Dealing with Vicarious Trauma

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I gratefully acknowledge the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, for allowing us to reproduce, in part or in whole, the training entitled, Core Competencies and Skills: Self-Care. I also am appreciative to my training partner Paul Freeman for his work on this presentation.
OBJECTIVES

– Define vicarious trauma and burnout.
– List three stress-related risk factors.
– Identify three general symptom of stress.
– Identify four risk factors for stress-related conditions.
– Identify the 5 core elements of resilience.
– Identify elements of a Self-Care Plan.
– Identify strategies for Self-Care.
Definitions of Stress-Related Conditions

A. Secondary Traumatic Stress
B. Vicarious Trauma
C. Compassion Fatigue
D. Burnout
Video

Webcasts with Frank Ochberg, MD

What are the differences between Secondary PTSD, Compassion Fatigue and Caregiver Burden?

Gift From Within
A. SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

- physical and emotional stress of working with traumatized individuals.
- “a psychological phenomenon in which the caregiver experiences many of the common feelings and symptoms associated with victimization.”
- Symptoms parallel those of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

STS is often used interchangeably with vicarious trauma; however, vicarious trauma implies a more long-term stress response (not a temporary one).

B. VICARIOUS TRAUMA

"negative effects of caring about & caring for others."

It develops from empathizing with a victim in crisis. Empathy: your greatest asset and your greatest liability.

• Vicarious trauma may cause:
  • intrusive imagery, changes in meaning, beliefs, thought patterns; or
  • unpleasant and unwanted images.

Vicarious trauma is serious, because it can affect your sense of self and your world.

C. COMPASSION FATIGUE

- Compassion fatigue is: “...a state experienced by those helping people in distress... an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it is traumatizing for the helper.”
- Compassion fatigue is the result of efforts to empathize and be compassionate. Victim service provider, rather than victim, suffers. Often leads to poor self-extreme self-sacrifice.

D. BURNOUT

- Burnout is prolonged response to chronic emotional & interpersonal stressors on job.

- Burnout is reflected in:
  - Exhaustion.
  - Cynicism.
  - Ineffectiveness.

- Burnout is specifically tied to work. A form of energy depletion. “Burnout” isn't used to specifically describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure, as the other terms are.

Risk factors increase our vulnerability to stress.

> All of us are vulnerable to some extent.
> However, some of us are more vulnerable because we have more risk factors.

Understand your personal risk factors: Easier to identify what helps you to cope with stress

A. Past Victimization
B. Personal Life and Characteristics
C. Work Environment
D. Context
A. PAST VICTIMIZATION

Past victimization affects how we respond to victims. Sometimes, positive effects:

- can motivate to work for justice,
- make the world a better place,
- or yield deeper empathy for crime victims.

However, experiences may also raise unresolved issues that cloud your perspective.

Unresolved past issues might cause you to:

- avoid or over-identify with a particular victim,
- overly protective role, and
- attempt to rescue or
- make decisions for the victim.

You might also begin reliving own victimization.
Stress in other areas of life, e.g., money issues or problems at home, may increase the chances of a stress-related condition.

Social support also is vital.
- Do you have people to talk to?
- Some parts of your work may be confidential.

Your approach to work is important:
- Failing to manage boundaries,
- holding unrealistic expectations, or
- spending too much time at work…
…can increase susceptibility to stress.
C. WORK ENVIRONMENT

The nature of the work itself can create stress.
- You may hear horrible, graphic stories every day.
- Have overwhelming sense of responsibility for victims.
- Often there maybe no closure.
- May not know if we made a difference in long run.

Organizational support is critical. An agency's failure to recognize the demanding nature of this work, provide support, or give adequate time off can create a stressful agency culture.
D. CONTEXT

After experiencing crime, victims often feel insecure. Can have trouble trusting, accepting.

- Victims — those you most want to help — may react with mistrust, distance, and lack gratitude.
- That can be confusing. You may feel annoyed, angry, unappreciated or manipulated.

- You may find it stressful to interact with victims from different cultures, who don't act the way you expect.
  - They may fear police and judicial system.
  - They may even reject your assistance.
  - Can lead to frustration.

