

Vicarious  
Trauma:  
The Cost of  
Caring

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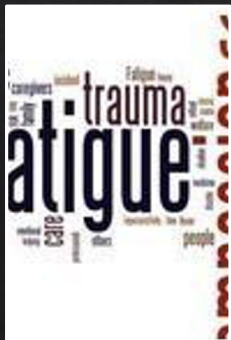
# The Cost of Caring Objectives & Goals



Goal: Better understand vicarious trauma and its effect on organizations, professional & personal lives



Goal: Use strategies & interventions to better manage your own secondary trauma & offer peer support to others in addressing secondary trauma issues



Objective: Distinguish between vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, STS, & burnout and other stress-related conditions



Objective: Understand and explain the negative affect of vicarious trauma on organizations, professional & personal lives

Key Focus

Vicarious Trauma

# Vicarious Trauma...by any other name

## Vicarious Traumatization

- Another aspect of STS
- Transformation in inner exp of the prof helper that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with traumatic material
- Changes in the professional's worldview as a result of exposure to the trauma experienced by others

## Secondary Traumatic Stress

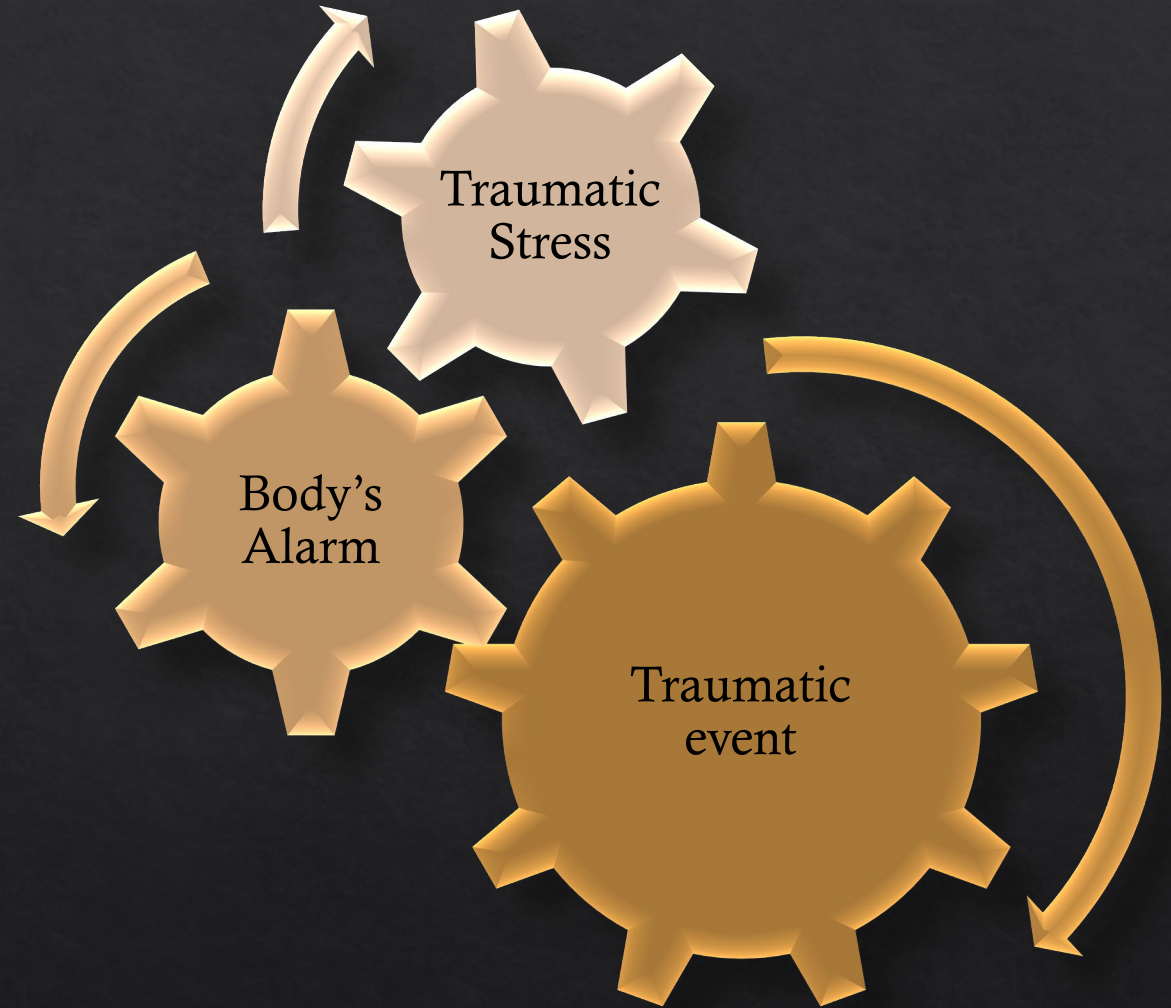
- Natural consequent behaviors & emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by another person
- When helping pros exp any of the array of human responses to trauma as a result of their work with traumatized individuals.
- STS more “treatable” than burnout

