

Vicarious Trauma: When Helping Hurts



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Introductions

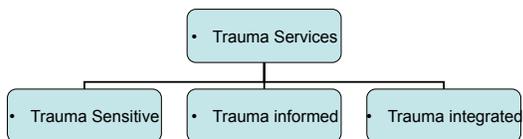
Today we will have a mixture of:

- Learning about the impact of vicarious trauma, secondary stress, burnout & compassion fatigue vs. trauma
- Trauma as a parallel process
- Impact on self, organization and clients
- Practicing self-care activities; to use for self or with clients
- Discussion



Conceptualizing in the trauma informed context

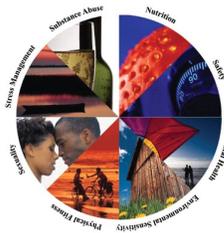
Part of a continuum based model that allows providers to understand the level of competence that they are operating when serving clients impacted by trauma



**From the Creating Trauma Services for Women
with Co-Occurring Disorders SAMHSA
August 2003**

Trauma informed services involve understanding anticipating and responding to the issues expectations and special needs that a person who has been victimized may have in a particular setting or service. At a minimum trauma informed services should endeavor to do no harm-to avoid re-traumatizing survivors or blaming them for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions.”

**From the TIP concepts...what
providers know about trauma.**



- Affects the body, mind, spirit, emotion
- Bio/psycho/social-more on this later
- Why holistic treatment needs to be the best practice...whatever that means

Trauma Informed Caregivers

Know that people who work in the field of trauma will be impacted in some manner.

Example: Carlissa



DEFINITION OF TRAUMA

An event that is so overwhelming in nature that it causes significant distress in almost anyone who experiences it. These events are often sudden and encased in an overwhelming amount of fear and terror that is unmanageable in the moment of the event. As a result of this event the survivors experience symptoms and behaviors that are often organized around management of the intense fear.

- Definition used by the Trauma and Addictions Collaborative of Cuyahoga County

Conceptualizing Trauma

- Type One-single episode
- Type Two-chronic or repeated yet different trauma incidents
- Natural Recovery- roughly 1/3

As a result interventions may vary...we will discuss the implications for this a bit later

- Lenore Terr concepts

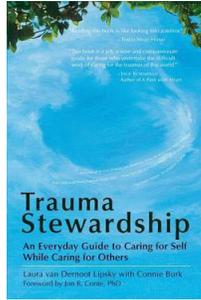
Trauma Stewardship

- Trauma Stewardship is defined as a daily practice through which individuals and organizations tend to the hardship and pain or trauma experienced by other human beings, other living beings and our planet itself.

- Laura Vandernoot Lipsky from her book Trauma Stewardship: An everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others

Three Levels of Trauma Stewardship

- 1. Individual/Personal
- 2. Organizational
- 3. Societal



Lets Take a Look at the Terminology...



TERMS OF ART

- Burnout
- Secondary Stress/Trauma
- Compassion Fatigue
- Vicarious Trauma



Concerning Hallmarks

- Attitude
- When the humor turns to true negativity
- “Losing the capacity to believe that we can make change.” (Connie Burk)
- Passion shifts
- It manifests into Vicarious Trauma



Addressing Burnout

- Acknowledge it is happening!
- Being aware of a shift in ones usual perspective towards work or clients
- Acknowledging that a break or shift is needed (self or other)
- Paying attention to the basics...eat/sleep
- Taking time for lunch...vacation...personal day
- Self-care



A Quick Note

- In the literature you will often see these two terms exchanged. While I will define both I will largely stick with the term Compassion Fatigue as it is my personally preferred term.



Compassion Fatigue

- **Compassion Fatigue:** The emotional residue of working with suffering clients; particularly those suffering from traumatic events or those who are in recovery. Professionals who work with people, particularly those who are experiencing despair, must contend with not only the normal stress or dissatisfaction of their work, but also with the emotional and personal feelings for the client and or situation.

Ex: Sidney...traumatic loss...imagining yourself in their situation

Secondary Trauma/Stress Definition

Refers to the stress reactions that workers may have from the exposure to the traumatic stories or experiences of another. These reactions are often characterized as psychological or emotional distress. If unaddressed, over time they will negatively impact the worker as likely have impairing effect on the individual.

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- Excessive worry **about clients**
- Thoughts about clients interrupting personal life
- Taking work home... emotionally
 - Case example
- Over-emotional responses/ reactions to client
- Ruminating on work-related topics
- Loss of self outside of work



Compassion Fatigue Continued...

- Feeling yourself physically respond to clients
- Taking clients success or failure personally
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Compassion fatigue may lead to susceptibility to vicarious trauma
- Loss of identity outside of work roles
- Hopelessness

Compassion Fatigue: Main Issue

- People loose their capacity for compassion due to exposure, exhaustion and the inability to be separate... think about Brown's thought on burn out and apply them here.
- Empathy vs sympathy
- Compassion for self
- Balance



Expert Brene Brown's Thoughts

- Insight into yourself
- Clearing
- Realistic authentic boundaries
- Not loosing connection
- Avoid the three P's
 - Pleasing
 - Perfecting
 - Performing



Brown on Empathy

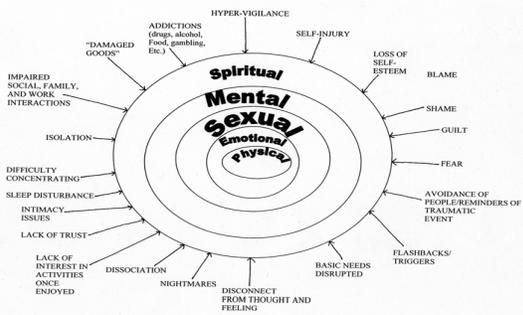


Kind of Like Math...



