Secondary Traumatic Stress: Caring for the Caregiver

Mary Mueller, LMSW
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Why Does This Matter?

- Self = Most important tool
- STS = Occupational Hazard
- Self Care = Personal Protective Equipment
- Increases ability to care for others effectively
“It’s a new anti-depressant—instead of swallowing it, you throw it at anyone who appears to be having a good time.”
Secondary Traumatic Stress

The emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Related Terms

**Compassion fatigue**, less stigmatizing way to describe secondary traumatic stress.

**Vicarious trauma**, Cognitive changes that occur after cumulative exposure to another person’s traumatic experiences.

**Burnout**, Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, & a reduced feeling of accomplishment; general occupational stress.

**Compassion satisfaction**, Positive feelings derived from competent performance as a trauma professional.
Who Is At Risk?

- Helping professionals
- Highly empathic (women)
- Prior trauma experiences (also more compassion)
- Frequent exposure
- Socially or organizationally isolated
- Inadequate training
Protective Factors

- Knowledge about STS, risk factors & self-care strategies
- Longer duration of professional experience
- Use of evidence-based practices
- Supportive work environment
Three Levels of Care

- **Personal**
  - Warning Signs
  - Self-Assessment
  - Finding Time

- **Interpersonal**
  - Warning Signs
  - Self-Assessment
  - Finding Time

- **Organizational**
  - Warning Signs
  - Self-Assessment
  - Finding Time
Personal: Warning Signs

- Hypervigilance
- Hopelessness
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Inability to listen, avoidance of clients
- Anger and cynicism
- Sleeplessness
- Fear
- Chronic exhaustion
- Physical ailments
- Minimizing
- Guilt
Personal: Self Assessment

Assessment Tools
- Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL)
- Compassion Fatigue Self-Test
- Self-Care Assessment Checklist (What About You?)
Take A Break, [iTunes store and Android app store](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp_mindfulness_coach.asp)
Personal: Finding the Time—If You Have...

- 2 Minutes
  - Breathe
  - Daydream
  - Doodle
  - Spend time with your pet

- 5 Minutes
  - Listen to music
  - Chat with a co-worker
  - Step outside for fresh air
  - Enjoy a snack; make a cup of...

- 10 Minutes
  - Write in a journal
  - Tidy your work area
  - Dance
  - Read a magazine

- 30 Minutes
  - Get a massage
  - Spend time in nature
  - Go shopping
  - Practice yoga
Interpersonal: Warning Signs

- Increased **conflict**
- **Negative feelings** when others reach out to you
- Can’t manage your relationships and work
- **Losing interest** in family rituals, routines & social activities
- Feeling **helpless** around the house
- **Avoiding** calls from friends or invitations
- Feeling **disconnected**, detached, or trapped
- **Withdrawing** and not seeking connection with others
Interpersonal: Self Assessment

Relationship Pie

Circle of Support

- Exchange: people you pay for services
- Participation: people/group you participate in
- Friendship: almost made 1st circle
- Intimacy: can’t imagine living without
Interpersonal: Finding The Time—If You Have...

- **2 Minutes**
  - Leave a message to tell someone you’re thinking of them
  - Let someone know you need to talk with them later
  - Leave a note on the fridge that says “I love you”

- **5 Minutes**
  - Mail a card or e-greeting
  - Send someone a list of dates for getting together
  - Look at pictures of family/friends

- **10 Minutes**
  - Have breakfast with family/friend
  - Research a group you may want to join
  - Talk to someone about a problem/frustration

- **30 Minutes**
  - Read/play a game with a child
  - Go for a walk with a friend
  - Cook/eat with family/friend
  - Write a letter to someone
Caring For Yourself in the Face of Difficult Work

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, energy, and compassion.

10 things to do for each day

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Do some light exercise.
4. Vary the work that you do.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Share a private joke.
9. Pray, meditate or relax.
10. Support a colleague.

For more Information see your supervisor and visit www.psychosocial.org or www.proqol.org

Beth Hudnall Stamm, Ph.D., ProQOL.org and Idaho State University
Craig Higson-Smith, M.A., South African Institute of Traumatic Stress
Amy C. Hudnall, M.A., ProQOL.org and Appalachian State University
Henry E. Stamm, Ph.D., ProQOL.org

Switching On and Off

It is your empathy for others helps you do this work. It is vital to take good care of your thoughts and feelings by monitoring how you use them. Resilient workers know how to turn their feelings off when they go on duty, but on again when they go off duty. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way they get maximum protection while working (switched off) and maximum support while resting (switched on).

