

Risk and Resilience in Trauma-Exposed Work

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Service providers play an important role in the lives of youth and their families as they work to develop safe and meaningful relationships. As a result of these connections, we are exposed to the stories and traumatic experiences of others. Caregivers dedicated to the progress and resilience of those in their charge often extend themselves beyond job requirements, healthy boundaries, and available resources. Over time, trauma exposure and extended efforts can have adverse consequences for our professional and personal lives. This session will discuss risk and resilience factors for burnout, caregiver fatigue, and vicarious trauma, followed by individual and collective strategies for building resilience in trauma-exposed work.



Risk and Resilience In Trauma-Exposed Work

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OK, settle
down,
everyone!

My chair
fell over!

Bananas!

is here!

And here's
my room...

AM I ON
MUTE?!

This is my
Dad's shoe.





**“Don’t worry, the expectations
are the same as ever ... only
completely different.”**

Shared Experiences during the Covid-19 Pandemic

- Powerlessness/lack of control
 - Empathic distress
 - Anxiousness
 - Changing roles (personal & professional)
 - Uncertainty
 - Fear/Safety concerns (self, loved ones, clients, community)
 - Numbing out
 - Unclear/changing direction/leadership
 - Over/under response to risks
 - Changes in motivation
- Conflicting priorities
 - Conflicting values
 - Difficulty connecting (clients, students, loved ones)
 - Internal/External resources
 - Conflicts (messaging, approach, priorities)
 - Essential service and mental health (moral distress/injury)
 - Supportive peers/leadership
 - Trauma exposure (Individual, global, news consumption)
 - Struggles to find meaning/purpose
 - Grief and loss

STRESS



EFFECTS OF STRESS ON THE BODY



SKIN:

Changes in Skin Texture, Loss of Skin Tone, Loss of Moisture, Thinner & More Delicate Skin



IMMUNE SYSTEM:

Decreased Immunity



HORMONES:

Hormonal Imbalances, Increased Cortisol



BONES:

Decreased Calcium Absorption, Weakened Bones



BRAIN:

Fatigue, Reduced Concentration, Decreased Mood



HEART:

Increased Heart Rate, Elevated Blood Pressure



GUT:

Decreased Nutrient Absorption, Alterations in Gut Motility, Changes in Microbiome, Leaky Gut



MUSCLE:

Muscle Protein Breakdown

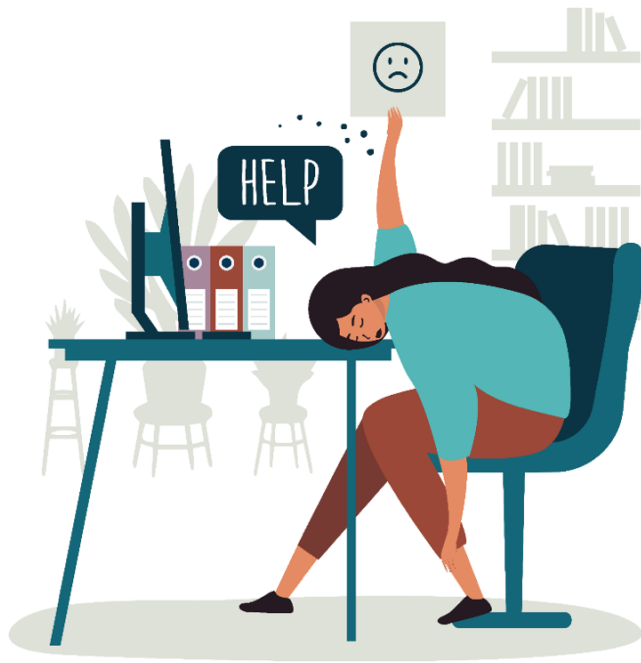


Burnout

Empathic Strain

Vicarious Trauma

Burnout



Depletion of internal resources and energy resulting from a prolonged struggle to meet unrealistic goals

- Develops over time as a result of chronic work-related stress
- Unsupportive work environment
- Excessive workload
- Limited resources
- Lack of control
- Constant change
- Uncertainty

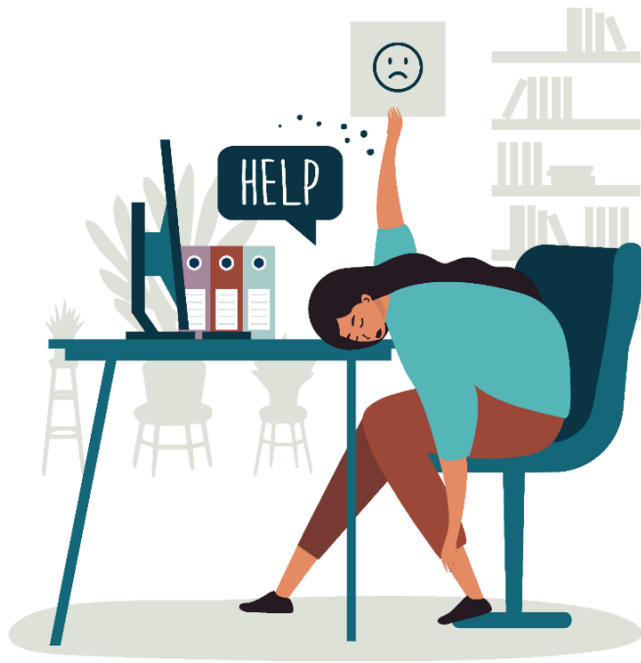
Burnout



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Burnout



Signs/symptoms

- Increased absenteeism
- Maintaining full voicemail/email
- Loss of motivation
- Physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion
- Feelings of self-doubt failure
- Isolation
- Cynicism or negative feelings toward colleagues
- Increased substance use

