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Self Care: Preventing Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress

1/24/2022

Caregivers Also Need Care



- We are all human
- Caring for hurting individuals can be difficult, draining, exhausting and frustrating
- We all deserve a little TLC

Quote



- Yet, taught by time, my heart has learned to glow. For other's good and melt at other's woe.
 - Homer (not Simpson) 900 BC – 800 BC

Secondary Traumatic Stress



Secondary Traumatic Stress and Related Conditions: Sorting One from Another

Secondary Traumatic Stress refers to the presence of PTSD symptoms caused by at least one indirect exposure to traumatic material. Several other terms capture elements of this definition but are not all interchangeable with it.

Compassion fatigue, a less stigmatizing way to describe secondary traumatic stress, has been used interchangeably with the term.

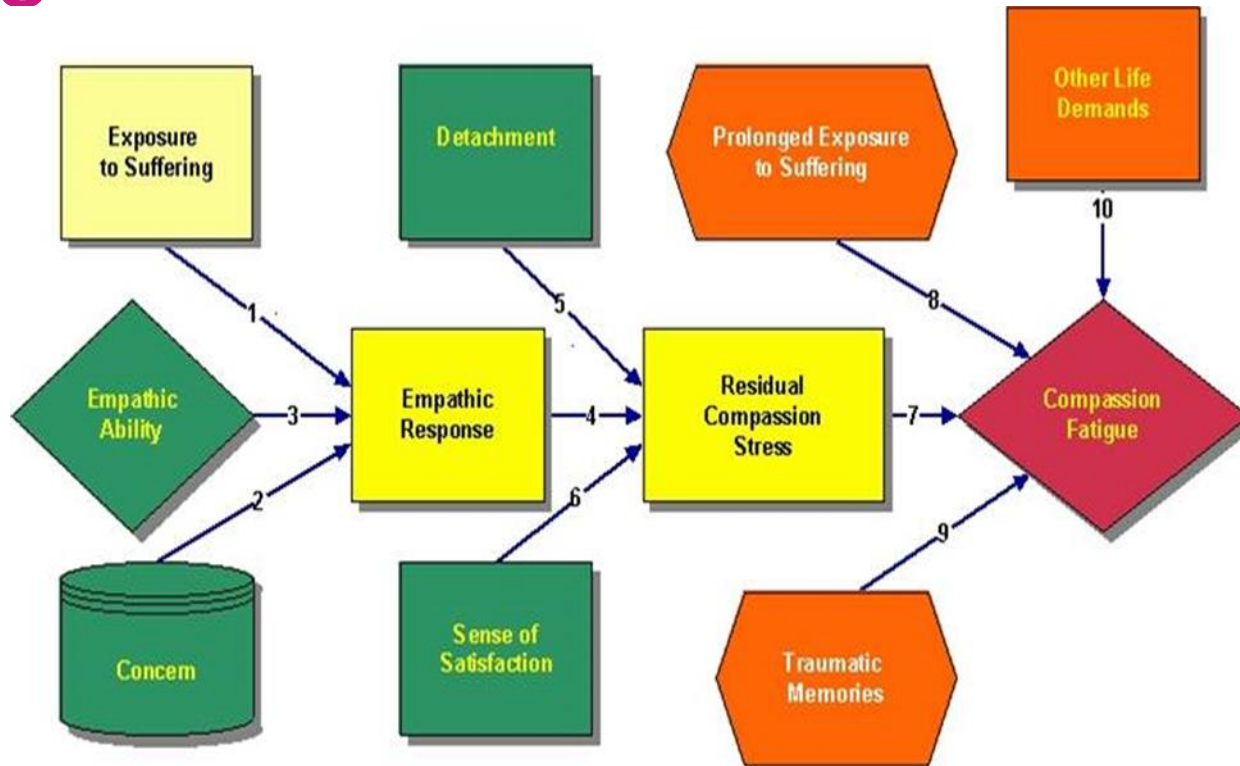
Vicarious trauma refers to changes in the inner experience of the therapist resulting from empathic engagement with a traumatized client. It is a theoretical term that focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on the covert cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person's traumatic material.

Compassion satisfaction refers to the positive feelings derived from competent performance as a trauma professionals. It is characterized by positive relationships with colleagues, and the conviction that one's work makes a meaningful contribution to clients and society.

Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced feeling of personal accomplishment. While it is also work-related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the terms is not used to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure specifically.

<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/secondary-traumatic-stress>

The Compassion Fatigue Process



The Compassion Fatigue Process (Figley, 2001)

<http://www.figleyinstitute.com/documents/Workbook>
 AMEDD, San Antonio, 2012 July 20, Rev August 2013.pdf

Compassion Fatigue: Warning Signs



- Mental and physical exhaustion
- Using alcohol, food or other substances to combat stress and comfort yourself
- Disturbed sleep
- Feeling numb and distanced from life
- Feeling less satisfied by work
- Moodiness, irritability
- Physical complaints — headaches, stomachaches

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- It is a process that can take time
- Low level, chronic clouding of caring
- Your ability to care for others decreases
- Emotional blunting whereby you react to situations differently than one would normally expect

Burnout or Compassion Fatigue?



