





Vicarious Trauma

23rd Annual AB 1058 Child Support
Training Conference
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1926

"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."



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Basic Understanding of Trauma

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Brain Structure and Trauma Post-Play Questions

- What was your child's life history?
- How did life experiences shape brain development?
- How important were early social supports?
- Can you have a brain that withstands life stresses later in life, after experiencing toxic stress early in life? At what price?
- What are some of your social supports?

Healing starts by understanding how early trauma affects health and behavior. (Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study.)



What Makes an Event Traumatic

- According to the American Psychiatric Association trauma is:
 - Real or perceived threat to one's physical or emotional well being
 - It is overwhelming
 - It results in intense feelings of fear and lack of control
 - It leaves one feeling helpless
 - It changes the way a person understands the world, themselves and others



TRAUMA

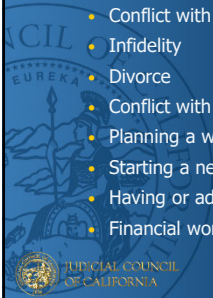
Types of Traumas (Big T's)

- Human
 - Homicide
 - Sexual assault
 - War
- Natural
 - Hurricane
 - Earthquake
 - Flood
 - Fire
- Workplace
 - Fight or physical attack
 - Threat of physical harm
 - Accident
 - Shootings

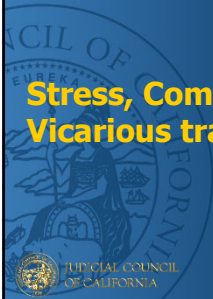


Types of Traumas cont. (Little t's)

- Conflict with significant others or children
- Infidelity
- Divorce
- Conflict with supervisor/boss or colleagues
- Planning a wedding
- Starting a new job
- Having or adopting a child
- Financial worries or difficulty

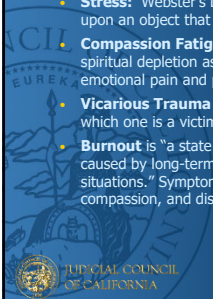



Stress, Compassion fatigue, Vicarious trauma and Burnout



A few definitions

- **Stress:** Webster's Dictionary defines stress as "pressure exerted upon an object that can either strengthen or weaken it."
- **Compassion Fatigue** is a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for people in significant emotional pain and physical distress." (Anewalt, 2009; Figley, 1995)
- **Vicarious Trauma** is the stress response to a traumatic event(s) in which one is a victim or witness.
- **Burnout** is "a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations." Symptoms include depression, cynicism, boredom, loss of compassion, and discouragement (Pines and Aronson, 1988).






Stress

What activates the stress response?

- “A Trigger is anything that sets you off emotionally and activates memories of your trauma. It’s particular to you and what your experience has been. Triggered, we revert to the feelings and behaviors we had in the traumatizing situation.”

From the book: Healing from trauma: A survivor’s guide to understanding your symptoms and reclaiming your life.



TRIGGERS

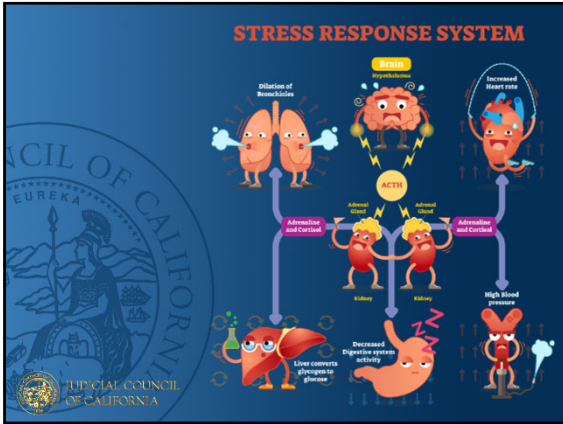
Stress (The stress response)

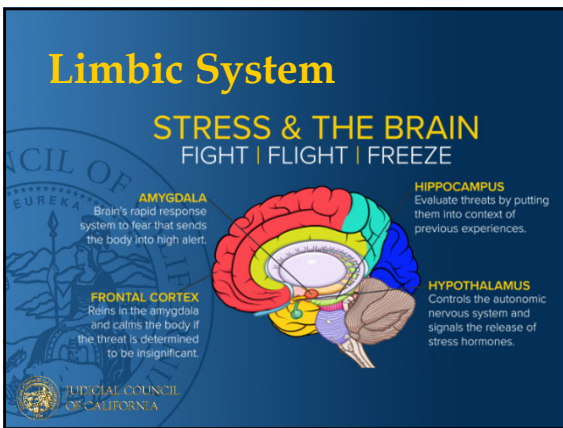
FIGHT | FLIGHT | FREEZE



- ↑ sweating
- ↑ heart rate
- ↑ breathing & oxygen
- ↑ muscle tension
- pupils dilate
- adrenaline
- heightened awareness
- bladder/bowels







