

Beyond Burnout: The Risks of Being in the Helping Profession

COVA Conference
October 29, 2008

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Peer Assistance Services, Inc

Peer Assistance Services, Inc.

- Founded 1984 - Peer Assistance: a planned, coordinated system of colleague helping colleague to deal with a specific problem
- Dedicated to providing quality, accessible prevention and intervention services in workplaces and communities, focusing on substance abuse and related issues
- Outreach and Education

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Objectives

- Introductions
- Risks
 - Psychological
 - Physical
- Increasing Self-Awareness
- Strategies for Self-Care

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Terri Spahn Nelson, MSSW, LISW

- For persons who work with trauma survivors, the most important part of coping with the intensity of the work is to acknowledge it will affect you. If you've been trained in crisis intervention and empathic, active listening skills, this work will affect you. If you really listen to what the client is telling you, this work will affect you. Recognizing that it is "normal" to be affected by this type of work is the most important coping skill that you can give to yourself. You're not alone. It's okay to feel outraged, horrified, shocked, saddened, or vulnerable.

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Risks of Your Profession

- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout
- PTSD
- Depression
- Anxiety Disorders
- Behavioral Problems
- Relationship Disruptions
- Physical Threats of Harm
- Increased Stress
- HBP
- CV Disease
- Weight Gain/Loss
- Suicide/Death
- Substance Use Disorders

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Compassion Fatigue

- The transformation in the inner experience of the helping professional that comes about as a result of empathetic engagement with victims' trauma material.
 - Empathetic Strain
 - Vicarious/Indirect Trauma
 - Secondary Victimization
- Emotional Residue



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Burnout

- The syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, often experienced by workers in high-stress jobs.



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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

DSM Diagnosis

- Persistent re-experience of a trauma that evoked intense fear, helplessness or horror
- Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma
- Persistent symptoms of increased arousal
- Symptoms extend past 1 month
- Clinically significant distress or impairment

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Psychological Risks

- Negative consequences of hearing about others' traumatic experiences
- May persist for months or years after working with trauma survivors
- Can occur even if you LOVE your work
- Can be stronger if helper has a history of personal trauma

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Likely Contributors

- 1) Exposure to the stories (or images) of trauma victims
 - 2) Your empathic sensitivity to their suffering
 - 3) Any unresolved emotional issues that relate (affectively or symbolically) to the suffering person.
- Countertransference

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Likely Contributors

- 4) You care for others more than yourself
- 5) Your sense of responsibility to others has become out of balance
- 6) You feel you must "make it all better," fix or solve all problems for your clients
- 7) You feel you have failed when you can't "make it all better," fix or solve all problems for your clients

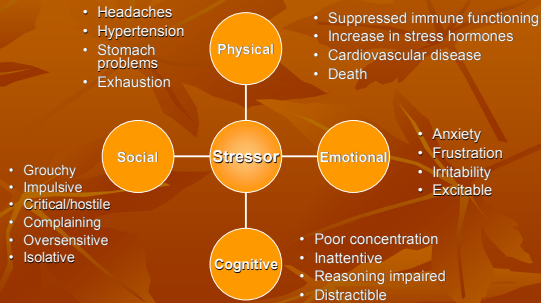
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Physical Risks

- Physical safety
- The STRESS factor
- Substance Use Disorders
- Suicide

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The Downside of Stress



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Signs of NOT Coping Well

- Changes in sleep habits (too much/little)
- Changes in eating habits
- Unable to shake off feeling blue or down
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Feeling like “it’s just not worth it”
- Feeling like “everything is hopeless”
- Difficulty concentrating, distracted or “in a fog”
- Unable to control anger, irritable over little things
- Crying a lot or “shutting down” feelings
- Fighting with family, friends and/or co-workers

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Increasing Self Awareness

- What negative consequences have you been experiencing?
- How will you recognize warning signs in the future?
- How can you help yourself?



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Is There an Upside?

- Job stress and burnout can motivate you to make changes to improve your personal and professional life
 - Increased optimism
 - Increased resiliency
 - Create better boundaries for future

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What You Should Do

1. Accept and take responsibility for what you are experiencing
2. Create a plan (or improve your plan) for self-care
3. Create accountability for following through with your plan

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Take Responsibility

- Accept your feelings
- Decide to change what you are doing to help yourself
- May or may not be as easy as pushing a button



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Change – Are You Ready?

