Supporting the Team: Mitigating Vicarious Trauma Among Treatment Team Members

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# Disclosure

Learning Objectives

- Explain the impact on treatment team members from the repeated exposure to the trauma experienced by clients

- State the essential principles and practices of a trauma-informed court and the benefits for team member wellbeing, retention, and workplace culture

- Determine means of mitigating vicarious trauma, promoting self-care and resilience and creating organization change
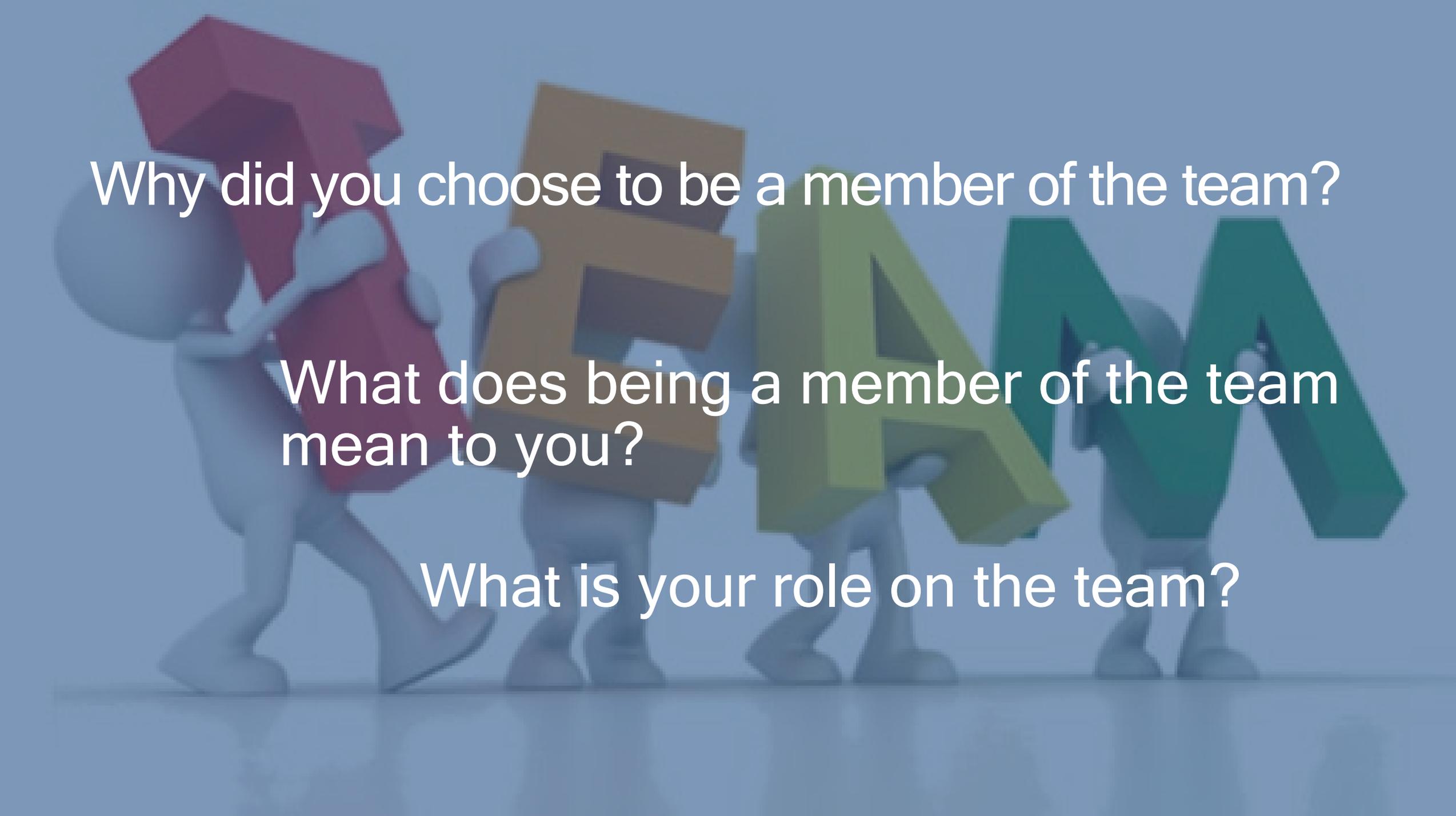
Why did you choose to be a member of the team?

What does being a member of the team mean to you?