- The stages of burnout have been identified as:
 - Enthusiasm
 - Stagnation
 - Frustration
 - Apathy

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Commonalities



- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment or meaning in work
- Mental exhaustion
- Decreased interactions with others (isolation)
- Depersonalization (symptoms disconnected from real causes)
- Physical exhaustion

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)



- Definition
 - Trauma experienced as a result of exposure to another's trauma and trauma reactions.

Stress and Exposure to Trauma



- Exposure can be through:
 - Assisting in the aftermath of a traumatic event
 - What an individual tells you or says in your presence
 - The individual's reactions to trauma reminders
 - Media coverage, case reports or other documents about the trauma

When Another's Trauma Becomes Your Own



- Exposure may cause:
 - Intrusive images
 - Nervousness or jumpiness
 - Difficulty concentrating or taking in information
 - Nightmares, insomnia
 - Emotional numbing
 - Changes in your worldview (how you see and feel about your world)
 - Feelings of hopelessness and/or helplessness
 - Anger
 - Feeling disconnected from loved ones

When Another's Trauma Becomes Your Own



- You may:
 - Lose perspective
 - Respond inappropriately or disproportionately
 - Withdraw from those in your care
 - Do anything to avoid further exposure



Self-Care Checkup

Getting Past STS - Organizational



- Clinical supervision
- Trauma case load balance
- Enhance physical safety of staff
- Incorporate STS training for staff
- Partner with STS intervention providers
- Ongoing assessment of staff risk and resiliency
- Reflective supervision
- Workplace self-care group
- Flextime scheduling

Getting Past STS - Individual



- Use supervision to address STS
- Increase self-awareness of STS
- Maintain healthy work-life balance
- Implement plans to increase personal wellness
- Use employee assistance programs
- Utilize accountability buddy system
- Practice self-care
- Stay connected
- Counseling services
- Use vacation time

Self-Care Basics



- Get enough sleep
- Eat well
- Be physically active
- Use alcohol in moderation, or not at all
- Take regular breaks from stressful activities
- Laugh every day
- Express yourself
- Let someone else take care of you

The ABC's of Prevention



- Awareness
- Balance
- Connections

Awareness



- Ability to function is interfered with or altered.
- Situation or incident does not seem “typical or ordinary,” it feels traumatic.
- “Compassion stress” breaks through normal boundaries?
- Regularly waking up tired in the morning and struggling to get to work?
- Feeling as if you are working harder but accomplishing less?
- Becoming frustrated/irritated easily?
- Losing compassion for some people while becoming over involved in others?
- Routinely feeling bored or disgusted?
- Experiencing illness, aches and pains?

Balance



- Keep balance in your life.
 - Practice excellent self-care.
 - Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion.
 - Allow yourself to take mini escapes.
 - Transform the negative impact of your work (find meaning, challenge negativity, find gratitude).
 - Get medical treatment if needed to relieve symptoms that interfere with daily functioning. Don't use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate.
 - Get professional help when needed to get back on track. We all need coaches and consultants at times.

Balance



- Balance for your soul:
 - Have quiet alone time in a calm, beautiful place; a safe retreat where you feel renewed.
 - Have an awareness of what restores and replenishes you.
 - Find ways to acknowledge loss and grief.
 - Stay clear with commitment to career goals or your personal mission.
 - Know how to focus on what you can control.
 - Look at situations as entertaining challenges and opportunities, not problems or stresses.

Balance - Exercise



- List one mini escape or diversion that worked well to restore and renew you.
- List one thing that brings you joy.
- Name three things you feel grateful for today.
- Think of something that has brought you a sense of joy (make your top ten list).
- Who do you love that you can reach out to today? (Call them!)
- What made you laugh today? (Share it!)

Find Your Passion



- We all have hidden sources of energy and healing power.
- When you identify the things that fuel you, the things that you have true passion for, your fatigue will disappear.
- Balancing your life involves putting the things that we value and have passion for in our schedule.

Connections



- Talk out your stress. Process your thoughts and reactions with someone else (coworker, therapist, clergy, friend, family, supervisor).
- Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress.
- Pets accept whatever affection you are able to give them without asking for more.
 - Pets are basically invulnerable to “provider burnout”.
 - Blood pressure and heart rate decrease when interacting with animals.

Committing to Self-Care: Make a Plan



- Maintain a balance between work and relaxation, self and others.
- Include activities that are purely for fun.
- Include a regular stress management approach:
 - Physical activity
 - Meditation
 - Yoga
 - Prayer

Committing to Self-Care: Daily



- Walk the dog
- Play with the cat
- Exercise
- Pray
- Meditate
- Read a romance novel
- Write in your journal
- Chat with your neighbors
- Deep breathe
- Listen to music in the car

Committing to Self-Care: Weekly or Monthly



- Play cards
- Go bowling
- Have a nice dinner out with your partner
- Get a manicure, pedicure, etc.
- Go out with a group of friends
- Attend a support group meeting
- Go to the movies
- Attend religious services

References



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<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/secondary-traumatic-stress>
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- Orrù G, Marzetti F, Conversano C, Vagheggini G, Miccoli M, Ciacchini R, Panait E, Gemignani A. Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout in Healthcare Workers during COVID-19 Outbreak. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2021; 18(1):337.
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Thank you!