Amygdala

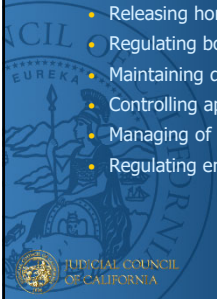
- Processes and stores memories of emotional events
- Responsible for determining what memories are stored and where those memories are stored in the brain.
- Involved in the processing of emotions:
 - Fear
 - Anger
 - Pleasure

FEAR

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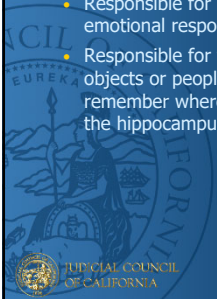
Hypothalamus

- Releasing hormones
- Regulating body temperature
- Maintaining daily physiological cycles
- Controlling appetite
- Managing of sexual behavior
- Regulating emotional responses



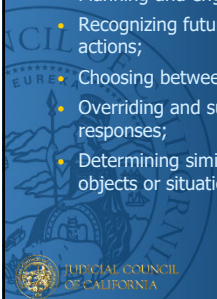
Hippocampus

- Responsible for processing of long term memory and emotional responses.
- Responsible for the memory of the location of objects or people. We would not even be able to remember where our house is without the work of the hippocampus.



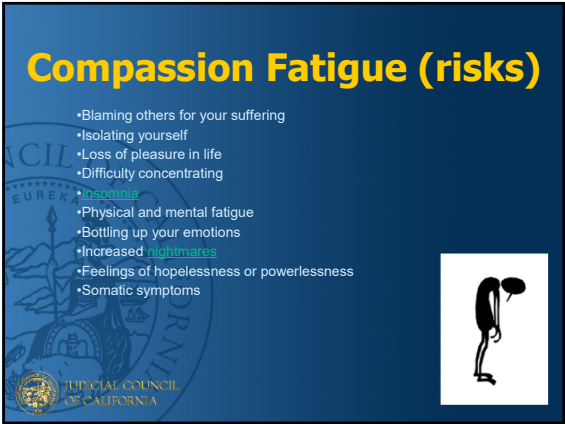
Frontal Cortex

- Planning and engaging in goal-directed behavior;
- Recognizing future consequences of current actions;
- Choosing between good and bad actions;
- Overriding and suppressing socially unacceptable responses;
- Determining similarities and differences between objects or situations.



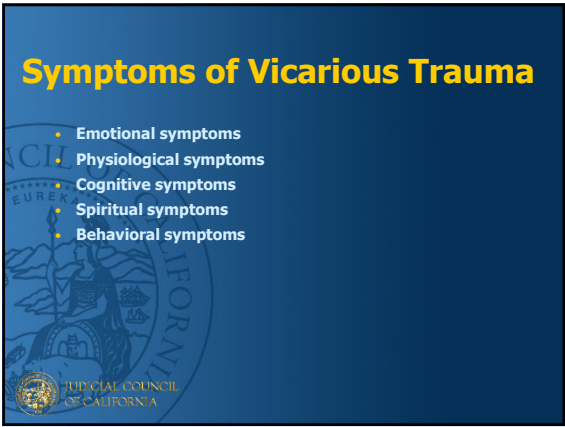
Compassion Fatigue (risks)

- Blaming others for your suffering
- Isolating yourself
- Loss of pleasure in life
- Difficulty concentrating
- **Problems**
- Physical and mental fatigue
- Bottling up your emotions
- Increased **nightmares**
- Feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness
- Somatic symptoms

