Rooted in Compassion: Self-Care for the Child Abuse Professional

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Disclosures
I have no financial relationships with any commercial interests.

Learning Objectives
Participants will...
• Define secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and trauma stewardship and mastery, and apply these terms to their own practices
• Explore their unique identity and purpose in their work, as well as their risks and reactions to secondary traumatic stress
• Learn ways for targeted self-care in the face of child abuse work
• Develop an understanding of compassion in all aspects of child abuse work, and how a compassion-based framework fosters job satisfaction, self-care, and patient care.
Compassion

**Definition**
- Compassion: Wanting to help someone who is suffering
- Look at a situation from our point of view
- Sympathy: Same, but without desire to help
- Empathy: Look at a situation from another’s point of view, inclusive of suffering and also other emotional states

**Neurobiology**
- Pathways that evolved to foster social connection
- Higher “top down” neuroprocessing
- Mirror neurons
- Release of oxytocin
- Similar to meditation
- Can be learned through training


Compassion in

**Relationships**
- Patient
- Family
- Offender
- Work environment
- Work undertakings
- Community
- Self

**Communications**
- Patients and families
- Colleagues
- Courtroom
- Media
- Self Talk
Professional Quality of Life

Compassion Fatigue

Burnout

Exhaustion

Cynicism

Inefficacy

Traumatic Experiences in One’s Work

- A deeply distressing or disturbing experience
- May or may not impact physical safety
- May or may not lead to PTSD
- The kind of experience that is hard to shake off and sticks with you
- Associated with feelings of helplessness or hopelessness

Traumatic Experiences in Child Maltreatment Work

- Witness to violent act
- Violent act toward oneself
- Can be verbal or physical
- Neighborhood exposure to extreme suffering
- Court testimony

- Witness to another’s traumatic suffering
- Review of pictures and videos
- Record review
- Debriefing venues, peer review
- Ubiquitous, affects everyone involved

Primary

Secondary
Step 1: Education and Conversation

Secondary Traumatic Stress
Risk Factors
- Empathy level
- Excessive "other-care" orientation
- Exposure severity
- High trauma caseload
- Unpredictability
- Lack of supervisory support
- Escape-avoidance coping style
- One’s own trauma history
- Personal stressors

Symptoms
Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Helpless
- Stressed
- "Drowning", too much
- Exposure criterion for PTSD

Compassion Fatigue
- Hopeless
- Exhausted and numb
- Dried up, not enough
- “Caring Burnout”
Symptoms

Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Anger or sadness
- Fear, guilt, minimizing
- Physical ailments
- Hypervigilance
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Sleep difficulty, exhaustion
- Avoidance

Compassion Fatigue
- Apathy or sadness
- Bottled up emotions, outbursts
- Persistent physical ailments
- Cynical altered world view
- Difficulty concentrating
- Recurring nightmares, flashbacks
- Isolation

Step 2: Know Yourself

Take Time with Your Own Thoughts, Feelings, Beliefs
Know Your Empathy Score
Toronto Empathy Questionnaire

https://psychologytools.com/test/toronto-empathy-questionnaire

Understand Your Stress Response

- Headaches
- GI symptoms
- Muscle tension
- Hypertension
- Cold/flu episodes
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Irritability
- Mental health symptoms (anxiety, depression)
- Hypervigilance
- Dissociation
- Inability to focus
- Overworking

Know Yourself

- Stay aware of your stress response
- Learn your triggers
- Acknowledge your symptoms of STS
- Be proactive
- Many examples in the literature involve the discovery of STS or CF after something bad happens — either a medical error or impaired health
Trauma Stewardship – A Daily Practice

Understanding Triggers and Making it a Choice

- You have a choice to...
  - Recognize your own experiences and choose how they inform your identity, strengths, and challenges
  - Seek help
  - Choose how your experiences may inform your contribution to this work
  - Be kind to yourself and not minimize your own experiences
  - Be proactive when anticipating a trigger in the workplace
  - Call on objectivity in the face of a known trigger

- Trauma Mastery
- Post-Traumatic Growth
- Resiliency
- Transformation
- Contribution

