



Supporting Investigators After Child Death Cases:

BURNOUT, COMPASSION

FATIGUE & VICARIOUS TRAUMA



PRESENTED BY

Tyler Counsil, Ed.D.
**DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR EDUCATION
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
(ZERO ABUSE PROJECT)**
CORONER, DAVIESS CO.

Learning Outcome

- **DEFINE AND DIFFERENTIATE** BETWEEN BURNOUT, COMPASSION FATIGUE, AND VICARIOUS TRAUMA.
- **IDENTIFY** THE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF THESE IMPACTS IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS.
- **UNDERSTAND** THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF UNADDRESSED TRAUMA EXPOSURE.
- **EXPLORE** INDIVIDUAL SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATING TRAUMA'S EFFECTS.
- **EXAMINE** ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES.
- **RECOGNIZE** THE IMPORTANCE OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH WITHIN OUR TEAMS AND AGENCIES.

The Spectrum of Impact:

Not All Stress is Equal

- Acute Stress
- Chronic Stress
- Distinguishing Terms: Related but Different
- Why Differentiate?
 - Prevention + Intervention



Understanding Burnout

The Exhaustion of Demands



- **Definition:** A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged or excessive stress.
- **Primary Cause:** Chronic workplace stress, workload, non-control, insufficient rewards, unfair treatment.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Emotional Exhaustion
 - Depersonalization/Cynicism
 - Reduced Personal Accomplishment
- **Impacts:** Productivity, performance.

Understanding Compassion Fatigue

The Cost of Caring

- **DEFINITION:** A DEEP PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL EXHAUSTION AND ACUTE EMOTIONAL DISTRESS DIRECTLY RESULTING FROM EXPOSURE TO TRAUMATIC STORIES AND THE DESIRE TO HELP.
- **Primary Cause: ABSORBING EMOTIONAL PAIN**
- **SYMPTOMS:**
 - EMOTIONAL NUMBNESS
 - IRRITABILITY & ANGER
 - WITHDRAWAL/ISOLATION
 - SLEEP DISTURBANCES
 - PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS
 - LOSS OF HOPE/MEANING
- **IMPACT:** IMPAIRED EMPATHY, DECREASED



Understanding Vicarious Trauma

A Shift in Worldview



- **Definition:** A profound and negative transformation in the helper's worldview and psychological functioning due to repeated empathic engagement with clients' traumatic experiences.
- **Primary Cause:** Cumulative effect of sustained exposure to trauma.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Changes in Worldview
 - Intrusive Thoughts/Images
 - Avoidance/Numbness
 - Identity Changes
- **Impact:** Impaired relationships & collaboration

Differentiating the "Big Three": Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Trauma

Feature	Burnout	Compassion Fatigue
Primary Cause	Chronic workload/organizational stress	Empathic engagement with suffering
Core Symptom	Exhaustion, reduced accomplishment	Emotional numbness, irritability
Focus	Work demands, job dissatisfaction	Emotional toll of caring
Onset	Gradual, prolonged	Can be gradual or rapid (cumulative effect)

Signs and Symptoms in Ourselves

The Red Flags



- **Emotional**
 - Persistent sadness, anger, anxiety
 - Irritability, emotional numbness
 - Loss of joy, feeling overwhelmed
- **Physical**
 - Chronic fatigue, headaches
 - Stomach issues, muscle tension
 - Sleep disturbances, weakened immune system
- **Behavioral**
 - Increased absenteeism, procrastination
 - Social isolation
 - Self-medication (alcohol/drugs), risky behavior
- **Cognitive**
 - Difficulty with decision-making, memory problems
 - Intrusive thoughts/images
 - Feeling detached, cynicism
- **Spiritual**

Signs and Symptoms in Colleagues

Observing and Supporting

- **BEHAVIORAL CHANGES**

- Increased cynicism or negativity
- Withdrawal
- Increased errors
- Frequent sick days or tardiness
- Reduced initiative or enthusiasm

- **Communication Cues**

- Frequent complaints
- Dismissing positive outcomes
- Difficulty discussing cases without distress

- **Physical Appearance**

- Appearing visibly fatigued or disheveled
- Noticeable changes in weight or grooming

- **Importance of Observation**

- Creates an environment of mutual support and early intervention.