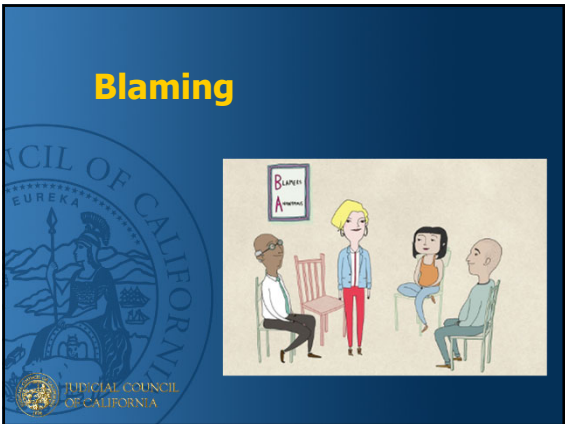


Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

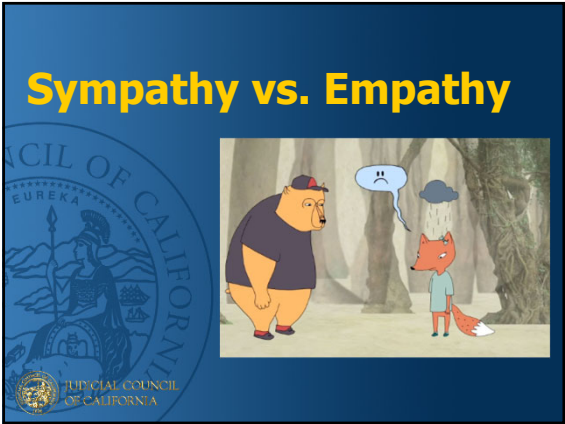
- Emotional symptoms
- Physiological symptoms
- Cognitive symptoms
- Spiritual symptoms
- Behavioral symptoms



Blaming

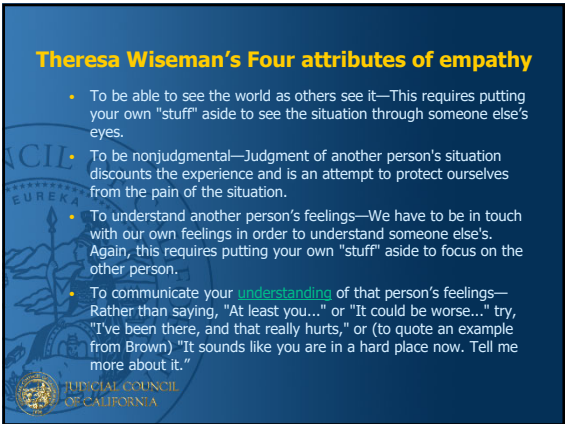


Sympathy vs. Empathy

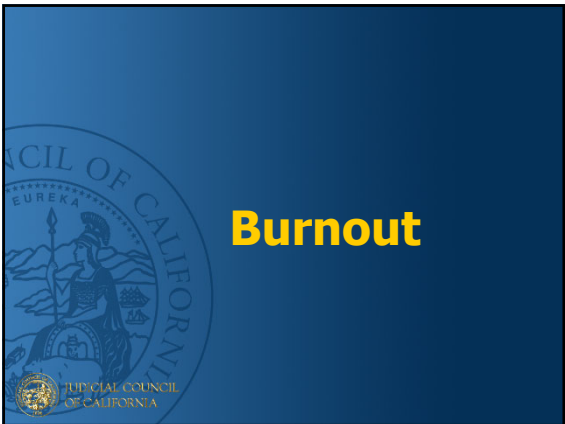


Theresa Wiseman's Four attributes of empathy

- To be able to see the world as others see it—This requires putting your own "stuff" aside to see the situation through someone else's eyes.
- To be nonjudgmental—Judgment of another person's situation discounts the experience and is an attempt to protect ourselves from the pain of the situation.
- To understand another person's feelings—We have to be in touch with our own feelings in order to understand someone else's. Again, this requires putting your own "stuff" aside to focus on the other person.
- To communicate your *understanding* of that person's feelings—Rather than saying, "At least you..." or "It could be worse..." try, "I've been there, and that really hurts," or (to quote an example from Brown) "It sounds like you are in a hard place now. Tell me more about it."