Ultimately, can be a serious stress-related condition.
GENERAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

General Symptoms of Stress-Related Conditions

- Physical
- Behavioral
- Psychological

Stress-Related Conditions Fact Sheet
PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

– Exhaustion. feeling physically drained.
– Insomnia.
– Nightmares.
– Headaches, gastrointestinal problems.
– Increased susceptibility to illness.
– Somatization - translating emotional stress into physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and gastrointestinal problems.
– Hypochondria - anxiety about real or imagined physical ailments.
BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Absenteeism from work or other activities.
- Inability to make decisions.
- Problems in personal relationships.
- Compromised care for victims.
- Overeating or undereating.
- Difficulty maintaining professional boundaries with the victim.
PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

- Isolation or distancing from family and friends; numbness.
- Negative self-image.
- Depression, anger, or irritability.
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy-empathy.
- Cynicism (the hallmark of compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization).
- Resentment.
- Dread of working with certain victims.
- Feeling of professional helplessness.
PSYCHOLOGICAL (cont’d)

- Diminished sense of enjoyment and hope.
- Intrusive imagery: finding a victims' stories intruding on your thoughts often.
- Over-identification with the victim.
- Challenging basic beliefs about safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control.
- Feeling heightened sense of vulnerability and threats against one's person.
What is Resiliency?  Resiliency is...

• **Ability to return to healthy functioning after being in a stressful situation.**
• **Power to cope with adversity to adapt to challenges or change.**
• **Way to help you manage potentially negative reactions to stress.**
• **Learned through your external supports, inner strengths, and learned skills**
• **Strengthened by developing an ongoing self-care practice.**
The Five Core Elements of Resiliency

Select each button to learn more.

- Personal Perspective and Meaning
- Self-Knowledge and Insight
- A Sense of Hope
- Strong Relationships
- Healthy Coping
1. Personal Perspective & Meaning

- Acknowledging the personal meaning you attach to your work.
- Identifying your personal points of view.
- Weighing the costs and losses of victim services work.
- Personal perspective and meaning has three components:
  - Morality & Integrity
    - Spirituality
  - Coherent Life Meaning
1. Personal Perspective & Meaning

**Morality and Integrity**

Morality and integrity means recognizing right from wrong, having low tolerance for outrageous behaviors, and developing the courage to take risks in the face of adversity. In other words, morality and integrity means knowing when something is wrong and being brave enough to correct it.

**Spirituality**

Intrinsic spirituality and religious practices have been shown to correlate with many aspects of mental health, including resiliency. Benefits of spirituality include avoidance of stressful behaviors and a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

**Coherent Life Meaning**

Coherent life meaning implies that you begin with identifying personal values, then engage in behaviors that manifest those values.
2. A Sense of Hope

Belief that situations can get better.

Having a positive outlook on the future.

Recognizing the difficult experiences of victims, yet maintaining positive view of life's challenges.

Optimism,

Humor and Fun!
2. A Sense of Hope

**Optimism**: the capacity to envision a solution. Optimistic people recognize problems & attempt to work through them. They see problems as challenges rather than catastrophes. Optimistic, happy people tend to take better care of themselves than those who are lonely or depressed. An optimistic attitude helps people live longer, have healthier lives and better relationships. Do better in on physical tasks.

- **Humor and Fun**: positive social communication tool. Allows for expression of emotion (not mean-spirited or demeaning). If you’re hopeful, you'll keep stressful situations in perspective and laugh at your own mistakes. Having fun in the workplace and in your personal life is critical to a sense of hope. Fun helps us release stress and tension.
3. Healthy Coping

– Using skills and abilities to balance the negative aspects of work with positive activities.

– Caring for your own physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs.

– Addressing negative feelings proactively

*Truthfulness, Empathy & Responsiveness.*
3. Healthy Coping

**Truthfulness:** Facing the truth & acknowledging that this work affects us at a very basic level. A willingness to see the impact it has on our personal mastery and professional well-being. We constantly challenge our theories about why things are as they are.

