Secondary traumatic stress: recognizing the signs and doing something about them

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ARRIVAL

Introductions - Who are we?

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Session Objectives

• Define secondary stress
• Recognize signs and symptoms
• Practice simple stress reduction and wellness techniques

Who is in the room?

What age groups do you serve?

What is your profession?

Where do you work?

normal development layers of the brain
Have you worked with a child or family who has experienced trauma?

Abuse
Neglect
The death of a caregiver
Witnessed a violent event
How did it make you feel?
Reflect on your experience

Pair and share

Without describing the event itself, what experiences and feelings have you had?

Definitions

Burnout
Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
Burnout
Shows up as:
1. (Emotional) Exhaustion
2. Cynicism (depersonalization)
3. Feeling ineffective
   - Due to chronic work stressors
   - May result in relational problems and insensitive interactions.

Burnout in teachers is specifically correlated with:
1. Demographics
2. Lack of support
3. Job design
   - Role conflict
   - Role ambiguity

(Maslach and Jackson, 1981)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), Compassion Fatigue (CF) and Vicarious Trauma (VT)

There is debate in the field about what the differences are between STS/Compassion Fatigue (CF) and Vicarious Trauma (VT). Several authors have been working on further refining and defining the differences (e.g., Harrison and Westwood, 2009; Avery, 2001; Bush, 2009; and Figley, 1995)

Secondary traumatic stress is rooted in empathetic engagement and builds on the underlying understanding of both compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, but results in 'an acute stress disorder or symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder' (Bush, 2009, pg 25). Symptom clusters of arousal, intrusion, and isolation.

(Figley, 1995; Kinavey, Wennergren, Stegenga, & Lund, 2018)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
Because they are more closely related and overlapping than not, for our purposes today we will treat STS, CF, and VT as synonymous--and a natural consequence for caregivers who are exposed to the trauma of others through personal relationships.
A Model of Secondary Stress Response

Hears about or sees someone close to them struggle with a stressful event or trauma → Aroused sympathetic nervous system → Stress hormones release cortisol, adrenaline → Fight or flight decreases all other systems → Anxious, depressed general stress response. Work stress is generated stressful normal and abnormal experiences of caregivers.

Common responses to excessive stress and trauma

NORMAL responses to ABNORMAL events
- Aches and pains
- Sweating, shortness of breath, heart palpitations
- Changes in appetite, sleep, activity level, immunity
- Easily startled, worried
- Mood swings, irritability, restlessness
- Numbness, isolation, withdrawal, tendency to minimize the experience
- Difficulty concentrating/remembeing
- Feelings of self-blame, survivor guilt, shame
- Interuption of equilibrium
- Negative reinforcement of adaptive behaviors

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
- Attunement can expose caregivers to secondary trauma, especially if affected individual is their responsibility
- Caregivers’ unmet basic needs result in reduced access to adaptive qualities, creativity & compassion
- May compromise re-attunement, restoration of attachment and healing potential
Potential Risk factors for STS

- Accumulation of stressful life events
- Poverty
- Trauma, abuse and neglect
- Lack of work life balance
- Difficulty setting boundaries and keeping them
- Witnessing physical and or emotional violence
- Social isolation
- Lack of peer supports

What does it look like?

Symptoms of STS

- Pre-occupation with the child’s story or situation
- Re-imagining child’s traumatic event
- Stomach or digestive issues
- Rapid heart rate/panic feelings
- Dissociation or detachment from day to day activities
- Neglecting ones own needs
- Pushing too hard to get things done
- Shift in feelings of safety

Activity - Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)

The ProQOL
- Measures Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout and Compassion Fatigue.
- One measure being used to quantify STS
- Free and available for use
- Completing the survey is for your own reflection.

If you are willing to help us gain better understanding of STS in helping professions, please read the consent page and complete the demographics section and leave the survey behind when you leave. Thank you!
What to do about it?

Individual level
• Simple techniques that can be practiced by the individual, for example self-care or mindfulness

Social level
• Build community, relationships and trust, e.g. sharing experiences

Structural level
• Making change to systems, routines, organization and environment

If you do one thing, work on social/peer supports...James Caringi

Why Systems Level/Structural Strategies?