## Compassion Fatigue

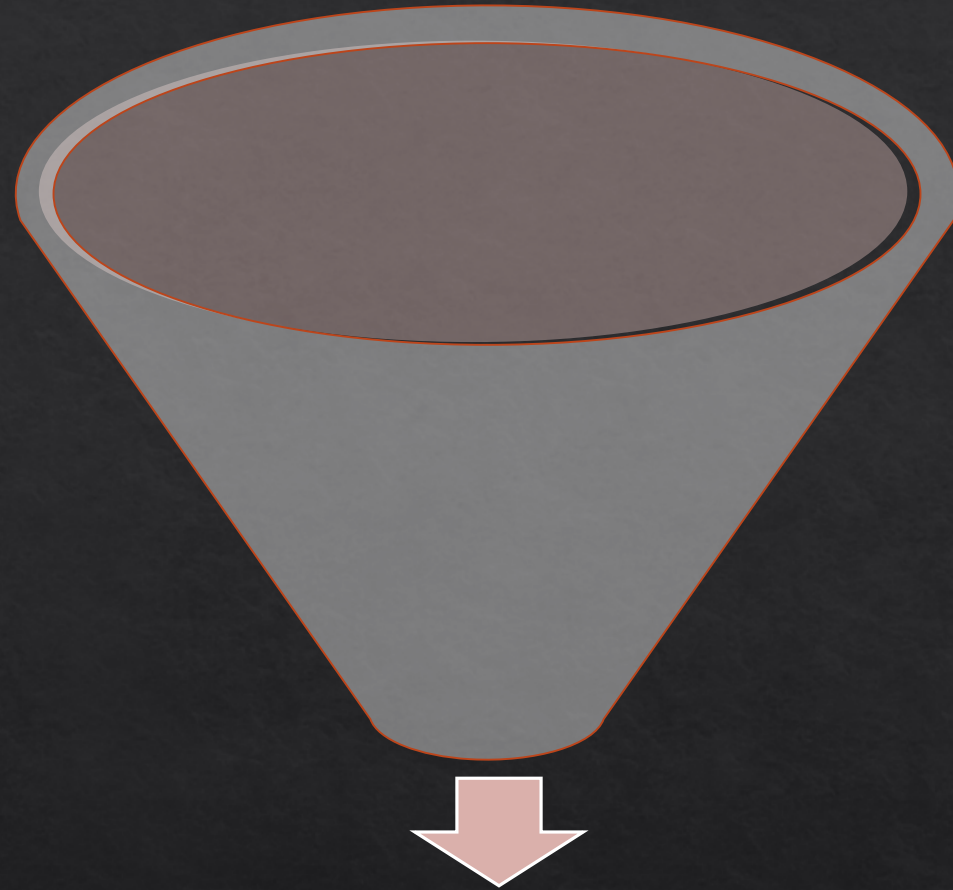
- Synonymous with STS
- Reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or bearing the suffering of others.

# Trauma Stress Reaction

Traumatic Stress: Symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or *other threat to one's well-being*



# Mode




The emotional residue of exposure that counselors have from working with people as they are hearing their trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured.

# burnout


- Not a crisis event but develops over time
- Physical, mental, & emotional exhaustion due to long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations
- Symptoms incl: negative attitudes toward work people, & life; disillusionment; inability to cope with the work environment
- From many sources that do not involve trauma. Most sources of burnout are *related to systemic issues within a work organization.*
  - Unbending rules & procedures
  - Communication problems
  - Overbearing boss
  - Insufficient resources to meet needs of those being served



# Vicarious Trauma vs Burnout



State of tension &  
preoccupation of  
stories/trauma  
experiences told by  
clients



Happens over time  
and as a buildup



Vicarious Trauma  
Symptom categories

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Re-Experiencing  
Intrusive Thoughts

---

Avoidance

---

Negative Cognition  
& Mood

---

Arousal



# STS Risk Factors



Exposure to  
traumatized  
individuals



Demographics



Trauma History



Burnout



Empathy

# Secondary Traumatic Stress Unhealthy Organizations

## Job Stress

“harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker”

