



breathe

This ancient Sanskrit symbol
is a beautiful reminder
to do what comes naturally.

It's the first thing we do
when we come in to this world,
and the last thing we do
when we leave it.



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Taming Trauma

Strategies and tools for managing and mitigating vicarious and secondary trauma

Introductions

- ▶ Who we are:
 - ▶ Humans in Recovery from a lot of things
 - ▶ Trauma Survivors
 - ▶ Many peers are survivors (as are many humans)
 - ▶ Peer Supports who work in trauma rich environments
 - ▶ SUD and Mental Health
 - ▶ People who need to mitigate our own exposure to direct and secondary/vicarious trauma
 - ▶ Sharing what we do and what we have learned
 - ▶ This is not all inclusive nor is it in any way a scientific study – we are peers sharing our lived experience

Why do we care about mitigating trauma?

- ▶ As peer supports we work with people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma
 - ▶ Secondary and Vicarious trauma are a thing that happens
 - ▶ Even when we don't think so
 - ▶ Trauma Response affects us
 - ▶ Work relationships/performance
 - ▶ Personal relationships
 - ▶ Health and wellbeing

Lets do a mixer

- ▶ When you came into the room you were given a few post-it notes, we are going to use those now
 - ▶ One open ended question per note (3 notes)
 - ▶ Stand up and walk around
 - Trade questions with another person and exchange answers (one minute each)
 - Repeat

Some examples or make your own open ended questions.

- 1. Are you usually early or late?
- 2. What's your claim to fame?
- 3. Are you interested in or do you play sports?
- 4. What quirks do you have?
- 5. Do you people watch? Favorite places?
- 6. What do you hope never changes?
- 7. How different was your life one year ago?
- 8. What's the nicest thing anyone ever said about you?
- 9. What skill would you like to master?
- 10. What movie title best describes your life and why?
- 11. What is the most heartwarming thing you've ever seen?
- 12. What job would you be terrible/amazing at?
- 13. What are you absolutely determined to do?

What did you get out of that?

- ▶ Here is where we found the mixer: <https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/3-mingle>

Why did we choose a mixer?

- ▶ Science says that face to face conversation increases wellbeing and resiliency
- ▶ Experience says that when you have moved around and interacted a little with each other and us you will get more out of this experience
- ▶ Added bonus: We have a big list of open ended conversation starting questions which we will compile and share or you can take a photo
- ▶ It's fun building connections

What does trauma look like?

- ▶ How does Trauma manifest in our lives?

What is Trauma? (a definition)

- ▶ Trauma is a response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms one's ability to cope and can result in
 - ▶ Sadness/Anger/Denial/Fear/Shame
 - ▶ Nightmares/Insomnia/difficulty with relationships/emotional outburst
 - ▶ Nausea/Dizziness/Sleep problems/Changes in appetite/Headaches/Intestinal distress
 - ▶ Depression/Anxiety/SUD/DID/PTSD
- ▶ So obviously trauma affects us in a myriad of ways

What does trauma look like?

How many of you have:

- ▶ Felt a sense of relief when a peer cancels an appointment
- ▶ Experienced dread when heading to meet with a difficult peer
- ▶ Left work in a state of overwhelm/been unable to complete normal life requirements because of disturbing emotions
- ▶ Felt exhausted, even after getting enough sleep/without reason
- ▶ Episodes of random crying
- ▶ Increasing depression

That's vicarious trauma

What does trauma look like?

How many of you have:

- ▶ Found yourself “acting out” with food, spending, gambling or other addictive or destructive behaviors
- ▶ Struggling with sleeping and having nightmares
- ▶ Increased absenteeism at work
- ▶ Reduced self care/struggle with hygiene and appearance
- ▶ Increased dissatisfaction with work/company
- ▶ Emotional Instability

That's compassion fatigue

And remember...