Burnout



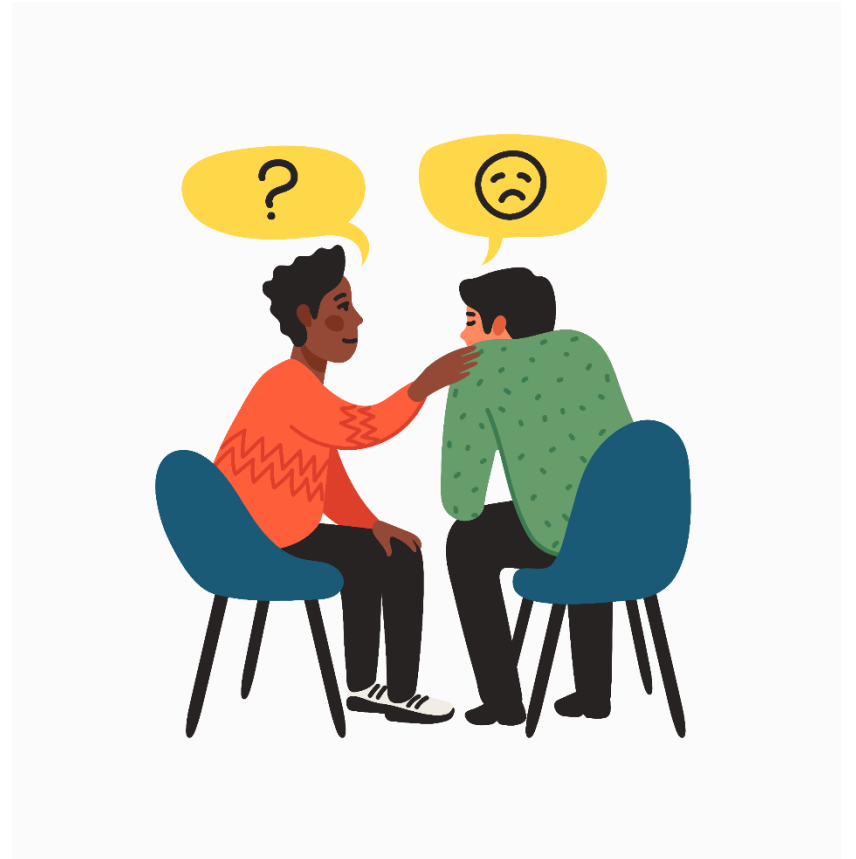
What helps?

- Rest
- Change of position
- Change of job/career
- Decreased workload

Empathic Strain (Compassion Fatigue)

Exhaustion occurring as a result of compromising self to care of others.

- Cumulative
- Empathic response to caring for others
- Consumed by needs of clients/students
- May develop as a result of working beyond trained capacity



Empathic Strain (Compassion Fatigue)

What helps?

- Rest
- Supervision/debrief opportunities
- Connecting with peer and/or family supports
- Self-compassion practice





Vicarious Trauma

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

- Naomi Rachel Remen



Vicarious Trauma

- Vicarious trauma happens because you care – because you empathize with people who are hurting
- When you care about, and identify with, the pain of people who have endured terrible things, you bring their grief, fear, anger, and despair into your own awareness and experience and feel it along with them in some way.
- Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.

Impact of Vicarious Trauma

What to watch for...

- Isolation/ Avoidance
- No time for self / family / friends / healthy living
- Anger/cynicism
- Feelings of emotional exhaustion
- Increased irritability at home
- Increased dissociation, memory lapses, concentration issues
- Heightened startle response
- Feelings of powerlessness / hopelessness
- Client frustration / student-blaming
- Sarcasm / “Dark” humour
- Denial (I’m fine)
- Increased substance use
- Guilt/shame
- Change in meaning/ purpose/ hope
- Grandiosity

Vicarious Resilience

“The *positive effects* on helping professionals who witness the healing, recovery, and resilience of persons who have survived severe traumas in their lives.”