The Impact on Work Performance & Quality

- Decreased Effectiveness
- Professional Detachment
- Decision-Making Impairment
- Interpersonal Issues
- Ethical Lapses
- Attrition



Reflection Activity

Observing and Supporting

- **INSTRUCTIONS (Individual Reflection):**

- Over the past month, have I experienced any of the emotional, physical, behavioral, or cognitive symptoms discussed?
- When was the last time I truly felt rested and recharged?
- Am I finding joy or satisfaction in my work and personal life?
- Are there specific types of cases or tasks that consistently trigger strong emotional responses for me?



Individual Self-Care Strategies: Proactive & Responsive



- Mindfulness & Presence
- Physical Well-being
- Emotional Regulation
- Setting Boundaries
- Meaning & Purpose
- Social Connection
- Limit Exposure

The Importance of Processing Critical Incidents

Debriefing:

- **PURPOSE:** TO PROCESS REACTIONS TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS, NORMALIZE RESPONSES, And provide immediate support.
- Formal Debriefings
- Informal Debriefings (Peer Support)
- Timing: Soon after incident.
- Confidentiality
- **NOT THERAPY**



Building Resilience: Individual Strategies



- Meaning-Making
- Positive Self-Talk
- Humor (Appropriate)
- Hobbies & Interests
- Spirituality/Values
- Boundaries with Media
- Professional Development



Organizational Strategies: Creating a Supportive Environment

- CULTURE OF SUPPORT
- WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT
- REGULAR SUPERVISION
- Training & Education
- Debriefing Protocols
- Peer Support Programs
- Access to EAP/Mental Health Services
- RECOGNITION & APPRECIATION



Leadership's Role in Championing Well-being



- Model Healthy Behaviors
- Open Communication
- Allocate Resources
- Advocate for Staff
- Provide Timely Feedback
- Acknowledging Impact
- Proactive Planning

The Trauma-Informed Agency

Beyond Individual Coping

- **DEFINITION:** AN ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH THAT RECOGNIZES AND RESPONDS TO THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON INDIVIDUALS AND SYSTEMS.
- KEY PRINCIPLES (SAMHSA'S):
 - SAFETY
 - TRUSTWORTHINESS & Transparency
 - Peer Support
 - Collaboration & Mutuality
 - EMPOWERMENT, VOIce & Choice
 - Issues
- **Applying to investigative/first responder Teams:**
 - Safe debriefing spaces.
 - Predictable review processes.



Experiential Activity: Designing a Team Debriefing Element



Scenario: Your CFR team has just completed a particularly complex and emotionally challenging review involving severe child abuse. You need to incorporate a structured debriefing element into your next team meeting.

Reflect:

- What are 2-3 specific questions or prompts you would use to facilitate a safe and productive debriefing?
- What ground rules would you establish for the debriefing session?
- What resources would you remind team members are available if they

When to Seek Professional

Recognizing the Need Help.

- PERSISTENT SYMPTOMS
- ESCALATING IMPACT
- Functional IMPAIRMENT
- Self-Medication
- SUicidal Ideation/Self-Harm

When in Doubt: If you're quESTIONING WHETHER YOU NEED HELP, IT'S OFTEN A SIGN TO REACH OUT.



Resources for Professional Help & Support

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Private Therapists/Counselors
- GP/Family Doctor
- Crisis Lines/Support Services:
 - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988 (call or text).
 - The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 (call), or text START to 678-678.
 - National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788.
- Professional Associations
- Online Mental Health Platforms