- ▶ Secondary trauma/compassion fatigue is a normal process, it does not mean we are weak or broken. It is a result of our empathetic connections to our peers
- ▶ Our jobs often require us to hear about or even witness the traumatic and disturbing things that happen to other people
- ▶ We experience “personal moral conflict” as a matter of course especially interacting with our peers in court and medical systems
- ▶ Research has shown that the symptoms of secondary trauma can be just as real and personal as those of primary trauma, despite our not having experienced the disturbing event directly

There are lots of names for it:

- Vicarious traumatization,
- Secondary traumatic stress
- Compassion fatigue
- Countertransference
- Burnout

Each of these terms can be specifically defined to mean something a little different, for today's discussion we will not differentiate at that level, this is about what we can do to help ourselves.

Lets agree that trauma is:

- ▶ Occupational Hazard (cannot be avoided)
- ▶ A natural result of empathetic engagement with people who have experienced trauma
- ▶ Has real physical and emotional effects on each of us
- ▶ Effects our personal relationships with others
- ▶ Produces unhealthy coping mechanisms when ignored
- ▶ Creates over-identification and/or numbing out
- ▶ Causes suffering for individuals and organizations

Things to be aware of

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- ▶ Your signs and symptoms are your warning signs.
 - ▶ We have to be accountable to share our honest experiences with our supervisors and supports and identify the signs before crisis
- ▶ You can increase your resilience
 - ▶ We can build resilience into ourselves by consciously choosing to do things that calm our autonomic nervous system or soothe ourselves

What can we do?

- ▶ How can I help myself?
 - ▶ Not rocket science
 - ▶ Some of this is obvious
 - ▶ These are things we actually do

What can we do

- ▶ The solutions often lie in reducing your isolation
 - ▶ Taking a look at our life with a focus on connections and taking steps to increase connection
 - ▶ Commit to events and show up despite not wanting to
 - ▶ Managing stressful experiences in the moment with relaxation and breathing techniques
 - ▶ Guided meditation in my car
 - ▶ Making self care your number one priority
 - ▶ This sounds “no duh” but is surprisingly hard
 - ▶ We have to balance external connection and internal needs for peace

Risks and resilience

- ▶ While we do not have a solid understanding of all of the risks that contribute to vicarious trauma we can agree that they exist and that the more empathetic and compassionate our role is the deeper the effect of vicarious trauma
- ▶ Resiliency is not automatic, nor does it happen organically. It can however be fostered and developed. We are not responsible for our experience of vicarious trauma, we are however responsible for mitigating it in whatever ways we can

Metaphor for releasing trauma:

- ▶ Trauma is cumulative, it builds over time
- ▶ The experience of emotional overwhelm is similar to that of a shaken bottle of soda
 - ▶ Inside the bottle is a tremendous amount of pressure
 - ▶ If you open the cap, boom, everyone's wearing the soda
 - ▶ The safest way to release the pressure is to open and close the cap in a slow, controlled manner

How can I take care of myself

Because our bodies respond to secondary or vicarious trauma similarly as to actual trauma, we can use many of the same tools to manage it.

Mindfulness

Paying attention to our feelings

Self compassion

Physical activity

Social interaction

“Spiritual Practice”

What else?

Generally helpful info

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There is no “right” or “wrong” way to respond. We’re all different, so don’t tell yourself (or anyone else) what you should be thinking, feeling, or doing. Although there are some things that are almost always suggested

- Try to avoid obsessively reliving the traumatic event. Repetitious thinking or viewing/picturing over and over the trauma can overwhelm your nervous system, making it harder to think clearly
- It can be helpful to engage in activities that keep your mind occupied (read, watch a movie, cook, play with your kids), so you’re not dedicating all your energy and attention to the traumatic event
- Reestablish routine. There is comfort in the familiar. After trauma, getting back—as much as possible—to your normal routine, will help you minimize traumatic stress, anxiety, and hopelessness. Even if your work or school routine is disrupted, you can structure your day with regular times for eating, sleeping, spending time with family, and relaxing

Generally helpful info

- Ignoring your feelings will slow recovery. It may seem better in the moment to avoid experiencing your emotions, but they exist whether you're paying attention to them or not
- Even intense feelings will pass if you simply allow yourself to feel what you feel
- Recognize when traumatic stress becomes PTSD. If your traumatic stress symptoms don't ease up and your nervous system remains "stuck," unable to move on from the event for a prolonged period of time, you may be experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and may need to take further action for your own wellbeing

Lets talk about Mindfulness

- What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a skill

it is a focused, non judgmental awareness that we bring to the present moment, a practice of focusing ones attention on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting ones feelings thoughts and bodily sensations as they are in this moment.