- Change is HARD
- Change is uncomfortable
- Change can be resisted by those around you
- Successful change happens in small increments
- Change is HARD

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Create Your Plan

BE AGGRESSIVE, INTENTIONAL

- Don't go skydiving without a parachute
- Recruit help
- Learn to recognize warning signs in yourself and others

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Getting In Your Own Way

- Are you getting in your own way when it comes to self care?
- Monitor yourselves to catch the following words:
 - But
 - Can't
 - Won't
 - Never

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Effective Coping Strategies



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Less Effective Coping Strategies



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Coping Strategies: What NOT to do

DON'T engage in coping strategies that will perpetuate/intensify negative symptoms down the road

- Drinking alcohol, drugging
- Excessive spending, gambling
- Eating unhealthy foods
- Isolating from others
- Other



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Substance Use Disorders

- An estimated 10% of the general population will develop an addictive disorder in their lifetime
- Higher stress jobs have likelihood higher than 10%
- “Oops Phenomenon”
- Approximately 10% of individuals who need treatment receive it

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Substance Abuse and Women

- Women are 48% more likely to be prescribed a narcotic, anti-anxiety or potentially abusable drug
- Women who use sedatives, anti-anxiety, or hypnotics are almost twice as likely to become addicted
- Women who drink:
 - get drunk faster
 - become addicted more easily
 - develop alcohol related diseases more readily



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TAKE 2 OF THESE DAILY UNTIL YOU'RE ADDICTED.



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Alcohol Advice

- Healthy men up to age 65
 - No more than 4 drinks in a day
AND
 - No more than 14 drinks in a week
- Women (and healthy men over age 65)
 - No more than 3 drinks in a day
AND
 - No more than 7 drinks in a week

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Mental Illness

- 25% of working adults will have a mental illness ad/or substance use disorder in any given year
- Men & women in jobs with high levels of stress twice as likely to meet criteria for anxiety and depression

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Suicide

- 90% of completed suicides have mental illness and/or substance use disorder
- 2004 Data:
 - 33% Alcohol
 - 17% Opiates
 - 13% Cocaine/Amphetamine
 - 8% Marijuana

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Make Self-Care a Priority

ASK YOURSELF:

- What is fun and/or enjoyable for you?
- How can you make your environment(s) more fun/enjoyable on a day to day basis?
- How can you make your environment(s) more predictable?

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Creating Your Parachute

AT WORK

- Establish guidelines with your colleagues
- Support others
- Take BREAKS
- “Buddy-Check 9”
- EAP
- Other

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Creating Your Parachute

WITH VICTIMS

- Be self-aware of your reactions to victims
 - Anger, sadness, frustration
- Visualization
 - Bubble, One-way mirror
- Deep Breathing
- Other

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Creating Your Parachute

AT HOME

- Journaling
- Healthy Relationships
- Joyful activities/hobbies
- Sleep
- Balanced Diet
- Don't Watch/Read the News

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Creating Your Parachute

ADDITIONAL

- Keep your day as predictable as possible
- Volunteer or Teach
- Church/Community Activities
- Mentor
- Part-time Job
- Social Activism

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Build Your Resiliency

■ Optimism

- An active, empowering, constructive attitude that creates conditions for success by focusing and acting on possibilities and opportunities.
- Stay strength-based with your others/yourself.

■ Hardiness

- Actively engage and believe that you can influence the course of events in your life and accept change as a part of it.

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Combating: Accountability

MAKE A COMMITMENT

- What is one thing you are going to change today?
- How will you stay committed to that change?
- To whom will you be accountable?



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Commit to Making a Change

Life is not about living in the dark, but bringing light to it. If you give up on change, you give up on the light.

Now, why would you want to do that?

- James Downton, Jr., Ph.D.

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Resources

- www.friedsocialworker.com
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies
- www.compassionfatigue.org
- Victim Services Network
- American Psychological Association
- Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995. Trauma and the Therapist

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Thank You!!

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