Helping the Helper

Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Trauma, and Burnout

988
SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE

Helping Professionals

- Counselors/therapist
- Social workers
- Teachers
- Medical professionals
- First responders
- Child welfare workers

Within higher education

- Student affairs professionals
- Title IX office
- Student support offices
- Faculty/professors
- Housing staff
- Advisors
- Counselors
- Even students!

Definitions

Burnout: result of “chronic work place stress” leading to fatigue, lack of energy, reduced productivity, and negative feelings towards one job

Vicarious trauma: Result of continuous exposure to traumatic experience and stories of patients/clients

Compassion Fatigue: State of exhaustion and dysfunction because of prolonged exposure to compassion stress

	Burnout	Vicarious Trauma	Compassion Fatigue
Risk Factors	**Individual**: Lack of support system, lack of work/life balance, working in a helping profession, lack of delegation **Organizational:** Unclear job expectations, Unhealthy work dynamics, lack of resources, lack or variation, high workloads	**Individual**: Prior trauma, lack of workplace support system, Avoidance of emotions **Organizational**: Lack of support after a traumatic event, Constant exposure to trauma, lack of training	**Individual:** history of burnout, History of trauma, lack of work/life balance, lack of delegation, helping profession **Organizational**: Lack of training, heavy workloads,
Symptoms	Detachment, lack of empathy, fatigue, feelings of hopelessness, difficulty regulating emotions	Intrusive thoughts, nightmares, emotional numbness, avoidance, heightened anxiety/hyperarousal	Irritability/sadness/anger, physical symptoms, numbness, feeling helpless, isolating, fatigue, less empathetic or feeling hyper sensitive

Burnout Prevention and Treatment - HelpGuide.org

The difference between stress and burnout

Causes of burnout

Dealing with burnout

Dealing with burnout tip 1: Turn to other people

Tip 2: Reframe the way you look at work

Tip 3: Reevaluate your priorities

Tip 4: Make exercise a priority

Tip 5: Support your mood and energy levels with a healthy diet

Stress vs. Burnout

Stress	Burnout
Characterized by over-engagement.	Characterized by disengagement.
Emotions are overreactive.	Emotions are blunted.
Produces urgency and hyperactivity.	Produces helplessness and hopelessness.
Loss of energy.	Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope.
Leads to anxiety disorders.	Leads to detachment and depression.
Primary damage is physical.	Primary damage is emotional.
May kill you prematurely.	May make life seem not worth living.

BURNOUT, COMPASSION FATIGUE AND VICARIOUS TRAUMA ASSESSMENT

Using the scale, indicate how these statements reflect your actions and feelings.

5 = Very often; 4 = Often; 3 = Sometimes; 2 = Occasionally; 1 = Seldom; 0 = Rarely

____ **1.** I am NOT happy and content with my work life.

____ **2.** I feel drained and exhausted from "giving" so much.

____ **3.** I am preoccupied with the traumatized stories I have heard.

____ **4.** I feel apathetic about work.

____ **5.** I feel down after working with those I help.

____ **6.** I think about traumatic experiences of a person I help too much.

____ **7.** I feel trapped by my work as a caregiver.

____ **8.** Because of my work as a caregiver I have been on edge.

____ **9.** Outside of work I avoid certain situations because they remind me of the experiences of those I work with.

____ **10.** I don't like my work anymore.

____ **11.** Because of my work as a caregiver I am exhausted.

____ **12.** I have intrusive thoughts of stories I've heard from those I'm helping.

____ **13.** I feel overwhelmed with the amount of work I have to do.

____ **14.** I wonder if I make a difference through my work.

____ **15.** I have flashbacks connected to my client.

____ **16.** I work too hard.

____ **17.** I become overwhelmed when thinking about working with certain clients.

____ **18.** I experience troubling thoughts about events of a client when I'm not working.

____ **19.** I feel I'm working more for money than for personal fulfillment.

____ **20.** I have felt trapped by my work as a caregiver.

____ **21.** I have involuntarily recalled my own traumatic experience while working with a client.

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Microsoft Word - Burnout, Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma Assessment (careinnovations.org)

Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious trauma statistics

- Between 40% and 85% of “helping professionals” develop vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and/or high rates of traumatic symptoms, according to compassion fatigue expert Francoise Mathieu (2012).
- 63% of psychologist surveyed in a study done by APA reported moderated levels of vicarious trauma in 2020.
- 2/3 of US employees say they have experienced burnout at some point
- Professionals whose caseloads consist of 60% or more clients with a significant trauma history are at increased risk of experiencing secondary trauma
- It is estimated the over half of college student affairs professionals support students through a traumatic life event on at least a monthly basis (Lynch, Jason, The cost of professional helping in higher education)

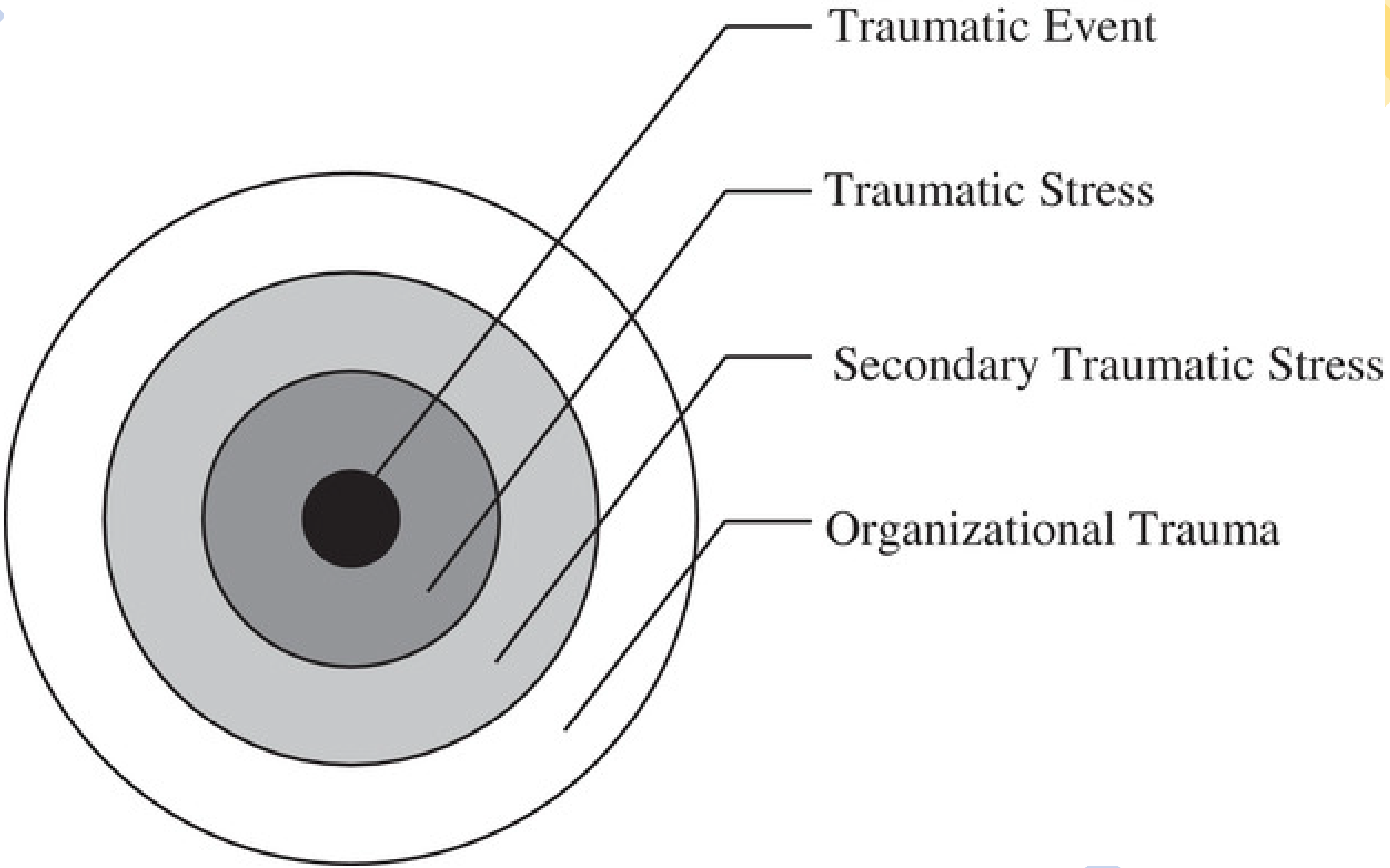
- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death
- According to the CDC the number suicide survivors is over 5.8 million in the US
- In a 2016 survey 25% of clinicians in an outpatient behavioral health setting had lost patients to suicide and clinicians who experienced a patient suicide displayed greater suicide prevention knowledge than and were more comfortable working with high risk patients
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among college students
- In 2022, 2% of college students surveyed said they had attempted suicide in the past year.[4] That's higher than reports from 2007-2021