- Mindfulness can be applied to anything we are doing (eating/walking/meditating/breathing)
- This can be uncomfortable when we are new at it and that's ok - start slow

Mindfulness

Mindfulness practice helps us battle brain changes caused by trauma by building new connections in our brains through meditation, body scan and conscious practice

There are mindfulness retreats and classes available, you can even find them on Youtube

Meditation link – 5 minutes

<https://youtu.be/vrgLjLAG9mY>

Self Compassion

- ▶ Compassion is a state of kindness, caring and concern for another's experience. If you look it up you will find words like empathy, understanding, consideration, gentleness and love. All things we find easy to give to others, trauma affects our ability to be compassionate towards ourselves
 - ▶ We may find it easy to focus on the negative – start with our self talk
 - ▶ Try to challenge our negative and critical thoughts (I plot myself on a bell curve)
 - ▶ Affirmations

What else can we do?

- ▶ Build in release valves
 - ▶ Work with supervisors and support persons to ensure you have time to debrief after stressful and traumatic interactions
 - ▶ Peer Support
 - ▶ Physical release/exercise/hit/throw
 - ▶ Dancing
 - ▶ Singing/Music

Your feelings are valid

- ▶ Accept your feelings (without judging them)
 - ▶ Trauma can cause difficult and surprising emotions including shock, anger and guilt and shame
 - ▶ Accepting these feelings and allowing ourselves to feel what you feel is necessary for healing
 - ▶ Give yourself time/Be patient
 - ▶ Don't force healing

Intentional Practices

- ▶ Gratitude Text Message
 - ▶ A practice I do daily to prompt me to be more positive
 - ▶ 7-10 people text daily 3 things they are grateful for, everyone shares
 - ▶ Sign up on wall

Rituals and Transitions

- This is about how we do things and move between tasks.
- We are often in high alert (full of adrenaline) and stay that way reducing our resilience
 - How do I wash my hands? Mindfully or mindlessly?
- My drive to and from work
 - Basic sensory
 - Music/singing
 - Open the windows
 - Roll them up and scream
- Breathing (inhale 4- hold 3- exhale 7 or inhale 4-hold 2-exhale 4- hold 2)

- Protect your space

How do we take care of our bodies

- ▶ Exercise and moving our bodies help us to mitigate stress and trauma
 - ▶ Exercise that is rhythmic and engages both arms and legs releases more endorphins (walking, running, swimming and dancing are great choices)
 - ▶ Boosts energy and motivation (and a little is better than none)
 - ▶ Short bursts of activity are as beneficial as one longer session (aim for 30 min a day – but start where you're at)
 - ▶ Add a mindful element to your exercise by focusing on how it feels when your feet hit the floor or the rhythm of your breath
 - ▶ Start easy (Stretch, Walk, Hokey Pokey)

How do we take care of our bodies?

- ▶ Link to Uptown Funk
- ▶ <https://youtu.be/OPf0YbXqDm0>

Within each of us is the power to heal.

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- ▶ When we hurt ourselves, our body repairs the wound seemingly without intervention. We all have this innate healing ability inside of us, we just have to remember that it is there
- ▶ Our bodies are incredible. Right now, hundreds of thousands of processes are happening within your body to keep it functioning and thriving
- ▶ All of this work needs nourishment, care and protection which is why good diet, exercise, fresh air, staying hydrated and getting enough sleep are core pieces of our recovery

What about our spirit? Our soul? Our selves?

- ▶ There are lots of belief systems and religions that tell us how to “save our souls” that isn’t what we are talking about
- ▶ For our purposes our spiritual energy is our life force – it is the energetic side of ourselves (and it needs care)

- ▶ Our spiritual energy animates our body and gives us that radiant glow or aura. We may have witnessed this in ourselves or others. It is possible at times to feel it beaming from us out into the world
- ▶ Our spiritual energy needs care, to be nourished and protected as we do our physical body, but often it is neglected or ignored. Frequently we fail to tune into our spiritual selves and really honor this energetic side of us
- ▶ If you are feeling drained despite sleeping well, if you are struggling to find the joy even though everything in your life is going well, it could be because you need to restore and replenish this spiritual energy