Available at ProQOL.org
Organizational: Warning Signs

- High rates of turnover, absences, tardiness
- Poor communication between individuals/departments
- Increased interpersonal conflict
- Missed deadlines
- Incomplete/poor quality work
- Increased customer complaints
- Negative atmosphere/low morale
- Less motivation/energy
- Lack of psychological safety
Organizational: Self-Assessment

- Assessment Tools
  - Organization’s Stress Temperature
  - Motivation vs Frustration
  - Organizational Self Care Checklist
Take Your Organization’s Stress Temperature

- Describe how the organization looks when:
  - overwhelmed by stress
  - very busy, stressful & beginning to feel overwhelming
  - beginning to get busier and more stressful
  - calm and running smoothly
Motivation vs Frustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When...</th>
<th>What is helpful</th>
<th>What is NOT helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Busy &amp; Stressful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busier &amp; More Stressful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm &amp; Running Smoothly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizational: Finding the Time - If You Have...

- **2 Minutes**
  - Smile
  - Make coffee
  - Thank someone
  - Sign up for a training opportunity

- **5 Minutes**
  - Respond to an email
  - Talk with someone you don’t usually work with
  - Schedule a team meeting
  - Straighten up a common area

- **10 Minutes**
  - Clean up your workspace
  - Plan a celebration
  - Discuss a training opportunity with your supervisor

- **30 Minutes**
  - Have lunch with colleagues
  - Talk about burn out at a staff meeting
  - Have a “walking meeting” outside
  - Do “A Day in the Life” activity at staff meeting
Organization’s Role: Essential components to adequately address secondary traumatic stress.

- Recognize the impact of secondary trauma on the workforce.
- Recognize that exposure to trauma is a risk of the job of serving traumatized adults, children and families.
- Understand that a traumatized organization is less likely to effectively identify its clients’ past trauma or mitigate or prevent future trauma.
- Understand that trauma can shape the culture of organizations in the same way that trauma shapes the world view of individuals.
- Develop the capacity to translate trauma-related knowledge into meaningful action, policy, and improvements in practices.
Organization Prevention Strategies

- Normalize secondary traumatic stress throughout all levels of the organization
- Implement clinical workload policies and practices
- Increase the availability of opportunities for supportive professional relationships
- Provide regular trauma-informed clinical supervision that is relationally based
- Provide opportunities for behavioral health professionals to enhance their sense of autonomy and feel empowered in the organization

2015
Organization Intervention Strategies

- Strategies to evaluate secondary stress
  - Cognitive behavioral interventions
  - Mindfulness training
- Reflective supervision
- Change in job assignment or work group
- Caseload adjustment
- Gatherings following crisis; allow for voluntary, spontaneous discussions
- Referrals to EAPs or outside agencies
A FEW MORE IDEAS …
Caregiver’s Bill of Rights
(Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)

- To be respected for the work I choose to do
- To take pride in my work and know that I am making a difference
- To garner appreciation and validation for the care I give others
- To receive adequate pay for my job as a professional caregiver
- To discern my personal boundaries and have others respect my choices
- To seek assistance from others, if and when it is necessary
- To take time off to re-energize myself
- To socialize, maintain my interests, & sustain a balanced lifestyle
- To my own feelings, including negative emotions such as anger, sadness, & frustration
- To express my thoughts & feelings to appropriate people at appropriate times
- To convey hope to those in my care
- To believe those in my care will prosper in mind, body & spirits as a result of my caregiving
Trauma Stewardship

Adapted from: Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others, L. van Dernoot Lipsky

Daily Centering Practice

Creating Space for Inquiry

Why am I doing what I’m doing? Is trauma mastery a factor? Is this working for me?

Finding Balance

Engaging with our lives outside of work
Gratitude

Choosing Our Focus

Where am I putting my focus? What is my Plan B?

Building Compassion & Community

Creating a micro culture. Practicing compassion for myself and others
Attention

Intention

Attitude
Suffer less. Enjoy more. Be a better person.
Start where you are
Use what you have
Do what you can
Resources

- Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others, L. van Demoot Lipsky with C. Burk
- Your Wheel of Life, Institute for Leadership Fitness, www.instituteforleadership.com
- Caregiver’s Bill of Rights, Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, www.compassionfatigue.org
- Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL), B. Hudnall Stramm, www.proqol.org
Thank You For Your Time!

Mary Mueller, LMSW
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services
517-373-4190
muellem1@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/traumatotoxicstress