finding%20Your%20ACE%20Score.pdf>

- Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale:

[https://www.naadac.org/assets/2416/sharon\\_foley\\_ac15\\_militarycultureho2.pdf](https://www.naadac.org/assets/2416/sharon_foley_ac15_militarycultureho2.pdf)

- Professional Quality of Life Scale

[http://proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL\\_5\\_English\\_Self-Score\\_7\\_2011.pdf](http://proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL_5_English_Self-Score_7_2011.pdf)

# Dealing with Trauma Exposure

- *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky
- *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization* by Karen Saakvitne and Laurie Pearlman
- *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Prevention and Self-Care Strategies for the Helping Professions, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* by Thomas Skovholt and Michelle Trotter-Mathison

# Dealing with Trauma Exposure

- Self-Care Workbook:

[http://www.figleyinstitute.com/documents/Workbook\\_AMEDD\\_SanAntonio\\_2012July20\\_RevAugust2013.pdf](http://www.figleyinstitute.com/documents/Workbook_AMEDD_SanAntonio_2012July20_RevAugust2013.pdf)

- When Compassion Hurts:

[https://www.beststart.org/resources/howto/pdf/Compassion\\_14MY01\\_Final.pdf](https://www.beststart.org/resources/howto/pdf/Compassion_14MY01_Final.pdf)

- Secondary Traumatic Stress in child-serving systems:

[http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/secondary\\_traumatic\\_tress.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/secondary_traumatic_tress.pdf)

# Mindfulness Books

- *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment - and Your Life* (2011), Jon Kabat-Zinn
- *Radical Acceptance* (2012), Tara Brach
- *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1999), Thich Nhat Hanh
- *Meditation for Beginners* (2008), Jack Kornfield
- *How to Meditate* (2013), Pema Chodron

# Mindfulness Meditation CDs

- *Guided Mindfulness Meditation Series 1, 2 & 3*, Jon Kabat-Zinn
- *Mindfulness Meditation*, Tara Brach
- *Natural Awareness*, Pema Chodron
- *Guided Meditation*, Jack Kornfield
- *Plum Village Meditations*, Thich Nhat Hanh

# Online MBSR Courses

- Free online MBSR course:  
<http://palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html>
- Online video course:  
<http://www.soundstrue.com/store/the-mbsr-online-course-3226.html>

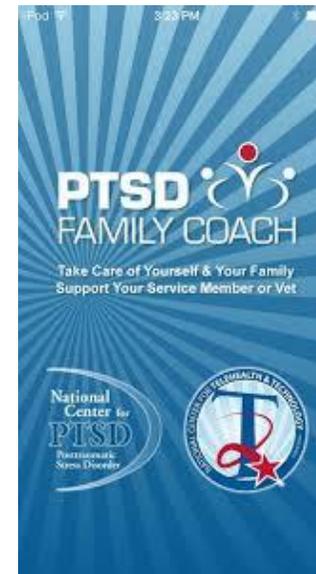
# Guided Mindfulness Meditations

- <http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/resources/multimedia/index.asp>
- <http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/mindfulness-meditation-podcast-series/>
- <http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/programs/mbsr/Pages/audio.aspx>
- <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

# Self-Help Mobile Applications

<http://www.t2health.org/mobile-apps>

- Breathe 2 Relax
- PTSD Family Coach
- Stop, Breathe, and Think
- Mindfulness Coach



# Self-Help Mobile Applications

<http://www.militarymentalhealth.org/articles/media>

- Positive Activity Jackpot
- Virtual Hope Box
- Provider Resilience



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