- Professionals need support processing their grief, guidance on potential legal issues, reassurance, and their own mental health

After a client suicide or suicide attempt

- Feelings of grief, guilt, shame
- Detachment
- Loss can impact clinicians professional identify
- Diminished relationships with co-workers
- Affected ability to work with students/clients

- Student affairs professionals/counselors and other helping professions may feel a sense of responsibility to their students/clients


Traumatic Event
Traumatic Stress
Secondary Traumatic Stress
Organizational Trauma

What can you do as an individual

Recognize

Reverse

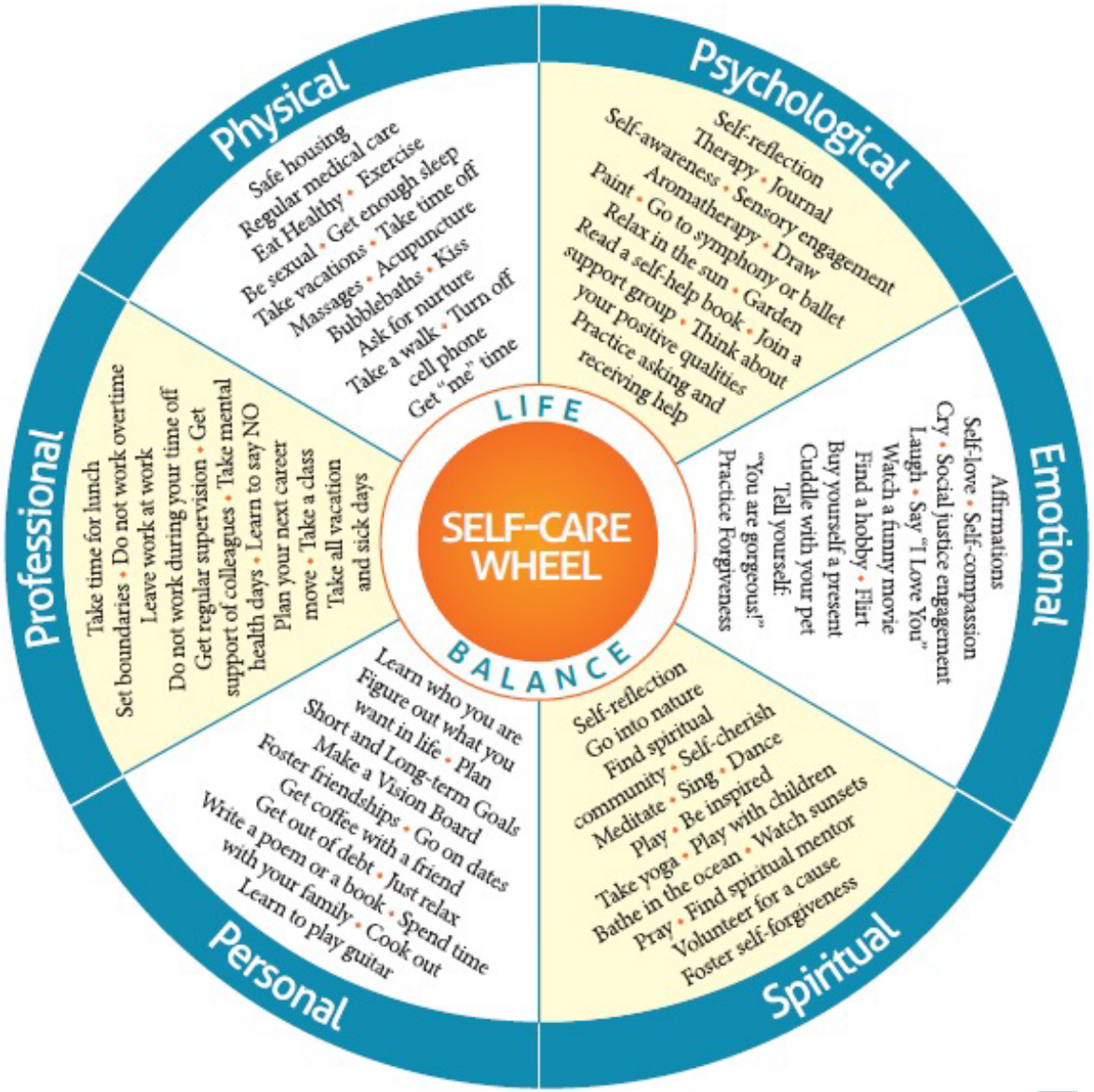
Resilience

What can you do as an individual

- Have work life balance- Take time off
- Build a strong support both inside and outside of work
- Talk to a mental health professional
- Set boundaries – It is okay to say “no”
- Learn your triggers
- Seek supervision and consultation
- Take care of physical needs

Setting boundaries

- Be honest with yourself and your supervisor about how you feel
- Asking for help or saying “no”
- Taking an intentional “pause”
- Communicate clearly
- Manage interruptions
- Delegate if possible
- Seek support
- Give yourself compassion


SELF-CARE WHEEL
LIFE
BALANCE
Physical
Safe housing
Regular medical care
Eat Healthy • Exercise
Be sexual • Get enough sleep
Take vacations • Take time off
Massages • Acupuncture
Bubblebaths • Kiss
Ask for nurture
Take a walk • Turn off cell phone
Get "me" time
Psychological
Self-reflection
Therapy • Journal
Self-awareness • Sensory engagement
Aromatherapy • Draw
Paint • Go to symphony or ballet
Relax in the sun • Garden
Read a self-help book • Join a support group • Think about your positive qualities
Practice asking and receiving help
Emotional
Affirmations
Self-love • Self-compassion
Cry • Social justice engagement
Laugh • Say "I Love You"
Watch a funny movie
Find a hobby • Flirt
Buy yourself a present
Cuddle with your pet
Tell yourself: "You are gorgeous!"
Practice Forgiveness
Spiritual
Self-reflection
Go into nature
Find spiritual community • Self-cherish
Meditate • Sing • Dance
Play • Be inspired
Take yoga • Play with children
Bathe in the ocean • Watch sunsets
Pray • Find spiritual mentor
Volunteer for a cause
Foster self-forgiveness
Personal