(Hernandez, Gangsei, & Engstrom, 2007)

Inspiration and
awe

Seeing people
overcome adversity

Recognizing
people's capacity to
heal

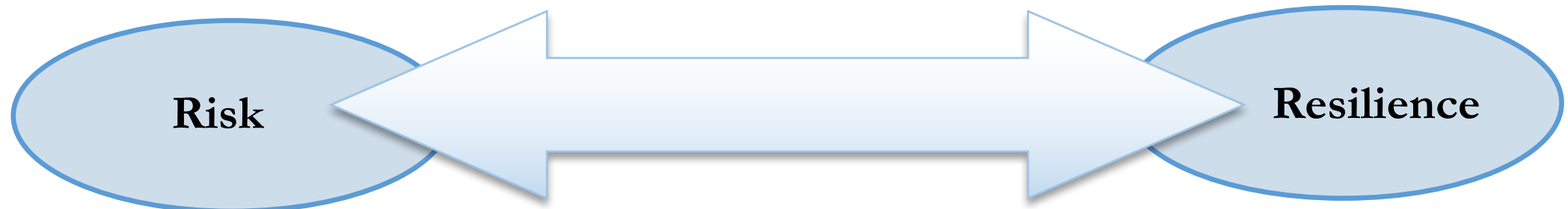
Reaffirming the
value of your work

Perspective



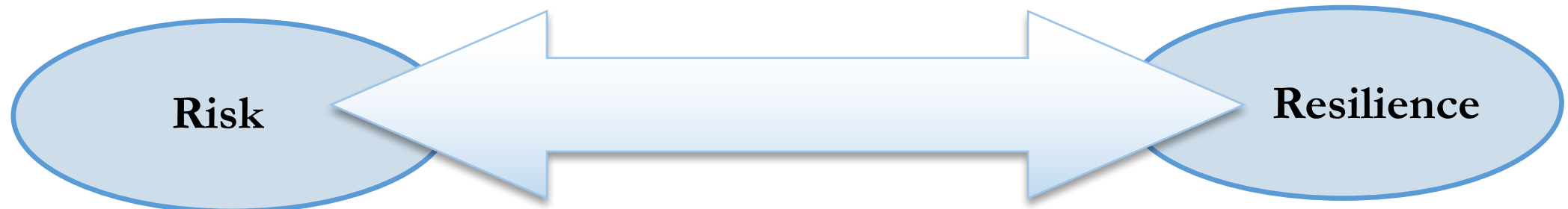
Workplace Risk/Resilience Factors

1. Workload/expectations/nature of work
2. Professional History and Training
3. Trauma Exposure
4. Supervision/Administrative Support
5. Supportive Environment (Peers)
6. Emotional Labour
7. Societal Value and Perception



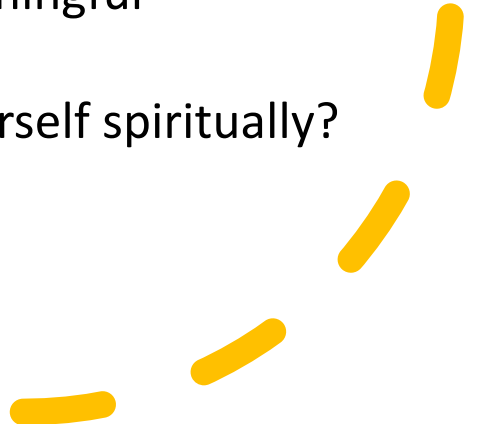
Personal Risk/Resilience Factors

1. Rewards, Value, and Meaning in the Work
2. Personal Trauma History
3. Personal Support System
4. Coping Style
5. Current Life Context
6. Ability to Establish Boundaries
7. Trauma Exposure



Strategies for Transforming Vicarious Trauma

Practice Individual and Collective Wellness in the Workplace and Beyond

- **Physically** – How do you release the built up tension and stress in your body?
 - **Mentally** – How do you care for your overall mental health?
 - **Emotionally** – What intrinsically meaningful activities do you enjoy? How connected are you to your emotions?
 - **Relationally** – Do you engage in meaningful connections with others?
 - **Spiritually** – How do you tend to yourself spiritually?
- 

Strategies for Transforming Vicarious Trauma

Identify and Actively Engage Support Systems

- **Stay connected** with the people you love
- **Ask for help** when life/work gets hard
- **Engage in peer support opportunities**
- **Spend time** with those who bring joy and laughter to your life
- **Understand you are not alone**



Strategies for Transforming Vicarious Trauma

Engage mindfully and intentionally with your work

- Remind yourself why you choose to do this work
- Understand your role and what is expected of you
- Look for opportunities to collaborate with colleagues
- Take time for reflection
- Continue to learn and grow
- Identify and challenge your own beliefs
- Develop transitions in and out of work
- Establish boundaries
- Practice mindfulness



We are not doing this alone!

We don't have to be the provider of all services when we can guide to appropriate resources.

When we stay connected to each other (interagency, intersector), we build community and create a collective experience.

When we share challenging experiences, we realize we are not alone.

When we share good stories and celebrate achievements of clients, communities and agencies together – we build vicarious resilience.

Practice *Self-Compassion, Balancing* and *Self-care*



Differentiate between *self-care* (sustainable wellness) and *self-indulgent*.



Mindfully balancing and looking after ourselves helps to effectively care for others.



Practice self-compassion



Remember that *balancing* and *self-care* are active processes, not end states.

If we want to give our best, we must be at our best. This is not selfish, it is best practice.



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