What is your role on the team?
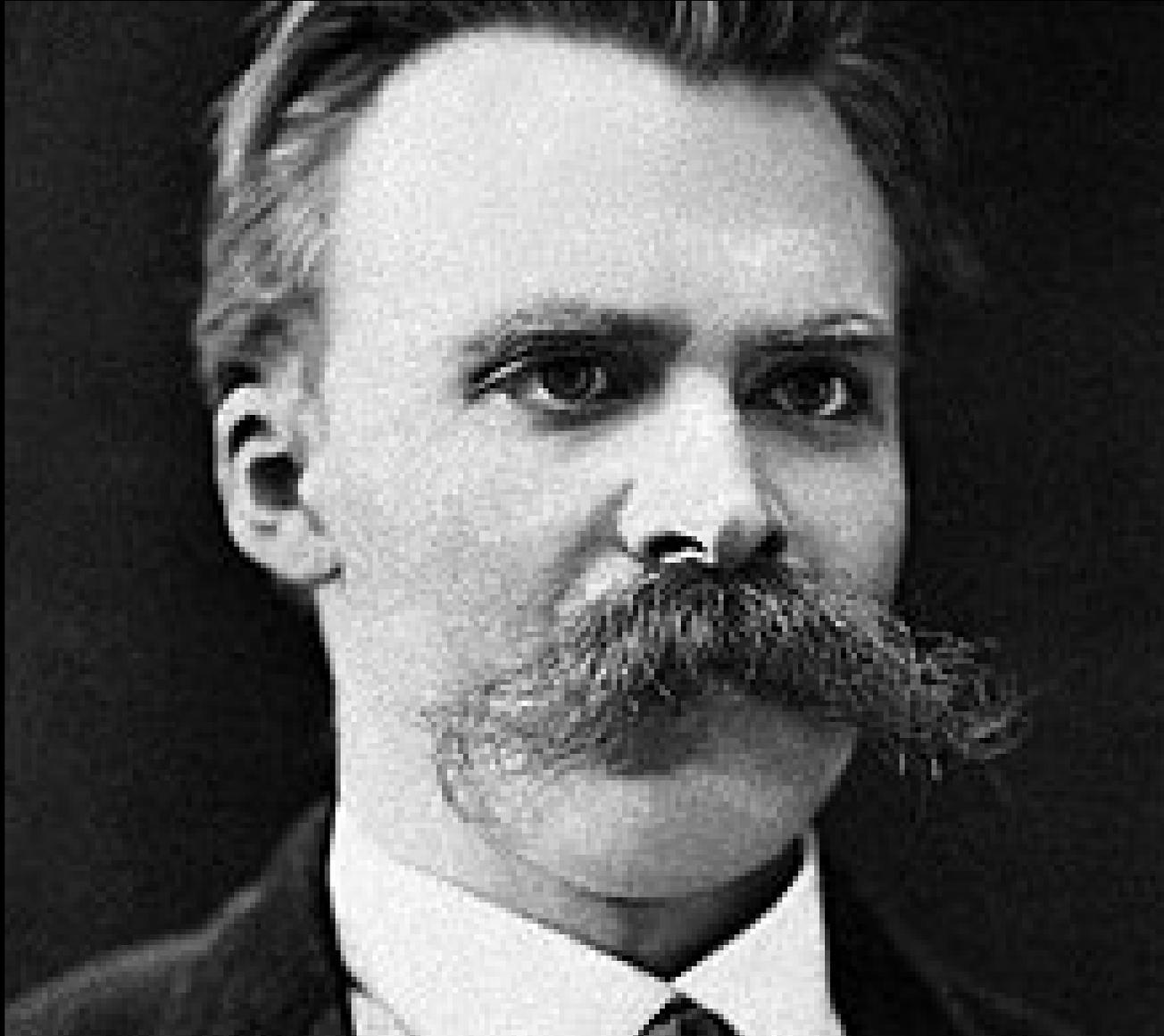
"What Does Not Kill Us, Makes Us Stronger"

Friedrich Nietzsche

What is trauma?

- ✓ Experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions
- ✓ Can be a single event, multiple events, or series of circumstances
- ✓ Experienced as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening
- ✓ Results in lasting effects on the individual's physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being

Traumatic Events

Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence

Direct experiences or witnessed events, or learning that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or friend

The event must have been violent or accidental

Removal from the home, even if in the child's best interests

For children, being harmed, neglected or abandoned by the people who are supposed to love you

Types of Trauma

Complex

Pervasive impact of exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events