Other signs that you need to restore your spiritual energy may include:

- ▶ Feeling out of place or like you don't belong
- ▶ Lacking enthusiasm for your life even though you are achieving your goals
- ▶ Feeling like you lack purpose
- ▶ Wanting to feel, see and understand life on a deeper and more profound level
- ▶ Feeling constantly stressed or anxious

A powerful way to restore this spiritual energy is to send yourself healing. Anyone can do this, and here is how it works:

6 Simple Steps How To Recharge Your Spiritual Energy Using Your Hands



Step #1:

- ▶ Find a quiet place where you can be quiet and undisturbed
- ▶ Sit upright in a chair
- ▶ Close your eyes and take 5 deep breaths
 - ▶ Inhale through your nose and all the way into you belly
 - ▶ Exhale completely through your mouth

Step #2:

- ▶ Hold your hands together in prayer position and gently press your finger tips and palms together
- ▶ Bring your hands up so they touch the center of your forehead or third eye and then bring them down so they touch your heart center

Your forehead and chest area contain two powerful chakras (third eye and heart chakra) and this movement will help to activate them.

Step #3:

- ▶ Now, gently begin rubbing your hands together until you have generated some heat. (12 seconds)
- ▶ Place your right hand over your heart center and your left hand over your belly button.

These are powerful chakras that will be recharged through your own hands.

Step #4:

- ▶ Keeping your eyes closed, visualize healing white light being sent out of your hands into your body
- ▶ See the nourishing light flowing into your body healing, restoring and recharging all of your energy centers
- ▶ Visualize the light going down to the tips of your toes and up to the very top of your head
- ▶ Visualize the white light radiating from your body and forming a protective glow all around you.

Step #5:

- ▶ When you feel that you have received enough white light energy
- ▶ Open your eyes and gently shake your hands
- ▶ Stand and take another deep breath
- ▶ Gently shake out your body to get your blood moving

Step #6:

- ▶ As soon as you can, drink a big glass of water and be sure to stay hydrated for the rest of the day

This is a quick and easy way to send healing energy to your body and will help to instantly recharge your energy.

You can find this exercise at:

<https://consciousreminder.com/2017/10/11/6-simple-steps-recharge-spiritual-energy-using-hands/>

We cant do this (recovery) alone

Trauma can cause us to withdraw, connecting with others is vital to our recovery.

- Reach out – the simple act of talking face to face with another human can trigger stress fighting hormones
 - This does not have to be trauma related, comfort comes from doing normal things (have tea or lunch, take a walk)
- Expand your social network
 - take advantage of support groups, church gatherings, community organizations and other meet-ups
- Join a club or even an online support group
 - The club or group doesn't have to be a perfect fit, try a few on

Goals of trauma recovery

Improve your quality of life on a daily basis.

Avoid Burnout

Feel Better

Have peace

Recovery of all kinds is non-linear

Small steps are ok and progress is enough

In the end its about how we live

- ▶ I do a drum circle 6-8 times a year at my place and I go to many others
- ▶ Weekly dinner with friends
- ▶ Gratitude practice

- ▶ I ride my motorcycle with my partner pup Samson
- ▶ Motor cycle club
bicycle club
- ▶ Smile just to smile
- ▶ Treat myself to the movies, or quiet time, dance around the house with my dog

- ▶ We both participate in some recovery support groups

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“Everyone has a right to have a present and future that are not completely dominated and dictated by the past” Karen Saakvitne

Everyone struggles in life at one time or another, and life's journey has many ups and downs, twists and turns. Life is never a straight and even path and may require the occasional detour to get to where we want to be in life. Whether you have experienced traumatic events or not, and most of us have, we all experience times when we doubt ourselves, are fearful, uncertain and feel inadequate. This is part of being human. Trauma can affect our mental health but it doesn't mean we are crazy, sick or ill. Remember, trauma is an injury that happens to us.

Never forget how far you've come. Everything you have gotten through. All the times you have pushed on even when you felt you couldn't. All the mornings you got out of bed no matter how hard it was. All the times you wanted to give up but you got through another day. Never forget how much strength you have developed along the way.