Reflect on Your Workplace

- What are the organizational contributors to your well-being?
  - Positive
  - Negative
- "The Biggies"
  - Caseload or work volume
  - Empathic attunement
  - Keeping in check
  - Professional hope and atmosphere
  - Professional health behaviors (diet, sleep, life balance)
- Is there one thing I can change?
- Is there one negative contributor that I can buffer with other steps?
Organizational Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- High absenteeism
- Changes in co-worker relationships
- Inability for teams to work well together
- Inability for staff to complete assigned tasks
- Lack of flexibility of staff
- Unhealthy competition
- Constant changes in organization’s policies
- Aggressive behaviors between co-workers or with patients
- Rumor and gossip

Organizational Resiliency Model (ORM)

- Evidence-informed program for CAC’s, CASAs, and child welfare agencies
- A strategic organizational plan whereby resiliency is woven into the organizational culture through protocols and policy, training, and supervision
  - Buy-in
  - +/- Funding
  - Starting with the hiring process and ongoing
- Organizational support for individual self-care and community wellness

Compassion Satisfaction

- Resiliency as dynamic and modifiable
- Social support
- Supportive supervision
- Use of evidence based practices - agency
- Workload and workload ratio
- Reflection for meaning and purpose
- Self care activities
Unique Purpose

- Every being has a unique purpose in this world – a life path or work that serves the world we live in.
- Understanding and living your life’s purpose serves as both an anchor and a guide.

There will never be a storm
That can wash the path from my feet
The direction from my heart,
The light from my eyes,
Or the purpose from this life.

I know that I am untouchable to the forces
As long as I have a direction, an aim, a goal:
To serve, to love, to give.

Strength lies in the magnification of the secret qualities
Of my own personality, my own character
And though I am only a messenger, I am me.

A quote by Yoga Master Swami Satyananda Saraswati
Taken from The Four Desires, R. Stryker, 2011.

List the 3 roles in which you receive the most value in your work and why:

1. ROLE
   Why is this important to you?

2. ROLE
   Why is this important to you?

3. ROLE
   Why is this important to you?

Write Your Personal Meaning Statement

Intention
- Balance my own self-care in order to show up fully present for my patients, even at times emotionally challenging in the face of abuse
- Apply medical knowledge to the best of my abilities
- Offer compassionate holistic loving care to all involved

Meaning and Purpose
In my working capacity as a child abuse pediatrician, I hope to alter the trajectory of child maltreatment, toward a path of less suffering for all involved (child, parent, offender), ultimately paving the way for opportunity for all to change and heal for a better world.
Defining Moment

- Reflect on a pivotal incident in your career that led to seeing yourself in a new way and informed "joy of practice" and purpose and meaning in your work.
- What happened?
- How did it impact your career? Your life?

Rewards of Practice:
- Made me a better person
- Made me wiser
- Increased my self-awareness
- Appreciation for human relationships
- Increased tolerance for ambiguity
- Increased capacity to enjoy life
- Felt like spiritual service
- Resulted in changes in my value system

Step 3: Targeted Self-Care

1. Stress Awareness (Target your specific stressors.)
   - Explore your organizational issues
   - Know your symptoms of STS and possible triggers
   - Know your stress response

2. Decrease stress responsivity
   - Relaxation Response

3. Adaptive Strategies
   - Thoughts and actions (Both of which change how we feel.)
Targeted Self-Care

Decrease Stress Responsivity

- Relaxation Response
  - Physiologic state that is the opposite of stress
  - Many methods
    - Relaxed passive focused attention that turns off the “inner dialogue”
    - Two steps
      - Focused repetition of sound, word, prayer, or movement
      - When thoughts come up, passively disregard and come back to the focus
- Identify what method/methods are most beneficial for you
  - Achieve an ongoing practice
  - Rewire the brain, genomic changes (8 weeks of daily RR)

Relaxation Response Methods

- Meditation
  - Single point focus (breath, word, sound, senses, walking)
  - Body scan
  - Guided imagery
  - Metta (loving kindness)
- Breath awareness
- Mindful awareness
- Yoga
- Tai chi
Step 4: Frame of Reference

Frame of Reference
- Process oriented, not outcome oriented
- One important piece of a big picture
- Explore a broader world view (macro) while at the same time acknowledge the little ways you make a difference (micro)
- Cognitive reappraisal
  - Notice your negative thoughts and reframe
  - Create a personal mantra
- Target feelings of helplessness. You can always do something.