Secondary

Results from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences

Vicarious

Associated with secondary trauma and changes one's world view and sense of self; the cumulative effect of exposure to another's trauma affecting one's own personal life
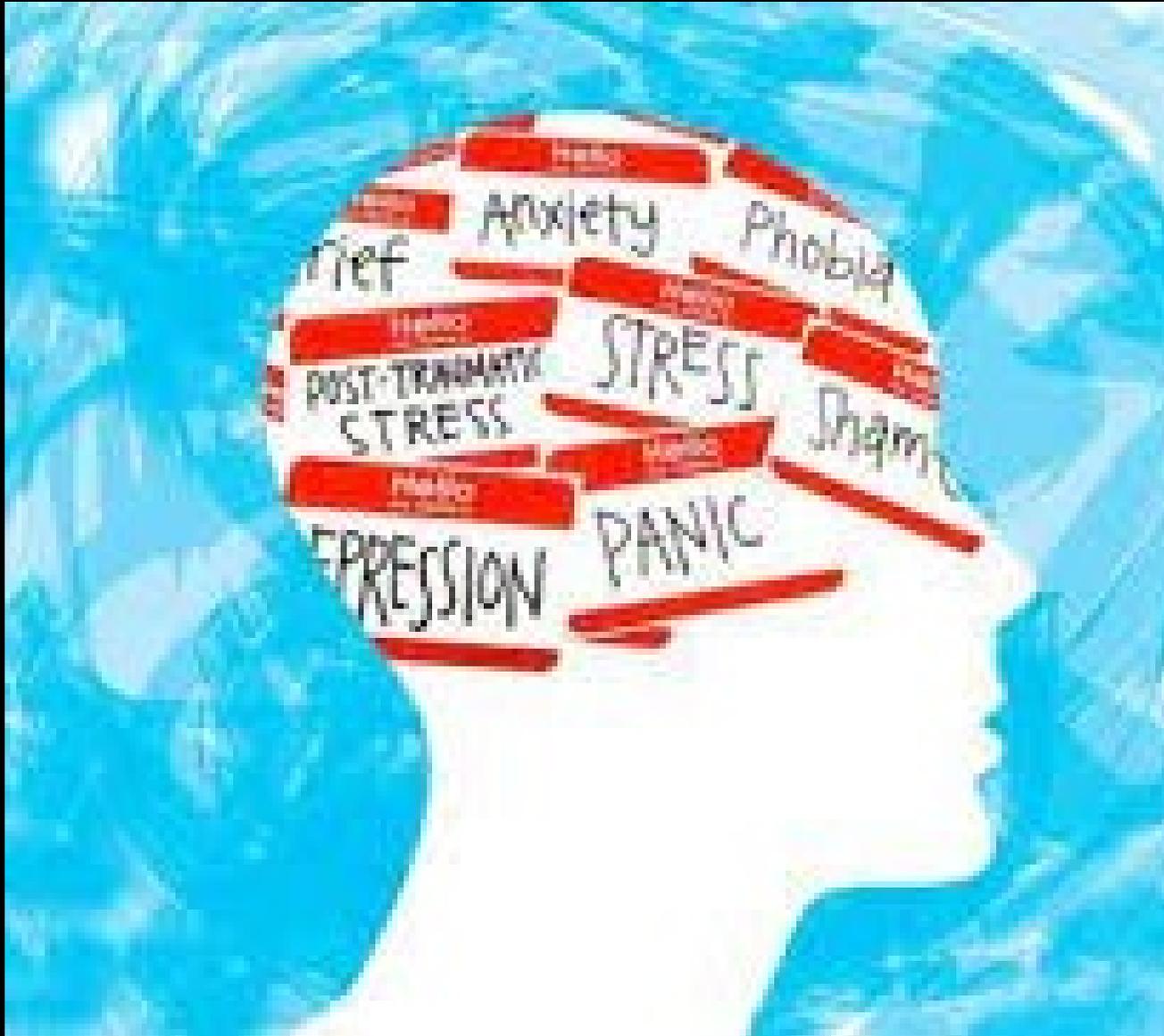
Trauma Among Recovery Court Participants

90% of drug court participants experienced trauma incident exposure

Among women, 20% meet PTSD criteria and another 71% had trauma exposure without PTSD

Trauma associated with prostitution and homelessness in this high-risk population, even in the absence of PTSD
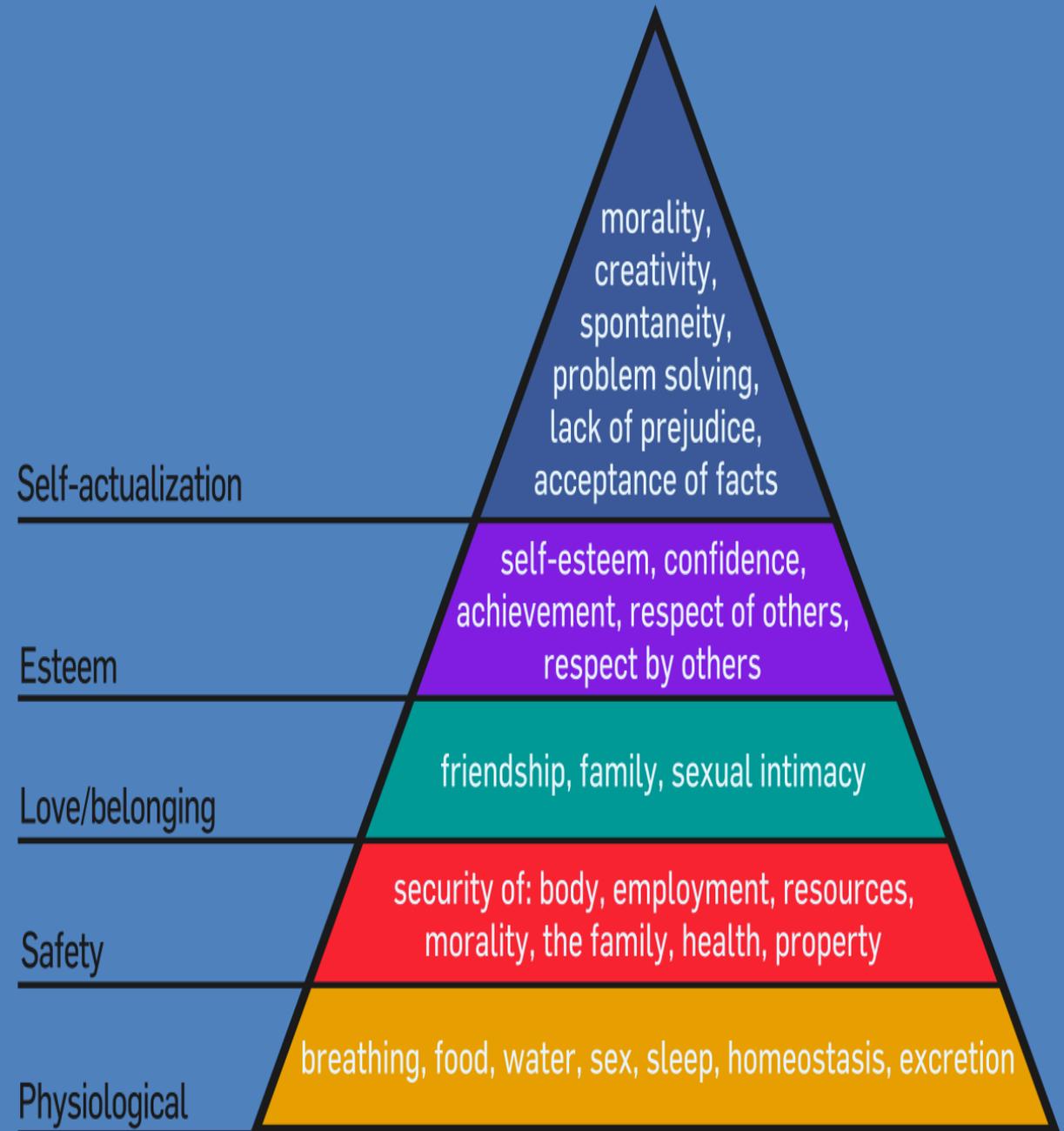
Trauma & Brain Development

