

Your Best Self:

How to navigate and address secondary
trauma in the helping professions

Presented to:

MA DOC

Presented by:

Whitney J. Kraemer, LMHC, CCHP

**Sr. Director, Justice & Health
Equity**

ForHealth Consulting

Umass Chan Medical School

October 9th, 2024

Agenda

- Understand stress on a spectrum
- Review secondary trauma
- Review burnout
- Discuss how to build resiliency
- Review ways to address trauma and burnout
- Understand how to effectively debrief and talk safely with colleagues
- Share self-care strategies

Are we all really in the same boat?

- Unifying
- Support during difficult times
- Shared pain and suffering
- Derived from the innate need to feel connected



- Individual uniqueness
- Situational uniqueness
- Difference in impact
- False empathy

▷ We are not in the same boat, but in the same sea –
and the difference is important (psychology-spot.com)

The Stress Spectrum

Positive Stress

- Mild/Moderate Stressor
- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Mild elevations in hormone levels
- Internal balance regulates quickly

Tolerable Stress

- Adaptive response to time-limited stressor
- More likely to set off body's "alert-system"
- Require support system and interventions to decrease symptoms
- Internal balance returns within a short period

Toxic Stress

- Ongoing and relentless response to intense stressors
- Causes changes to brain function and body regulation
- Hyperactivation contributes to increased risk of disease known as "allostatic load."

[The Stress Spectrum and Learning to Read the Nervous System | Psychology Today](#)

React vs Respond

React



Unaware

Impulsive or emotional

Instinct

Can feel uncontrollable

Rooted in fear

Limited forethought

Respond



Aware

Deliberate and intentional

Evaluated, slowed response

Maintain self control

Long term outlook

Consider others

Secondary Trauma

Common synonyms

- vicarious trauma
- compassion fatigue
- second-hand trauma

Definition

- A phenomena in which an individual is indirectly, yet significantly impacted by learning of another person's direct experience of a traumatic event.

Symptoms

Indifference

Numbness

Hopelessness

Cynicism

Irritability

Avoidance

Anger

Despair

Rumination

Fatigue

Physical
aches & pains

Burnout



A state of emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress



May impact us all to some extent



Rooted in lack of control in aspects of work and/or life



Can vary in degree of severity and can change over time

What can impact burnout

Work
environment

Workplace
climate

Caseload
size

Workload
demands

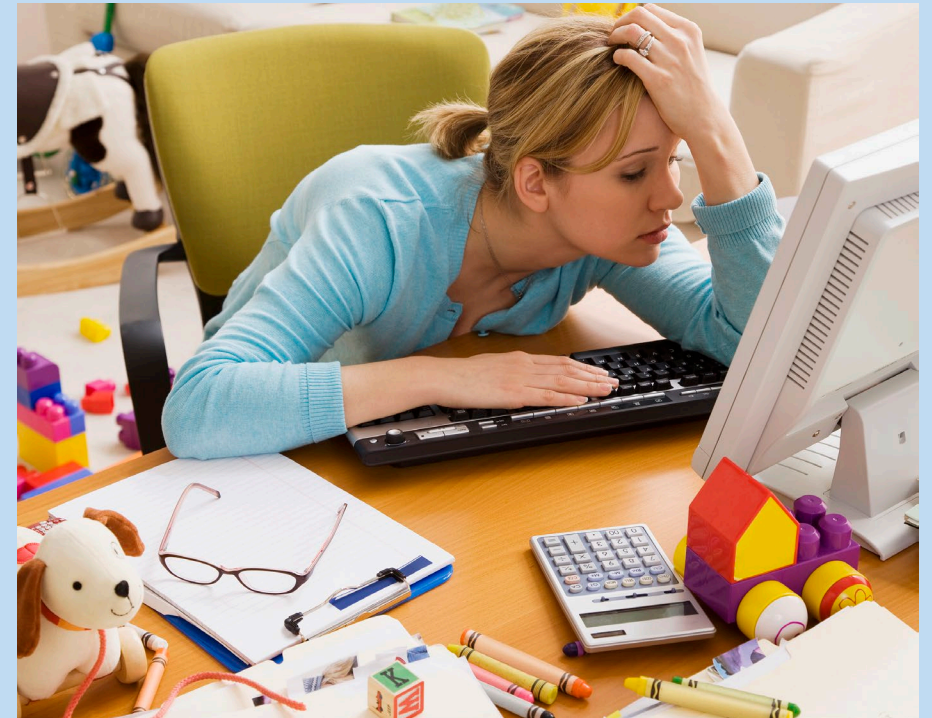
Client level
acuity

Absence of
supports

Lack of
progress

What does it feel like?