**Empathy:** Ability to accurately understand another's affective, cognitive, behavioral, and interactive experience. Ability to empathize is necessary for a working alliance between yourself and a victim.

**Responsiveness:** Reacting to situations in positive, timely way. Victims expect & deserve prompt assistance. Particularly important in situations that may be unpleasant or difficult. It's significantly less stressful to deal with negative events right away, rather than dwelling on them.
4. Strong Relationships

- Understand: belonging is a basic human need.

- Having positive connections with others leads to better health, more happiness, and greater satisfaction with life.

- Build personal networks of support!

Attachment to Others

Seeking and Giving Support
4. Strong Relationships

Attachment to Others: Friendships strengthen resiliency. Workloads are often so demanding that maintaining friendships at work can be difficult. It takes time, effort, and skill to develop close friendships. But it’s one of the most important things you can do for your resiliency.

Seeking and Giving Support: No matter how independent and self-sufficient you are, you will need help and support. You can’t do it all. Learn to rely on knowledge and skills of colleagues, organizations, experts. Have the courage to ask for help. Seeking support can be as simple as asking directions or asking for a ride; or as complex as a volatile situation or a complex victim issue.
5. Self-Knowledge and Insight

- Knowing who you are.
- Having a clear sense of what you believe and how you feel.
- Identifying your strengths and weaknesses - where you are successful and where you could use help.

Self-Esteem, Sense of Control & Independence
5. Self-Knowledge and Insight

Self-Esteem: Positive self-esteem means liking and respecting yourself enough so that you can focus on the needs of others, rather than on constantly seeking someone else's approval and affirmation. Positive self-esteem contributes to satisfying social relationships which, in study after study, have been shown to be crucial components of resiliency.
5. Self-Knowledge & Insight (cont’d)

**Sense of Control:** Distinguish between what you can't control and what you can. If you have a strong inner sense of control you recognize that you can affect many outcomes. Decide not to waste energy on things beyond your control and you'll have more energy to deal with problems you can control or influence.

**Independence:** Self-esteem and a sense of control, you can make independent choices and rely less on others decide for you. Even when a choice results in negative consequences, there’s power in knowing you did the best you could. Effective independence, the power to produce desired results, has been shown to contribute resiliency.
3. STRATEGIES for SELF-CARE

Elements of a Self-Care Plan

- Identify strategies for activities you do to enhance your health and well-being.
- Must be individualized: there is no "one-size-fits-all" self-care plan.
- Address all aspects of your life:
  - physical,
  - behavioral, and
  - psychological needs, balance personal & work lives.
Other Strategies for Self-Care

- Managing time
- Maintaining boundaries
- Eating right
- Exercising
MANAGING TIME

Ways of managing time:

• Track time by keeping a log.
• Establish goals.
• Plan your activities.
• Keep interruptions to a minimum.
• Keep your work area organized.
• Be selective with your reading.
• Structure appointments with victims.
• Use a planner.
MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

Maintain healthy boundaries with victims & survivors you work with. Overstepping boundaries may lead to over-involvement with victim and victim’s problems – not just those that resulted from the crime. TIPS:

• Focus on helping people achieve their outcomes.
• Reassure them: they don’t have to be a friend or confidante to receive services.
• Don’t share your personal problems.
• Share your concerns with your supervisor.
EATING RIGHT

Diet can influence your tolerance & reaction to stress. Good nutrition plus natural supplements can increase stamina and make you more resistant to stress.

- Fresh foods are best.
- Good Carbohydrates vs Bad Carbohydrates.
- Eat fruits and vegetables.
- Eat meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, yogurt, cheese. Mushrooms, beans, lentils, peas, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Eat polyunsaturated fats.
EXERCISE

Our bodies are designed to move. Built-up stress often can be relieved by physical exercise. Exercise also helps boost the immune system. It causes the release of endorphins (a body's natural feel-good hormones). The cardiovascular benefits are huge!

Getting fit does not require spending hours in a gym! A good physical fitness program includes:

- Stretching for limberness and breathing.
- Anaerobic activities to strengthen muscles & bones
- Aerobic activity strengthens cardiovascular system,
- Physical activities you enjoy — like dancing!