Reptilian Brain ●
Limbic System ●
Neocortex ●

Typical Development

- Cognition
- Social/ Emotional
- Regulation
- Survival

Developmental Trauma

- Cognition
- Social/ Emotional
- Regulation
- Survival
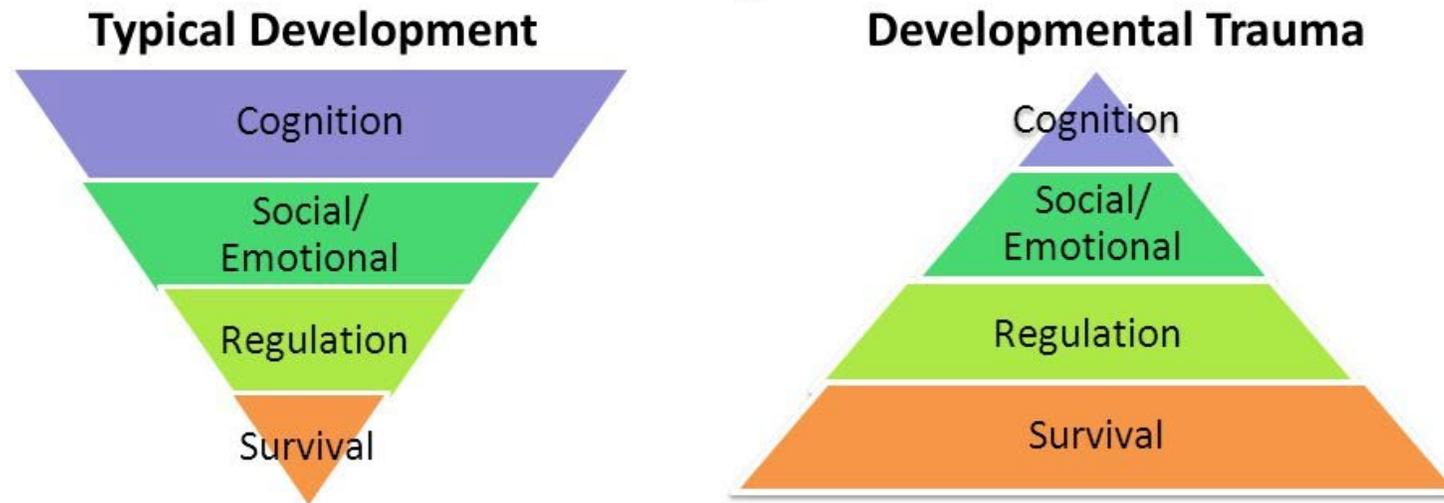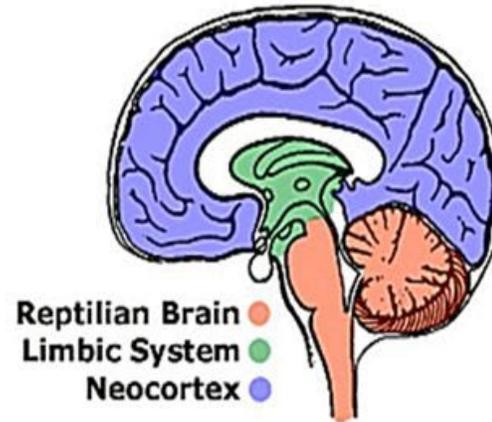
Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Trauma –
not just a
past event

TRAUMA CYCLE RESOLVED

Trauma → Fight/Flight/Freeze → Overwhelmed → Resolution → No Lasting Effects

Dr. Carin Mizera

Trauma Cycle Unresolved

Trauma → Fight/Flight/Freeze → Overwhelmed → Resolution → No lasting negative effects