Traumatic Event
+
Intense Fear, Numbing Terror
=
Behaviors, Symptoms, Trouble with Coping,
Impairment of Functioning

IMPACT OF TRAUMA



C. BURICK & K. MOUNCEY, THE CLEVELAND RAPE CRISIS, 2006

Vicarious Trauma Definition

Vicarious trauma is also known as secondary trauma. Vicarious trauma is the gradual change or disruption of a helper's **inner system** of thoughts, beliefs, feelings/emotions, images, and spirit as a result of repeated exposure to other's traumatic experiences. The worker will begin to experience or re-experience their own symptoms of trauma.

Vicarious Trauma



- Workers begin to look symptomatic of trauma without the "event."
- Exposure to the trauma of others/clients becomes a trigger for past trauma and or trauma symptoms.

VT in Action

- Physical - already existing symptoms can become more severe and even chronic; headaches, migraines, backaches, gastrointestinal problems, etc.
- Mental - inability to complete tasks, dreams/nightmares that may include images or other people's stories of your own
- Emotional - helplessness, hopelessness, feelings of doubt, mistrust, avoidant behaviors, feeling unsafe, intrusive thoughts
- Global (some call it spirit) – changes in one's world view
- Feeling impaired: work, relationships, functioning
- Numb and isolated

Vicarious Trauma



- Hyper vigilance
- Diminished creativity
- Hypervigilance
- Avoidance
- Disassociation
- Sense of persecution

Possible Risk Factors...

- Being a trauma survivor
- Addiction history
- History of depression
- History of anxiety
- Unresolved personal issues



We Understand It... Now What Do We Do?

- This issue needs to be addressed on all levels of system
- We need to start from the beginning
- We cannot be afraid to talk about it...normalize it as part of the profession and not a sign of personal weakness



A Word on Numbness...

I HATE THE FEELING WHEN
YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY
EMOTION. YOU FEEL SO EMPTY.
YOU'RE NOT HAPPY, YOU'RE NOT SAD.
YOU'RE NOTHING. WHEN YOUR
MIND IS SPINNING, BUT
YOU CAN'T FEEL
ANYTHING.

Group Exercise

- Self Care Master Lists....



Connection to Community, Work Environment, and Self



ORGANIZATIONAL CARE

When working with trauma survivors we must not only admit that these phenomena exist but we must also COMMIT to addressing it...



Lets take a look at formal and inform organizational approaches...



Trauma Informed Organizations

- Provide supervision
- Have good benefits
- “Force” people to take their time
- Not overwhelm with case loads
- Spread acuity around



More...

- Properly train workers
- Recognize that impact is normal and address it as a constant
- Develop a culture of support (formal and informal)
- No shame



Responsibility to Self and Co-workers

- We are herd animals.
- Healing from trauma best happens in community. Ex: war buddies
- Having people who understand our experience.
- Notice...ask...listen...intervene.
- Not be afraid of what we hear....it is not about us.



More on responsibility...

- Reframe it as an honor to keep a fellow human company while they struggle
- Not allow the struggles of our co-workers to be gossip
- Don't take out our stress and aggression on each other
- Work together to provide formal and informal support

What the Experts Say...



A-B-C's

Addressing vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue in your organizational setting and personal practice

– Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996)

- Awareness
- Balance
- Connection



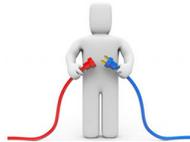
Trauma Stewardship (Lipsky)

“Always be working to cultivate the ability to be present and connect for self and others”



Lets Try a Little Self Care

To safe guard your own well being. To make the self care process a priority so that you are also able to care for others



Minute Meditation a Self Care Exercise



Self-Care as a PRIORITY

- Shift your thinking. Self-care is not selfish. See it as something you deserve.
- Develop and implement individual self-care. Set a pace that is reasonable and works for you.
- Leisure time
- Challenge your own negative beliefs.
- Personal objects of comfort and making your space pleasant.
- Humor and laughter



A reminder...for the
To DO: list

Practicing professional self-care in this way doesn't mean you are less dedicated. It means you have made an active commitment and choice to maintain your effectiveness as a social worker.

-NASW news, November 2008



Malory's Life Lessons in Self-Care

1. You should always have plenty of fresh, chilly water available. (preferably with three ice cubes in it).
2. Two treats first thing in the morning sets a positive tone for the day.
3. When you have got to go...go!
4. A breath of fresh air and a short walk (no matter the weather) almost always makes you feel better.
5. Sleep is important and especially great if you can find a sunny place to sleep.
6. A belly scratch is more important than reading your mail or answering the phone when you walk into the house.
7. If you need something from someone, stare at them until they notice you. If that doesn't work, keep staring, then bark...(one should do it) and then keep staring. Your needs cannot be avoided forever.
8. Breathe...take several deep dog sighs during the day.
9. Connect with your pack, huddle in for warmth and comfort. You do not need to manage it all on your own.

Thank you for your time and energy today!
Please contact me for more information about our
trainings and self-care tools.

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Resources

- Peter Levine: Waking the Tiger (1997)
- Peter Levine: Healing Trauma (2005)
- Judith Herman: Trauma and Recovery (1992)
- Bessel Van der kolk; assorted work and lectures. Most recent April 2010 in Cleveland, Ohio
- Lisa Schwab Lecture
- Laura Vandermoot Lipisky: Trauma Stewardship
- Self Care Assessment- Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996)
- Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996) Trauma and the Therapist
- Assorted works of Brene Brown