Bloom Pg. 26

**YOU CAN'T  
DO A GOOD  
JOB  
IF YOUR JOB  
IS ALL YOU  
DO.**

ARTIFACT UPRISING

# Secondary Traumatic Stress

## Unhealthy Organizations

### AKA

Declining Organization

Neurotic Organization

Snakepit Organization

High Fear Organizations

### Common Features

Strong sense of degradation

Everything always falling apart

Lack of energy

Low motivation

Low morale

Disagreement on goals and standards

Individual Unhappiness & Dissatisfaction

# Secondary Traumatic Stress System stressors

Walk-in visits

Supervisor demands

Pervasive organizational uncertainty

Unsatisfactorily explained & unannounced change

Funding changes

Vicious politics

Unclear policies

No sense of organization direction

No appreciation

No feedback – good or bad

Lack of communication – up & down the chain

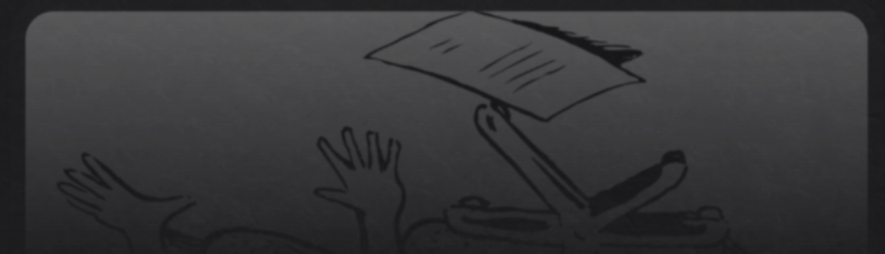
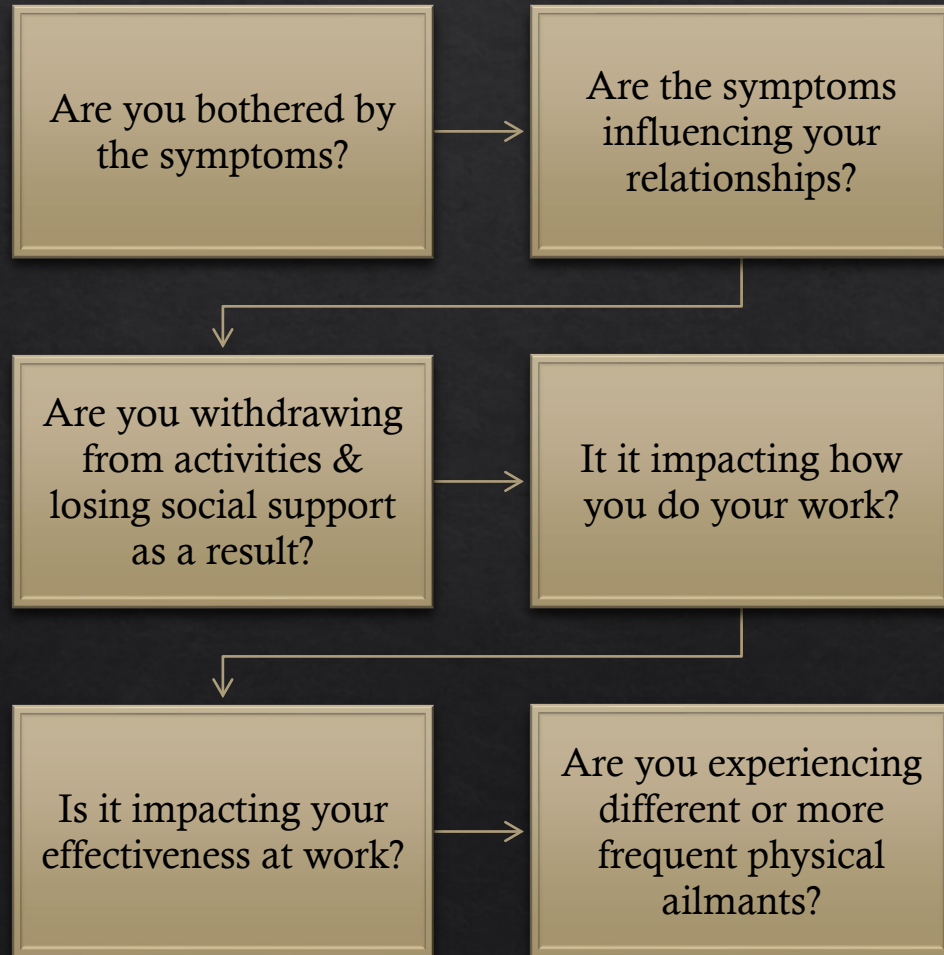
No control over participation or outcome of work

# Secondary Traumatic Stress

## Workforce impact



# Problem?



## Secondary Traumatic Stress Associated symptoms

**Cognitive:** Difficulty concentrating, obsessive thoughts; struggles with sense of trust, self-esteem, perception of safety, & control

**Behavioral:** Withdrawal, isolation, loss of interest in activities once viewed as pleasurable, increased substance use, risky behaviors, avoiding reminders of trauma

**Physical:** Somatization, frequent explained illness, weight loss and/or gain, feelings of fatigue

**Emotional:** Numbing, disconnectedness, drained, overwhelmed, anger, frustration, hopelessness



Crazy Train, No Diagnosis Needed





A

B

C

Actions of Self-Care

# Know your abc's

## Awareness

Know your own needs,  
emotions, & resources

Be aware of stress-related  
symptoms

Monitor stress symptoms  
over time

## Balance

Maintaining balance  
between personal &  
professional life

## Connection

Maintaining a connection to  
why you are doing this work  
& the rewards of the work

# Address the Stress

- ◇ Self-Care
  - ◇ Balance, limits, healthy habits, connection with others
- ◇ Nurturing activities
  - ◇ Gentleness, pleasure, comfort, relaxation play
- ◇ ESCAPE
  - ◇ Activities that allow one to forget about work
- ◇ Utilize Available Support
  - ◇ Seek education
  - ◇ Let your supervisor know when you are overwhelmed
  - ◇ Seek peer support
  - ◇ Social activities with colleagues to build connection

Self-Care is a  
priority and necessity  
- not a luxury -  
in the work that we do.