Promoting a positive and supportive workplace
• Systems level structural supports can have some of the largest impact on outcomes (Tseng, Liu, & Wang, 2011)
• Organizational climate is linked to levels of provider stress

Yet, how it can feel some days...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJV7TUF9Gxw

Systems level supports do not need to be expensive or time consuming to have an impact!!
Systems/Structural Strategies

- Supportive and supported leadership
  - Hire and train leaders who have specialized knowledge in early childhood systems and supports and have enough time and capacity to support staff
  - Regularly scheduled (e.g. annual) organization-wide training on STS
  - Supportive practices built into organizational routines (e.g. reflective supervision)

- In organizational materials, highlight work/life balance stories
- Incorporate stress management strategies into staff and team meetings (e.g. deep breathing, mindfulness, individual coaching)

Leaders model and promote work/life balance

Most of all...foster a climate of trust, respect, and collaboration! We are better together!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=An2OaIbPSII
Social Strategies

Work on relationships, knowing one another, building trust

Make sure everyone has someone safe to talk to and process their experiences

Social improvements are
- High impact
- Accessible
- Cost effective

Social Strategies

What this can look like
- Find informal time with peers
- Take a break together or have lunch together
- Structured time
- Set aside time to share experiences and emotions resulting from work
- Assign mentor or peer through a “buddy system”
- Reflective supervision
- Increase opportunities to spend time in groups to build community
- Provide training, e.g. in STS or compassion training
- Facilitated group work to work on organization structures - e.g. routines or schedules
- Host brown bag lunches or social events after work

Individual Strategies

Self care
- Exercise
- Rest
- Healthy diet
- Time with family and friends
- Hobbies
- Massage

Activities that activate renewal processes
- Mindfulness (e.g. yoga, tai-chi, meditation)
- Hope
- Compassion
- Laughter, joy, playfulness
- Time in nature

Adapted from Boyatzis and McKee (2009)

“You can't reduce the stress, but you can increase renewal” - Boyatzis
Mother Teresa understood compassion fatigue
She wrote in her plan to her superiors that it was MANDATORY for her nuns to take an entire year off from their duties every 4-5 years to allow them to heal from the effects of their care-giving work.

Stress Reduction Techniques
There are several evidence based techniques for stress reduction, e.g.
- Diaphragmatic breathing (yoga tradition)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Jacobson, 1920s)
- Transcendental Meditation (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1950s)
- Relaxation response (Benson, 1960s)
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1970s)

Varvogli & Darviri (2011) What do they have in common?
- Mindfulness, awareness
- Breathing exercises
- Activate parasympathetic nervous system

Let's Practice
Belly breathing
Extended exhale to hack into the body’s systems of downregulation

Slowly count as you breathe
The length of your inhale, 1-2-3-4
Then, starting over, the length of your exhale, 1-2-3-4

Without striving, let the exhale extend by one, or maybe two more counts, 1-2-3-4-5-6
Get curious, maybe there is a slight pause at the end of the exhale

Take a moment to notice the experience
Let’s Practice

Mindfulness sensory activity:
- First count 5 things you can see
- Next, count 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can feel
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Take a moment to notice the experience

Body scan

Bring awareness to the physical sensations in the body.

Focus on one part of the body at a time.

Move attention from toes to the head or vice versa.

Search for ‘body scan meditation’ to find videos with guided meditations.

Alternate nostril breathing

According to the yoga tradition, alternates between upregulating (activating the sympathetic nervous system) and downregulating (activating the parasympathetic nervous system)

Use your fingers to close one nostril at a time.
Summary

• Notice your physical experience
• Interrupt the stress response
• Shift into renewal
• Commit to practice over time

Three Good Things Exercise

1. Think about the three things that have happened during the last couple of days that you are most happy about ...

2. ... and why they happened

https://youtu.be/ZOGAp9dw8Ac
Seligman on 3 good things

Self-Care

“Self-care is an ethical imperative. 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”.

Keep in Touch - Continue the Conversation

- Tweet at us with the hashtag #AKIMH2019
- @ErinKinavey
- @Raiantllc

You can also find us at raiantllc.com and reach us by email at shine@raiantllc.com.

References