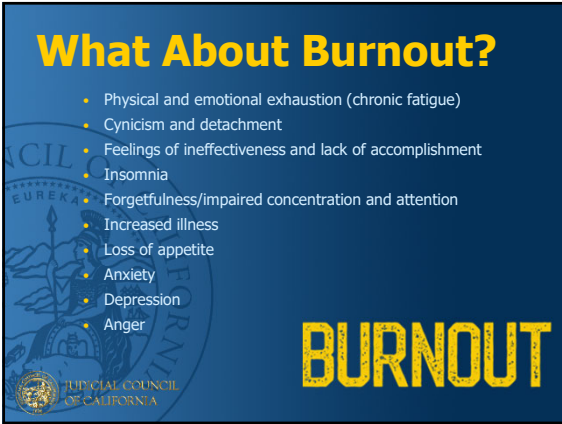
Burnout



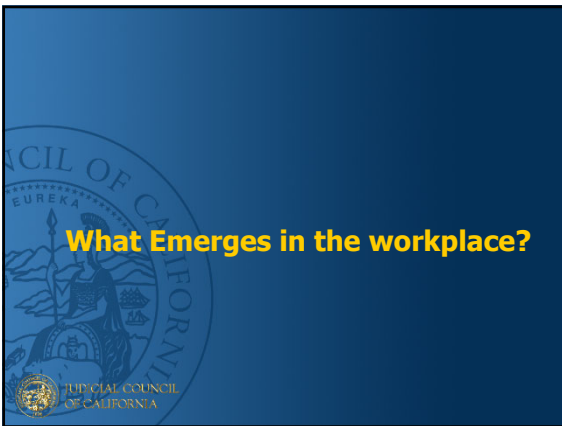
What About Burnout?

- Physical and emotional exhaustion (chronic fatigue)
- Cynicism and detachment
- Feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment
- Insomnia
- Forgetfulness/impaired concentration and attention
- Increased illness
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger

BURNOUT



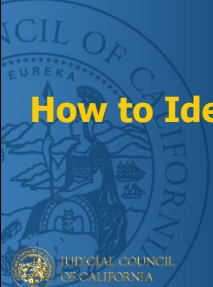
What Emerges in the workplace?



Are you at Risk?

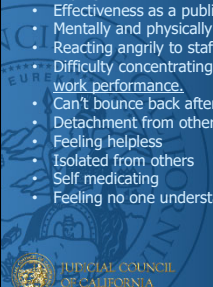
- **Personal**
 - Trauma history
 - Pre-existing psychological disorder
 - Young age
 - Isolation, inadequate support system
 - Loss in last 12 months
- **Professional**
 - Ineffective supervision
 - High percentage of trauma survivors in caseload
 - Little experience
 - Worker/organization mismatch
 - Lack of professional support system
 - Inadequate orientation and training for role
 - Lack of accountability
 - Hesitant to admit mistakes





How to Identify it in yourself

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How do these impact you?

- Coping mechanisms become overwhelmed
- Effectiveness as a public servant is reduced
- Mentally and physically exhausted not able to make a difference
- Reacting angrily to staff, colleagues, customers, and family members
- Difficulty concentrating on anything which impacts productivity and work performance.
- Can't bounce back after something hard happens
- Detachment from others
- Feeling helpless
- Isolated from others
- Self medicating
- Feeling no one understands you

“IT'S NOT THE LOAD THAT BREAKS YOU DOWN. IT'S THE WAY YOU CARRY IT.”
-C. S. Lewis

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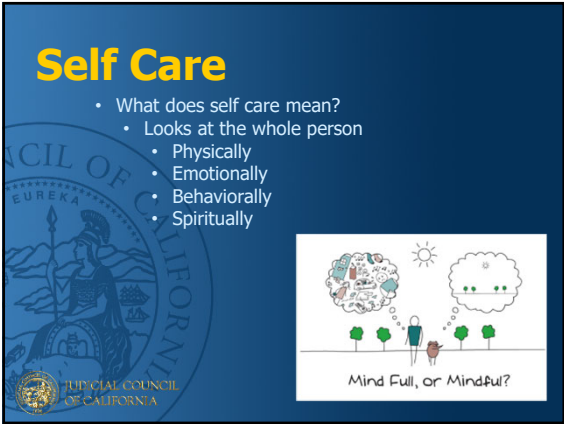


How do you take care of yourself?

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Self Care

- What does self care mean?
- Looks at the whole person
 - Physically
 - Emotionally
 - Behaviorally
 - Spiritually

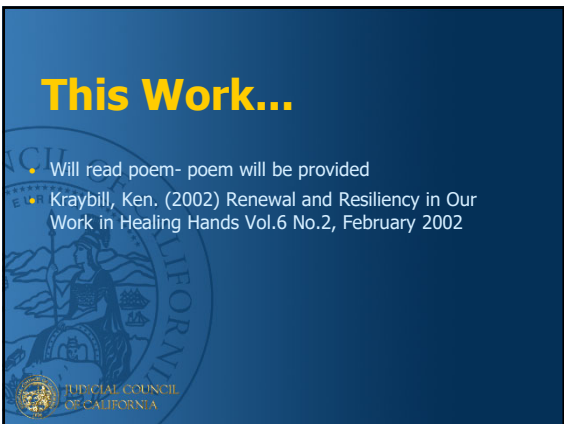


What do you do to take care of yourself?



This Work...

- Will read poem- poem will be provided
- Kraybill, Ken. (2002) Renewal and Resiliency in Our Work in Healing Hands Vol.6 No.2, February 2002



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