Learn who you are
Figure out what you want in life • Plan
Short and Long-term Goals
Make a Vision Board
Foster friendships • Go on dates
Get coffee with a friend
Get out of debt • Just relax
Write a poem or a book • Spend time with your family • Cook out
Learn to play guitar
Professional
Take time for lunch
Set boundaries • Do not work overtime
Leave work at work
Do not work during your time off
Get regular supervision • Get support of colleagues • Take mental health days • Learn to say NO
Plan your next career move • Take a class
Take all vacation and sick days

What can you do as an organization/supervisor following client suicide and/or traumatic event

- Staff debriefing post traumatic event/client Suicide
- Support staff members
- Link the staff member to an EAP program
- Modeling wellness
- Allowing flexible work schedules/time off
- Organizational leaders should assess staff wellness and crisis response

What can you do as an organization/supervisor to prevent burnout, Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue

- Open communication
- Manage workloads
- Offer opportunities for professional development
- Remind staff importance of self-care
- Clear expectorations
- Comprehensive supervision and trainings
- Create opportunity to for variety
- Create a vicarious trauma prevention plan-supervisors need to be aware of signs of trauma and educated on trauma informed practices

Psychologically safe leader assessment and planning

[Psychologically safe leader personal action planning (workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com)]

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

PROBLEM SOLVING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

SECURITY AND SAFETY

FAIRNESS AND INTEGRITY

Creating a VT organizational plan –Getting ahead

- Assess organizational strengths and needs
- Build, strengthen, and maintain collaboration with community partners
- Acknowledge Vicarious Trauma
- Educate employees of VT and be open during job interviews
- Trauma informed trainings
- Promote employee empowerment and connection
- Draft sample emails
- Provide resources to staff
- Create a safe space
    - Regular supervision
    - Acknowledge staff differences
    - Openly discus traumas

References

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