- Being extra cynical or critical at work
- Dragging yourself to work and trouble getting started
- Being irritable or impatient with co-workers or clients
- Lacking the energy to be productive
- Difficulties concentrating
- Lacking satisfaction from achievements
- Feeling disillusioned with work or career path
- Using food or substances to feel better or to simply not feel
- Changes in sleeping habits
- New and unexplained symptoms



Building resiliency

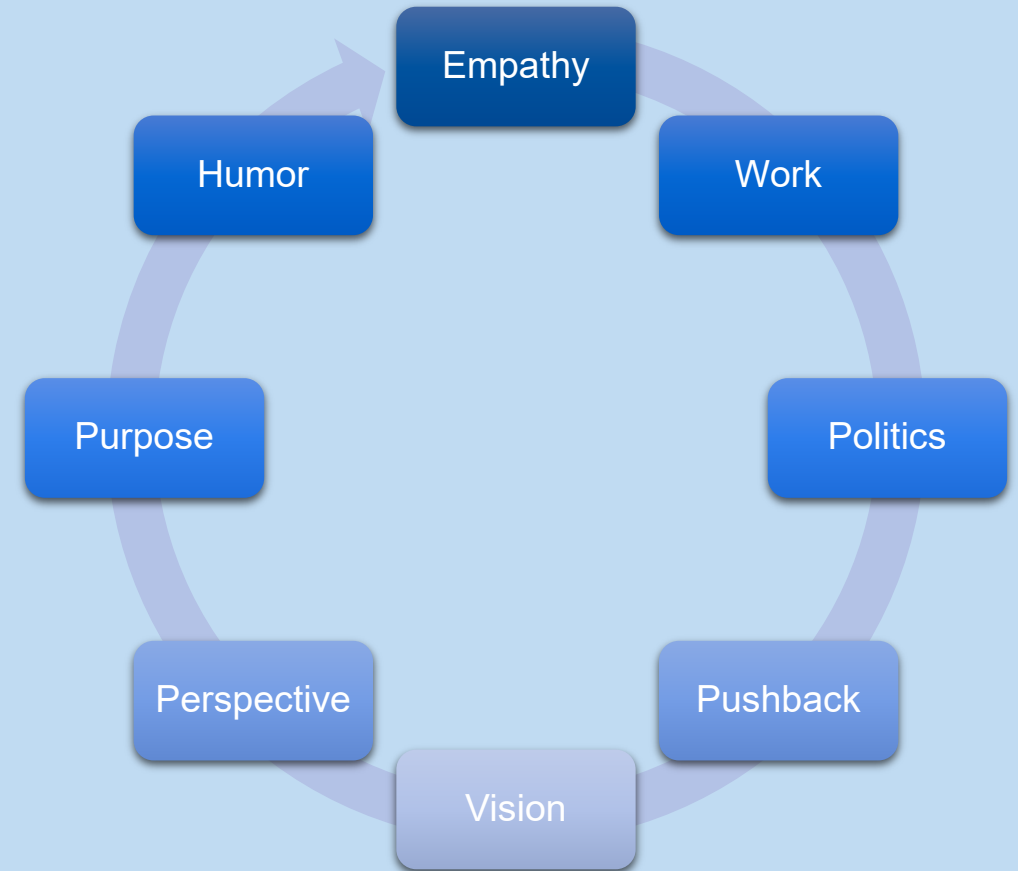
Definition: the ability to cope with and recover from difficulties, toughness, setbacks.

Looks like: emotional regulation, positive attitude towards work and life, ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback

An individual's resilience is on a spectrum that is built on through genetic predispositions, early environments, and life circumstances

Sources of Resiliency

- Well-developed network of relationships can mitigate stress
- Optimism can blunt effects of stress
- Resiliency and response to stress presents on a continuum
- Work towards learning from failure and practicing self-compassion



Where to go from here?