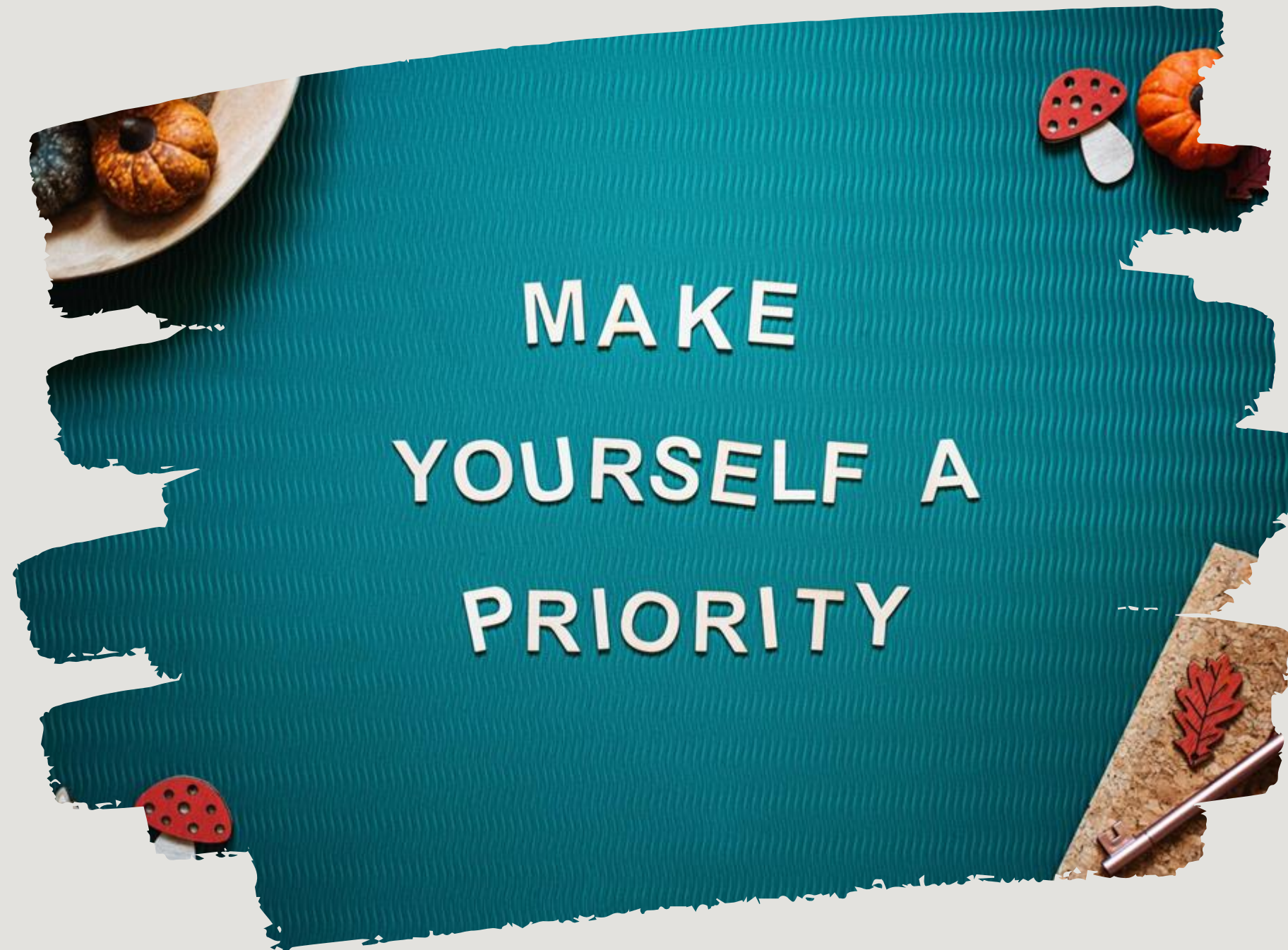


Fostering Openness & Support

- DESTIGMATIZE MENTAL HEALTH
- Regular Check-ins
- Peer Support Champions
- Share Success STORIES
- CELEBRATE SMALL WINS
- CREATE SAFE SPACES
- ZERO TOLERANCE FOR BULLYING/HARASSMENT



Ethical Responsibility: Sustaining Ourselves for Others



- Duty of Care
- Professional Integrity
- Long-Term Impact
- Role Modeling
- Preventing Future Harm
- Honoring the Child

Key Takeaways

- DIFFERENTIATE Impacts
- RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS
- ACKNOWLEDGE THE COST
- PROACTIVE SELF-CARE
- DEBRIEFING IS ESSENTIAL
- ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
- TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH
- SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP
- SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



Resources for Further Learning



- **First Responder Center for Excellence (FRCE):**
<https://firstrespondercenter.org/>
- **National First Responders Fund (NFRF):** <https://www.nfrf.org/>
- **Office for Victims of Crime: The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit (VTT):**
<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt>

Thank You!!



tylercounsel@zeroabuseproject.org

<https://zeroabuseproject.org/>