Overwhelmed → Unresolved → Coping → Trigger - F/F/F - Overwhelmed - Coping Cycle

Dr. Carin Mizera

ANATOMY OF FEAR
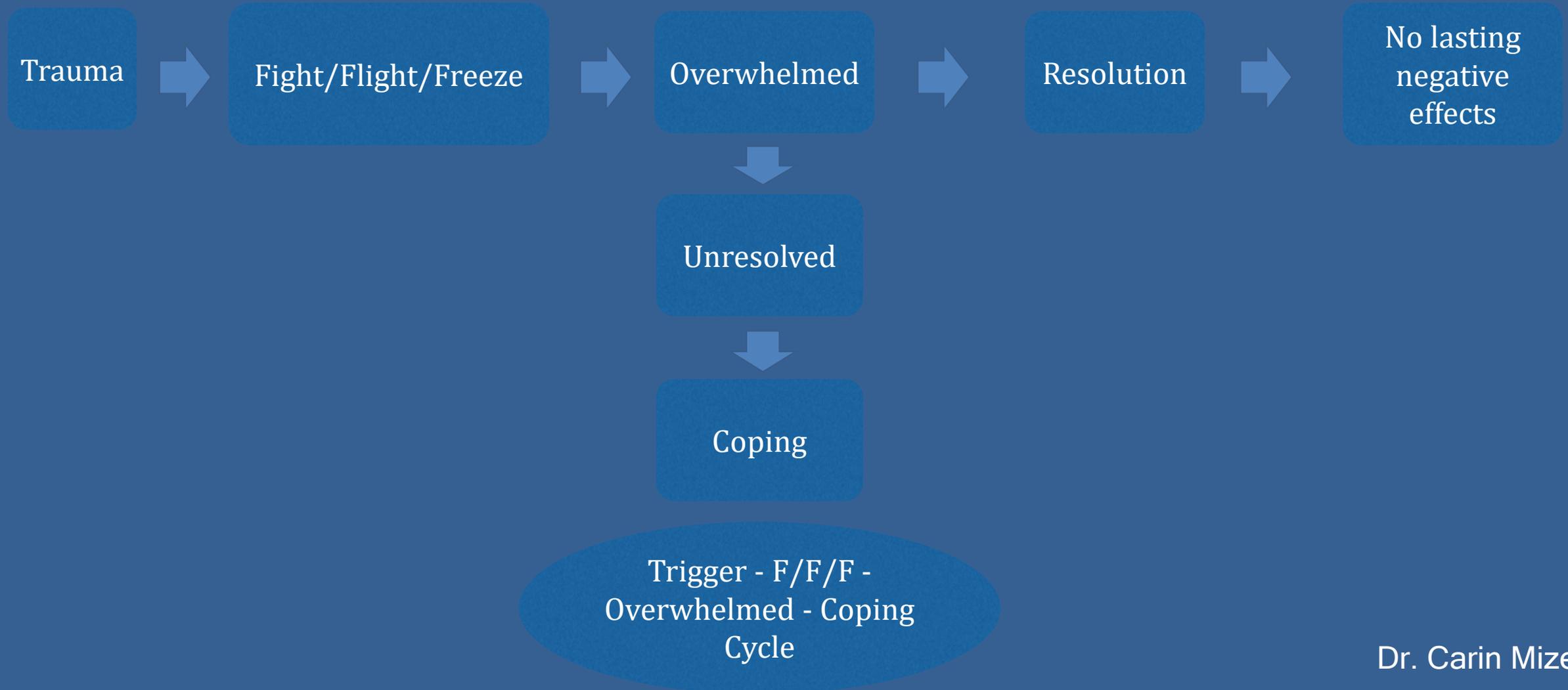
HIPPOCAMPUS: Cements the response to the threat into long-term memory

PUPILS: Dilate, ready to relay signs of danger to the visual thalamus

SALIVA: Decreases as digestive system slows

THYROID GLAND: Raises resting metabolic rate

LUNG: Bronchioles dilate, taking in more oxygen

HAIR: Stands on end

AMYGDALA: Directs central and autonomic nervous systems to trigger an all-systems alarm; also stores memory of threat

HYPOTHALAMUS: Incorporates signals from organs, triggers pituitary gland and nervous system, causing the body's major organ systems to prepare for action

HEART: Blood pressure and heart rate spike, infusing brain and muscles with ready fuel

PITUITARY GLAND: Produces thyrotropin and adrenocorticotropin, calling the thyroid and adrenal system into action

SKIN: Vessels constrict, causing chills and sweat

Within seconds of perceiving a threat, the primitive amygdala sounds a general alarm. The adrenal system promptly floods the body with adrenaline and stress hormones. Nonessential physiological processes switch off. Digestion stops, skin chills, and blood is diverted into muscles in preparation for a burst of emergency action. Breathing quickens, the heart races, and blood pressure skyrockets, infusing the body with oxygen while the liver releases glucose for quick fuel. The entire body is suddenly in a state of high alert, ready for fight or flight.

—J. S.

