

UP THE CREEK

March
2018

Workforce Wellness: The Trauma Informed Workplace

by Carol Nagele-Vitalis, MA, OAP Consultant

Building a healthy work environment is high on the priority list for supervisors. While many employees have positions that are not required to deal with the care and needs of others, many find their days filled with the stories and struggles of clients that have experienced violence and trauma.

For therapists, first responders, child welfare workers, case managers, and other helping professionals involved in the care of those in crisis, and traumatized people, the essential act of witnessing, and listening to trauma stories may take an emotional toll that compromises professional functioning and diminishes quality of life. At times, the direct exposure to more significant traumas, up to and including mass shooting events, death or murder scenes, or an out of control client, takes an even greater toll.

BETWEEN 40% AND 85% OF “HELPING PROFESSIONALS” DEVELOP VICARIOUS TRAUMA, COMPASSION FATIGUE AND/OR HIGH RATES OF TRAUMATIC SYMPTOMS.

FRANCOISE MATHIEU (2012).

Bearing witness to human adversity and suffering can deeply impact employees. In the effort of work place wellness, how can we, as supervisors, support the health of our employees whose work may cause secondary traumatic stress symptoms to develop?

A place to start is building an awareness of the risk factors related to secondary traumatic stress:

Type of Story

The type of trauma stories an employee is hearing in their work can make a difference in the impact on the employee.

Length of Employment

Employees who are new in the field or new to hearing stories about trauma and adversity without warning or coping strategies are at greater risk for work related stress.

Continued on next page.

In This Newsletter

Supervising employees and leading in an organization is a tough job. This quarterly newsletter provides helpful research based articles with practical ideas to help you grow and flourish in your leadership role.

Business Quote

“Leadership is a series of behaviors rather than a role for heroes.”

Margaret Wheatley

Fun Fact

Google was originally called “BackRub.”

Isolation

Isolation can be experienced because of the location of the worksite, because they are the only staff doing a particular job or because they are not able to share details about work with friends or family due to confidentiality.

Personal Trauma History

Employees that are aware of their history and have developed helpful coping skills are able to more easily relate and support survivors. At time, an employee's past history with adversity could mitigate or create challenges to working with similar situations.

Organizational Strategies

There are organizational strategies that mitigate the impact of working with survivors of trauma and adversity. Here are a few to consider:

- **Team Spirit:** Feeling part of a team (per program, department, and entire agency) and having social support on the job can buffer workplace stress.
- **Training:** As workers gain knowledge and awareness of the hazards of indirect trauma exposure, they become empowered to explore and utilize prevention strategies to both reduce their risk and increase their resiliency.
- **Supervision:** Receiving regular and predictable supervision as a way to prevent, monitor and respond to stress.
- **Workplace rituals:** Friday walks, regular potluck lunches, spending time together outside of work.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP):** Regular education and encouragement about how to access these benefits.
- **Promotion of work/life balance:** Supportive efforts encouraging staff to practice self-care.

In response to this workplace issue, Sand Creek recently developed a Secondary Traumatic Stress Workshop that offers work teams education on what secondary traumatic stress is, and helps individuals and teams build helpful tool boxes. We are here to help and if you are interested please call 888.243.5744 to get more information about bringing this helpful training to your workgroup.

Sources

Figley, C.R. (1995). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Mathieu, F. (2012). *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*. (Routledge, NY).

Morse, G., Slyers, M., Rollins, A., Monroe-DeVita, M & Pfahler, C. (2012). Burnout in mental health services: A review of the problem and its remediation. *Adm Policy Ment Health*. 2012 September ; 39(5): 341–352.

About Sand Creek Workplace Wellness

Sand Creek is a women-owned small business specializing in providing exceptional workplace wellness services to support the human spirit at work. We embrace our core values of service, hope, trust, compassion, and wisdom in each interaction, there by upholding our mission of providing helpful solutions to improve productivity and shining a light in the darkest of moments.

Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to offer face-to-face counseling and consulting to those that voluntarily reach out to us. We are not simply a phone counseling service or online tool type EAP. Thousands of professional counselors form a worldwide Sand Creek network available to deliver personal care and support to you in your community. Our services are administered nationally, but delivered locally.

Sand Creek supports the relationship between individual health and overall organizational health. Our Organization Assistance Program (OAP) service extends the reach into the organization and provides work teams with a systemic approach to improve the health and well-being of an organization.