Examples of Cognitive Distortions and Adaptive Feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distortion/Underlying Belief</th>
<th>Adaptive Feeling/Underlying Belief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All or Nothing</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Filter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimization of Magnification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Should I or Can’t</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
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</tbody>
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P. Baum, Harvard Business, NE Career in Mindbody Medicine, 2016
Step 5: Compassion in Action

Compassion in Action
- Practice trauma-informed care
- Trauma stewardship
- Fierce compassion
  - Actions taken with a positive intention to protect others
  - Compassion for your enemy, being both firm and kind
  - Ahimsa – a yoga virtue to live in non-violence
  - Those who do not live in non-violence, live in "moral abyss"
  - Rather than "hating" the enemy, practice Ahimsa in action, thought, and word
  - "Contagious"

Step 6: Compassionate Communication
Compassionate Communication

- An approach to language involving talking, gestures, and listening
- Can be applied to patients, families, colleagues, and media
- Not from a standpoint of right versus wrong, or "all good" or "all bad"
- Language that discourages static generalizations
- Understand one's unmet needs and parts, then you can have compassion for them
- Use both the left brain (decision making, EBM) and right brain (compassion and empathy)
- Try to separate the action (which is bad) from the person (who may have vulnerabilities and unmet human needs that led to the action)
- Value judgments (child abuse is bad), not moral judgments (blocks compassion)


Compassionate Communication

- With colleagues and supervisors
- Debriefing
  - Critical
  - Low Impact
  - Immediate
  - Delayed
  - On Demand
  - On Routine
- Low-Impact Debriefing
  - Fair warning
  - Consent
  - Low impact disclosure

Positive Psychology

Optimism

Humor
Self Compassion

- Think broadly about your health
- What's in good shape?
- What needs a tune-up?
- What needs major attention?

Dimensions of Personal Health

- Physical Health
- Intellectual Health
- Spiritual Health
- Emotional / Social Health

Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, 'The Resilient Practitioner.'

Self Compassion

- "Assertive Self-Care"
  - Monitor and nourish
  - How full is your cup?
  - "Disequilibrium periods" – acknowledge and do more

- "The Good Enough Practitioner"
  - Avoid maladaptive perfectionism, which is impossible. There will always be more work to do, and giving 100% all the time leads to exhaustion, burnout, and loss of creativity and growth.
**Self Compassion**

- Go all out...for yourself, for this work, for these children
- Go easy...just showing up and making this choice is remarkable
- Honor crying or showing emotion
- The work is your choice—stay self-aware

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**Self Compassion**

- Choose how you begin and end the workday (something positive, a ritual for separation)
- Keep a folder of positive feedback and micro-affirmations
- Design positive self-talk
- Choose “Renewal Pursuits” with novelty to stimulate and energize
- Do something...even in ritual or thought...avoid feelings of helplessness

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**Give Yourself Permission to Pause**

- “Two feet,” breath in; “One breath,” breath out
- Look out a window or at a picture with depth
- Place reminders
- Drink a glass of water
- Relaxation Response
- Do something slow and quiet everyday
Think Energetically

- Recharge your battery
- Job engagement (the opposite of burnout) is an energetic state
- Energetic boundaries
- Well wishes, compassionate thoughts toward another increases happiness (neuroscience) and supports agency and may impact others

Compassion for All

Loving Kindness Meditation
- Friend
  - (maybe the abused child)
- Someone of conflict
  - (maybe the perpetrator)
- Everyone
- Yourself

- May you be happy
- May you be well
- May you be safe
- May you be at peace

Being rooted in compassion

in all dimensions of one's scope of child abuse practice brings greater satisfaction, lessens suffering, and buffers that which we cannot control.
Some Resources

- L. Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009, *Trauma Stewardship: An everyday guide to caring for self while caring for others.*
- NCTSN Secondary Traumatic Stress Resources
- Relaxation Response Resources
  https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/resource/relaxation-response
  https://youtu.be/n8CsFudFLp8

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