LIVER: Begins to break down glycogen for instant energy to keep up with higher metabolic rate

SPLEEN: Contracts, pumping out white blood cells and platelets in preparation for possible physical injury

STOMACH AND GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT: Vessels constrict to divert blood to muscles

BLADDER AND COLON: Prepare to void their contents in preparation for violent action and possible injury

ADRENAL MEDULLA: Floods bloodstream with adrenaline and noradrenaline, increasing the level of blood sugar and constricting blood vessels

Setting the stage for change

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (CDC, 2013)

The Women, Co-Occurring Disorders and Violence Study (SAMHSA, 2007)

ACE Study
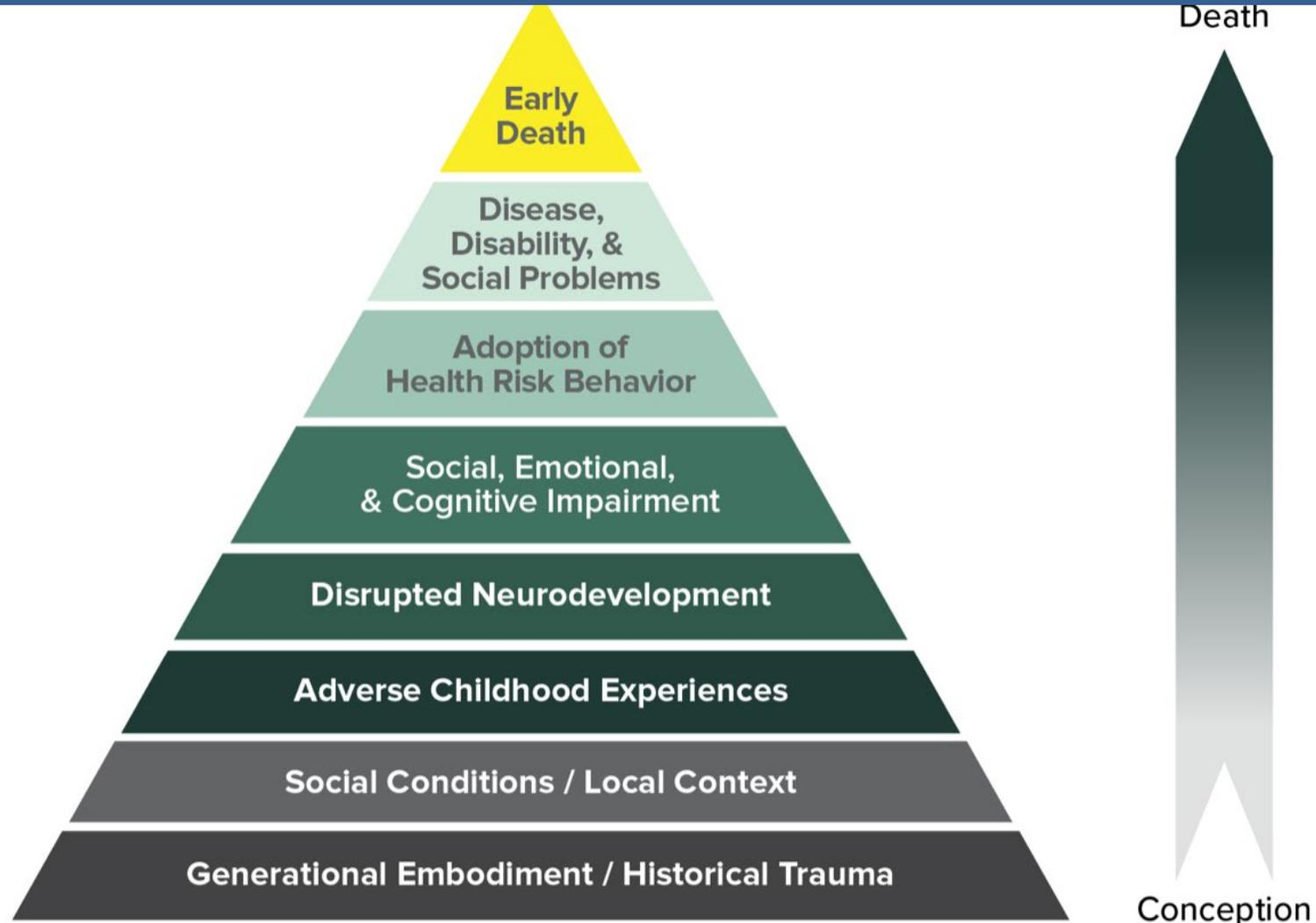
Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

Childhood Trauma The ACE Questionnaire

✓Ten questions; one point assigned to each positive response

✓High score dramatically increases risk of substance use and prevalence of hallucinations

✓For every identified negative event, 35-144% increase in risk of violence among males

✓High score predictive of risk of future homelessness

Three Levels of Trauma Work

Trauma-informed – things we all need to know

Trauma-responsive – what we need to do (policy, practices, environment)

Trauma-specific – the services we need to provide

Underlying Principles: A Trauma-informed Approach

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment
- Resilience and Strength-based
- Cultural, historical and gender issues
- Voice and choice

SAMHSA, 2018

Problem-Solving Courts

Engage in a team approach

Nature of the work involves problem-solving

Problem-solving involves empathic listening

Empathic listening involves potentially hearing about traumatic experiences

Exposure to traumatic experiences of others contributes to vicarious trauma

Vicarious trauma affects the quality of service provided – deterioration in provider decision-making and service delivery

Thus, to be effective for clients and the team, the team must address vicarious trauma

Is your team trauma-informed?

"Once our courtroom team participated in trauma training, we questioned all our routine practices. We communicated more respectfully and effectively, and we began to be much more individualized in our approach to each case."

