Thriving Despite Challenges: Overcoming Overwhelm and Workforce Issues.

Brittany Higgins, Lisa Turnquist, and Kirk Cooper-Johnson

Who We Are

Learning Objectives

Today we will help you to be able to:

- Explain the concepts of compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma
- Understand how some individuals in the field have worked to combat the above phenomena
- Engage in an exercise that facilitates greater self-understanding of positive core beliefs
- Replicate the above exercise with colleagues and/or participants

*We will use the term "participants" to refer to the clients/individuals you serve and "practitioner" to refer to your position (Care Manager, Therapist, Supervisor, Administrator etc.)

The Value of Psychological Safety

- *"a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking"*

  (Edmondson, n.d.)

- When leaders focus on promoting psychological safety, team members can feel more confident **taking risks, disclosing challenges, and voicing their experiences**

  (Gallo, 2023)

Disclaimer

- The three concepts we'll be discussing can be seen as interconnected, and some definitions often even overlap

- Our focus lies less on helping you to be able to differentiate between these terms, and more on building a general sense of how they all can negatively affect the wellbeing of you and your staff

Compassion Fatigue (CF)

▶ *"Compassion fatigue is a broadly defined concept that can include emotional, physical, and spiritual distress in those providing care to another. It is associated with (helping relationships) where people...are experiencing significant emotional or physical pain and suffering."*

(SAMHSA, 2022)
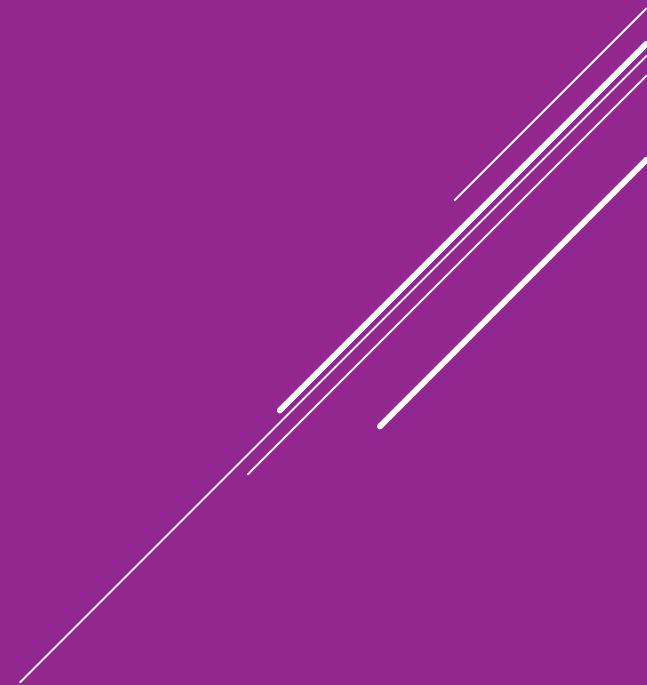
What Does it Look Like?

- Indifference or apathy
- Fatigue
- Symptoms associated with depression
- Feeling on edge/heightened startle response
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feeling trapped
- Enforcing boundaries between one's work and personal lives becomes more challenging

(Are you experiencing compassion fatigue? n.d.; SAMHSA, n.d.)

Common Misconceptions

▶ Compassion fatigue is the result of a flaw in your character

▶ If you "push through", you can overcome its effects

▶ The nature of this work dictates that you need to prioritize others over yourself

(Buttaccio, 2017)

OUR EXPERIENCE

Burnout

▶ *"Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed"*

(World Health Organization, n.d.)

What Does it Look Like?

▶ Meeting the demands of one's job becomes more challenging

▶ Feeling depersonalized

▶ Feelings of frustration are brought on more easily

▶ Symptoms associated with depression

▶ One may find themselves using substances as a coping mechanism

(SAMHSA, 2022; World Health Organization, n.d.)

Common Misconceptions

- Burnout needs to be overcome alone
- Days off will "cure" burnout
- Being burned out must mean it's time for a career change
- Burnout will resolve itself over time
- Burnout won't take a physical toll on you
- "I should just try harder…"

(Davis, n.d.; Morrissette, n.d.)

OUR EXPERIENCE
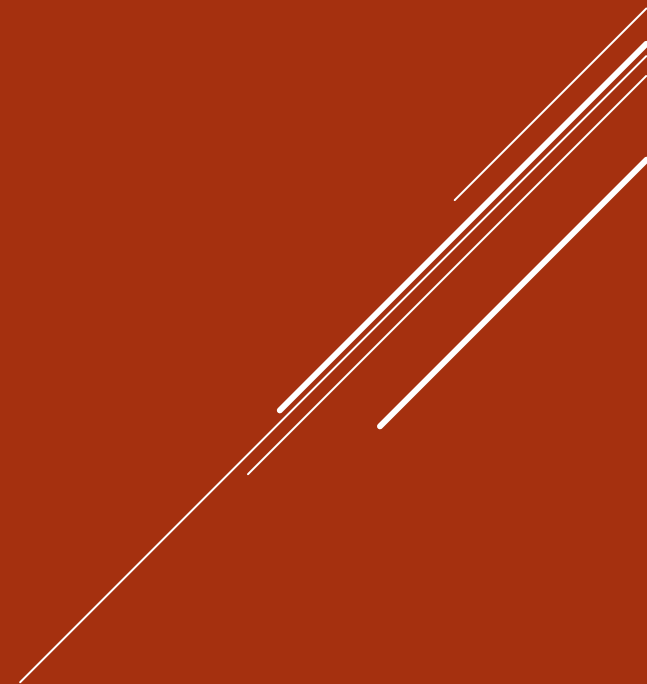
Vicarious Trauma

▶ *"Vicarious trauma is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and (you) feel committed or responsible to help them. Over time, this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being."*

(Pearlman & McKay, 2020)

What Does it Look Like?

▶ Finding a place of emotional regulation becomes difficult

▶ One's self-esteem and self concept are negatively affected

▶ Feeling indecisive, making decisions that aren't in line with one's values

▶ Difficulty enforcing proper boundaries at work (i.e., devoting one's off-time to work, taking on too many tasks, feeling a need to control the actions of others)

▶ Interpersonal challenges

▶ Physical ailments

▶ Difficulty feeling connected to others and to oneself

▶ Loss of hope and personal meaning

▶ Existential angst

Pearlman & McKay, 2020; SAMHSA, n.d.)

Common Misconceptions

▶ Trauma must occur to you **directly**

▶ Vicarious trauma happens to "weak" people

▶ Vicarious trauma irrevocably changes your brain

(Cullen, n.d.)

OUR EXPERIENCE

Organizational Culture

Organizational factors can (and often do) play a part in exacerbating all these phenomena:

▶ Agencies with rigid hierarchies: little communication between levels, lack of agency for those in the lower levels, and unclear communication of values and priorities

▶ Agencies that trivialize the demands of the work being done, with little regard given to promoting a culture of cohesion and support

▶ Agencies that don't continuously and seriously consider how much and how often staff are working

(SAMHSA, 2022)

Bringing it Full Circle

- If you feel comfortable sharing, please let us know:
- *How do these challenges surface in your program(s)?*
- *Does your team promote psychological safety?*
- *What are other strategies that have worked for you and your staff?*

Let's Do a Practice Exercise

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