

Critical Conversations: Secondary Trauma, Compassion Satisfaction, and Self-Care

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Self-care
starts
here



Stress:

- The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”.
- Stress is an inherent part of work. It can inspire motivation and commitment

Burnout:

- The state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by a depletion of one's ability to cope with one's environment.
- **Tends to be a result of the workplace environment rather than the work itself** and builds up over time; it does not result from a one-time incident (Nelson-Gardell and Harris, 2003)



PTSD:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events by an individual

Moral Injury:

- Moral injury is the strong cognitive and emotional response that can occur following events that violate a person's moral, ethical, or spiritual code. Morally injurious events threaten one's deeply held beliefs and trust.



Secondary Trauma

- **Vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue**
- People who work with, listen to, and try to help children and adults who have been traumatised are at risk for internalising that trauma. **The symptoms of primary or secondary trauma can be the same**
- Occurs when a helper is exposed to events directly experienced by another and becomes overwhelmed by exposure to trauma (Figley, 1995)
- Saakvitne and Pearlman describe it as:
 - Our strong reactions of grief, rage, and outrage
 - It is our numbing, our protective shell, and our wish not to know (1996)
- **May result from repeated exposure or from one event**
- **An occupational hazard** (Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1996)

Impact of secondary trauma

- You as a person:

- Stress; illness; appetite changes; nightmares; high blood pressure; questioning faith/loss of meaning in life; apathy; irritability; withdrawal from others; impaired relationships; substance misuse

- You as a professional:

- Lack of empathy; inability to engage with “clients”; perfectionism; unable to assess risk well; poor decision-making; lateness; sickness; avoiding tasks/visits/people; poor professional relationships

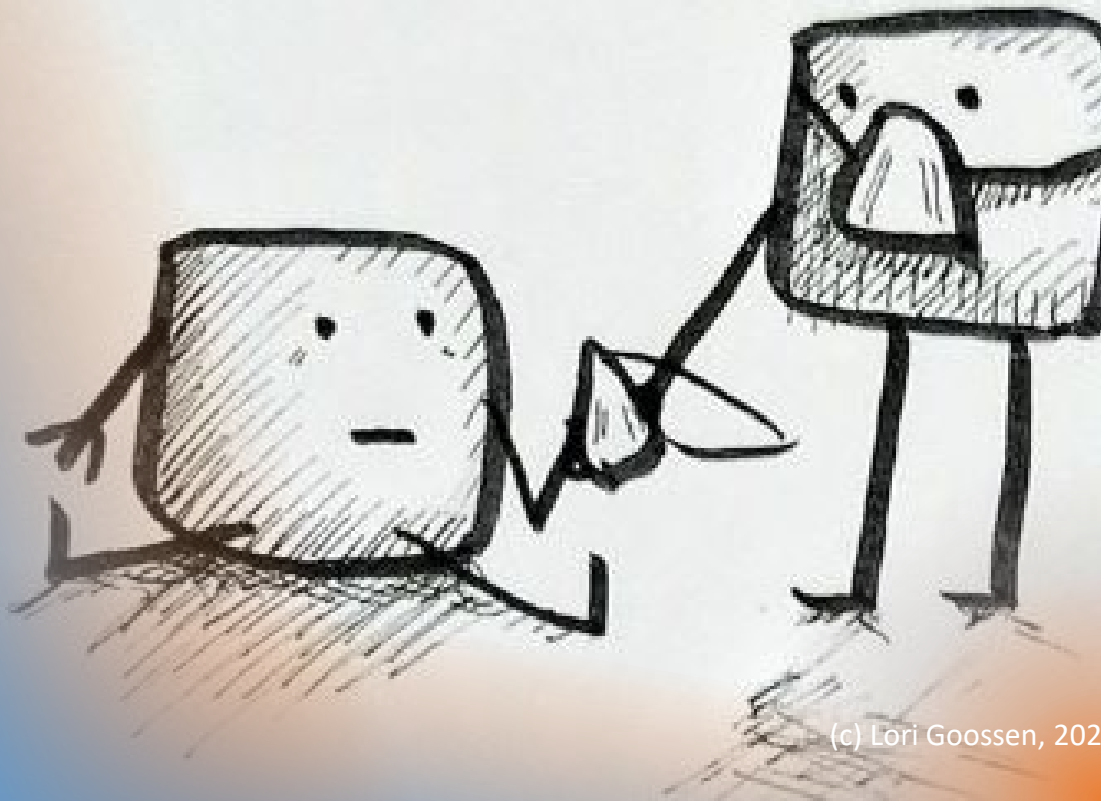
- Your organisation:

- High turnover/vacancies/caseloads; poor morale; hostile/unhealthy work environments

- Children and families:

- Inability of worker to engage them; late/missed visits; high turnover of workers and having to repeat their story; unable to share important info with worker because of worry or perceived lack of care/incompetence of worker; workers who just don't seem to care

put your own
oxygen mask
on first



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Self-care

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Professional

Self-Care

Physical

- Eat and sleep well
- Exercise
- Be aware of using substances (or gambling, shopping, sex, etc.) as coping mechanisms

Psychological

- Take time for self-reflection
- Engage in counselling/therapy
- Write in a journal
- Learn to say no (and not feel guilty about it)
- Listen to your thoughts, judgements, beliefs



Self-Care

Emotional

- Spend time with people you enjoy and who are supportive
- Identify comforting people, objects, activities, and places and engage with them
- Allow yourself to cry (or scream!)

Spiritual

- Reflect on things, people, ideas that are important to you (or figure out what *is* important to you).
- Contribute to causes you believe in
- Find strength in faith or spirituality
- Pray or meditate

Professional

- Utilise supervision (and demand it if needed)
- Set limits and boundaries
- Take breaks
- Find a mentor



Self-care is a way of living not a short-term fix

- Self-care is a long-term investment in your wellbeing
- Trying to repair damage that has already occurred will be more challenging and less effective than employing regular maintenance and growth self-care strategies
- You will need all three types of self-care strategy in your toolbox to avoid burnout and remain well
- **Fundamental changes to your life are not required; in fact, they are usually not sustainable. Small and purposeful efforts are more realistic and can reap many benefits for personal and professional life**
- It is important to periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies you use for repair, maintenance and growth and consider if you need to try something more effective

Developing a self-care plan for well-being

Repair: the actions we take when we notice we are experiencing signs of stress. There are some common emotional, behavioural, social, and physical signs of stress, but everybody reacts differently – some people may respond emotionally (e.g., become irritable, lose confidence, or feel overwhelmed), others respond behaviourally (e.g., become indecisive, isolate themselves socially, or binge drink), whereas others experience physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, insomnia, or food cravings).

Maintenance: keeping ourselves “ticking over” and operating at our current capacity.