Treatment Court Judge

Moving from Trauma Inducing to Trauma Reducing

Trauma Organized System

Reactive

Avoiding/Numbing

Fragmented

Authoritarian leadership

Us vs. Them

Reliving/Retelling

Trauma Informed

Shared language

Foundational understanding of trauma and healing

Understanding racial disparities, sociocultural trauma and cultural humility and equity practices

Healing Organization

- Reflective
- Collaborative
- Culture of learning
- Making a meaning out of the past
- Growth and prevention oriented
- Relational leadership

Trauma-Informed Care

A collaborative relationship between client and provider

Both client and provider are assumed to have valid and valuable input as manifested through mutual respect.

Client is actively involved in planning services

Safety both psychological and physical is guaranteed

Trust is developed over time

Understanding the Role and Effect of Trauma

Trauma-informed approach to treatment

✓Universal trauma assessment

✓Development of crisis/safety plans

✓Understanding triggers

✓Assist in managing emotions

Vicarious Trauma

"The very act of being compassionate and empathic extracts a cost under most circumstances. In our effort to view the world from the perspective of the suffering we suffer. The meaning of compassion is to bear suffering. Compassion fatigue, like any other kind of fatigue reduces our capacity or our interest in bearing the suffering of others."

Charles Figley, 2002

- Effectiveness of caregiving is strongly influenced by expressions of authenticity, positive regard, and empathy

- The more empathic the caregiver, the more likely the caregiver is to internalize the client's trauma
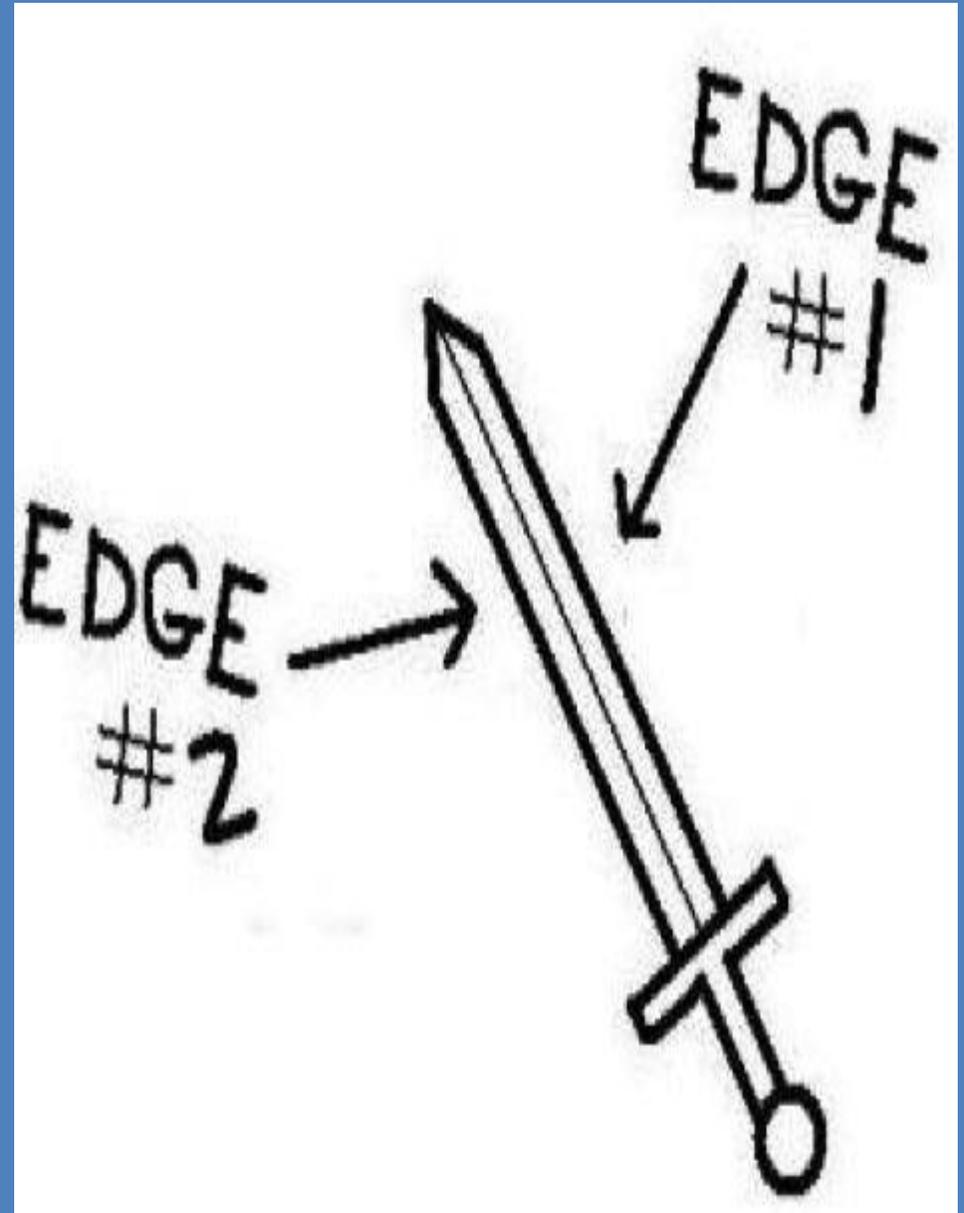
COMMON RELATED TERMINOLOGY