First it is important to **acknowledge** your experience and your perception in relation to burn out and/or secondary trauma

- What does it feel like to me?
- How are my relationships?
- What have others identified in me?
- How have others reacted to me?

Wellness Wheel



Ways to manage stress

Routine

Create and keep to a routine

Look out for when your workday starts to run into personal time

Prioritize

Make lists that include personal and professional priorities

Prioritizing yourself and is essential to your wellbeing

Designate

Find ways to designate a specific workspace

Develop a transition to help settle into and back from work

Time

Build in time for yourself

Get creative and keep your mind active, when you can

Low Impact Debriefing

Often it can feel easier to talk with coworkers and peers in a related field about work stressors but can in turn may unintentionally cause harm.

Low Impact Debriefing can help to share and process trauma safely and respectfully.

Self Awareness

- Be aware of the stories you tell and the level of detail provided
- Can you give an abbreviated version?

Fair Warning

- Warn your listener that the content you are going to share is disturbing or traumatic

Consent

- Seek permission related to timing and content
- Allow the listener a chance to decline or agree to engage in conversation

Limited Disclosure

- Decide how much is necessary to share
- Start with the least disturbing information

[Low Impact Debriefing | The TEND Toolkit](#)

Self-Care Strategies

Meditation

Exercise

Guided
Imagery

Know your
limits

Family time

Find new
hobbies

Seek
supervision

Get a
massage

Engage in
faith
community

Journal

Read

Volunteer

Listen to
podcasts

Mindfulness
practice

Modify diet

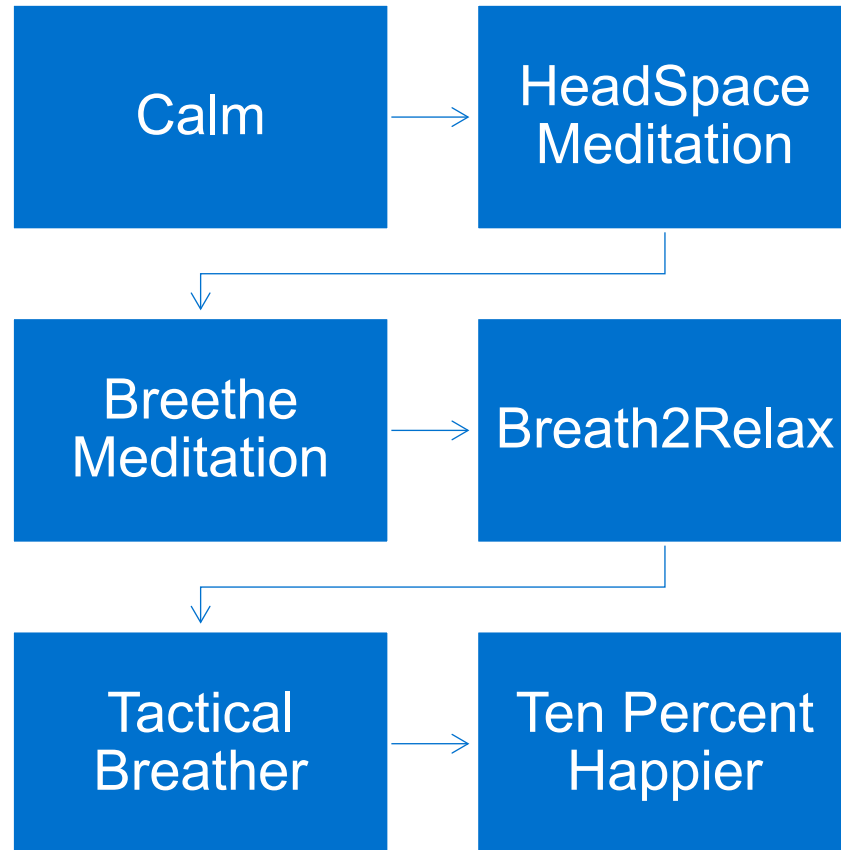
Sleep goals

Alone time

Engage with
others

Resources for Self Care

Apps for easy download



- [Tend Toolkit](#)—A library of resources for helping professionals
- [Mindful Smiling](#)—UCLA free mindfulness activities app and website
- [The Free Mindfulness Project](#)—Free resources for mindfulness
- YouTube has a wealth of free resources
- Mindful.org includes resources on mindfulness practices and meditation

Thank You