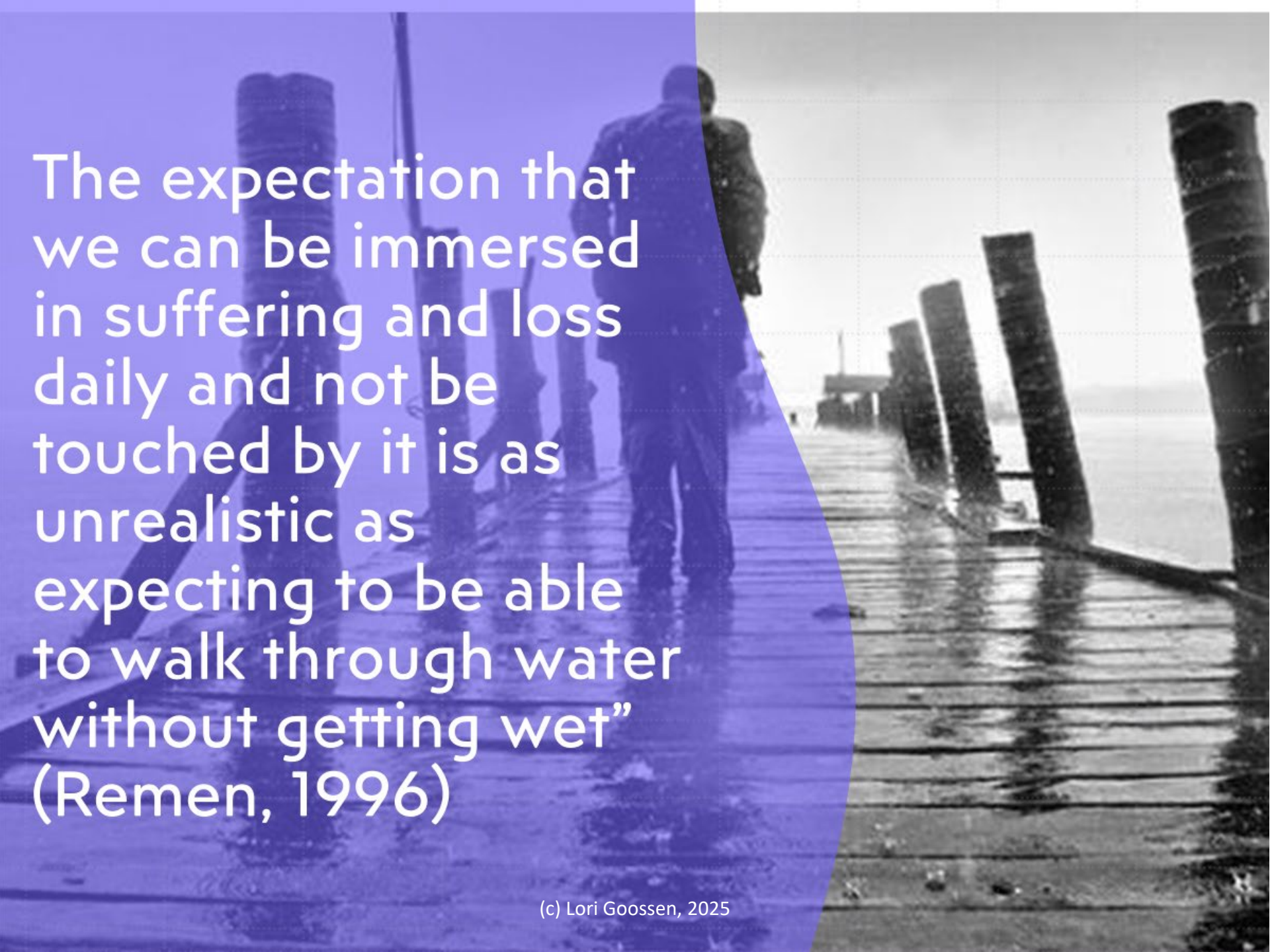
Growth: building the capacity for emotional resilience, so we feel and perform at our best.

Team care

Organisational responsibility

**“Workers’ state of mind and the quality of attention they can give to children is directly related to the quality of support, care, and attention they themselves receive from supervision, managers, and peers.”
(Ferguson)**





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”
(Remen, 1996)



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Resources

Secondary trauma and compassion fatigue: a guide to support managers and practitioners

Lori Goossen (2020)

Community Care Inform

Trauma Stewardship- An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky (2009)

Beyond the Cliff- Tedx Talks

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky (2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOzDGrcvmus&index=2&list=PLgJbjNlwldCG7SxRQXtmDypsDXGFjQD1X>

Reducing Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Burnout: A Trauma-Sensitive Workbook

Steele, William (2019)

Healing Secondary Trauma: Proven Strategies for Caregivers and Professionals to Manage Stress, Anxiety, and Compassion Fatigue

Trudy Gilbert-Eliot (2020)