Compassion Fatigue

Vicarious trauma

Burnout

# Taking Care of Yourself: Vicarious Trauma/Compassion Fatigue

Trauma experienced when being indirectly exposed to a traumatic event

A gradual decline in feelings of compassion towards others

Has been called the "cost of caring"
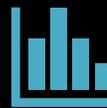
Desensitization

Stages of Compassion Fatigue

1. Compassion Satisfaction (pleasure/joy)

2. Compassion Satisfaction - Compassion Fatigue

3. Compassion Fatigue (indifference)

4. Compassion Fatigue- Burnout

5. Burnout (hopelessness)

BURNOUT

- Feeling overwhelmed at work

- Overload of responsibility

- Low job satisfaction

- Perception that there is lack of compensation

- Inadequate support or training

Compassion Fatigue- Signs and Symptoms

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual	Professional	Relational	Psychological
Aches	Numbness	Irritable	Loss of faith	Dread- work	Isolating	Concentration
Exhausted	Sad or depressed	Moody	Loss of purpose	Diminished satisfaction	Decreased intimacy	Easily distracted
Digestive problems	Hypersensitive	Appetite changes	Increased hopelessness	Changes-functioning	Parenting changes	Lack of focus
Sleep problems	Fearful	Forgetful	Questioning	Snappy with co-workers	Distrusting	
Rapid Heartbeat	Feelings of powerlessness	Nightmares	Spiritual- lost	Less empathy	Increase in tension	Self- doubt

Coping

Understand this is normal

Recognize the impact of important work

You care!

Professional Quality of Life Scale- (ProQOL) V. 5

The ProQOL is the most widely used measure of the positive and negative aspects of helping in the world

Survey of 30 questions

The ProQOL has proven to be a valid measure of compassion satisfaction and fatigue

It has been used for over 15 years

The measure was developed with data from over 3000 people

Vicarious Resilience

- Notice the positives, the resilience

- Appreciate how a crisis can become a pivotal point for change

- Seeing and honor the vitality of the human spirit

- Witnessing the coping and mastery of others in crisis; what helped them survive?

- Advocating for and assisting others

Hernandez, Gangsei, & Engstrom, 2007

Create a Mantra!

Our work is important.

Not on my watch!

I can help!

I believe in second chances.

I make a difference here.

Today I can.

This is a great team!

We provide hope!

I really love this work.

I am a wounded healer.

The strength of the wolf...

"Authentic social connection has a profound effect on your mental health – it even exceeds the value of exercise and ideal body weight on your physical health. It triggers the same reward centers in your brain that are triggered when people do drugs, or drink alcohol, or eat chocolate. In other words, we get sick alone, and we get well together."

James Doty, MD

Creating a Culture of Wellness from within the Team

Responses to Vicarious Trauma

Organizational Responses

Individual Responses
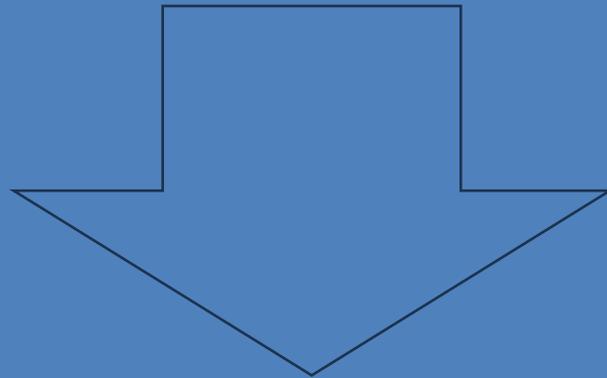
Prevention   Amelioration

Organizational Factors

Organizational culture

Organizational support

Caseload characteristics – frequency of exposure to trauma

Trauma training

Supportive team/peers/supervision

Organizational Responses

- Acknowledge that vicarious trauma exists among team members
- Plan for a culture shift
- Policies addressing vicarious trauma
- Empower team members
- Encourage healthy self-care habits
- Engage in prevention strategies
- Training, training and more training
- Provide mindfulness/meditation opportunities
- Develop a supportive culture/atmosphere
- Peer support for team members
- Consider staff rotation or "sabbatical" plans

Individual Responses

Put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting others.

Randy Pausch

Strategize

Take care of your body

Sleep
Eat
Move

Be aware and mindful

Nature
Active noticing

Be social

Laugh
Connect

A Self-Inquiry Exercise

1. In my life's important areas, what am I not saying no to?

2. How does my inability to say no impact my life?

3. What bodily signals have I bee overlooking? What symptoms have I been ignoring that could be warning signs, were I to pay conscious attention?

4. What is the hidden story behind my inability to say no?

5. Where did I learn these stories?

Dr. Gabor Mate

"*The Myth of Normal*"

You are not a superhero!

Do Not:

Blame yourself/others

Complain with colleagues

Work harder or longer

Self-medicate

Neglect your own needs and interests

Engage in risky behavior

Blur your ethical or personal boundaries

We Are Stronger Together

Evaluations

•Survey Link: https://cvent.me/ZzOk3r

1. On your compatible phone or tablet, open the built-in camera app.

2. Point the camera at the QR code.

3. Tap the banner that appears on your phone or tablet.

4. Follow the instructions on the screen to complete the evaluation.

5. After completion, you will be provided with a certificate that can be saved and printed.

Questions?

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