The Price of Caring
Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Trauma and Burnout

Julia Yeary, LCSW, IMH-E®
jyeary@zerotothree.org
Director of Military Family Resources
ZERO TO THREE

We are a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains and supports professionals, policy makers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

• We train professionals and build networks of leaders
• We influence policies and practice
• We raise public understanding of early childhood issues

All our work is:
• Grounded in research and experience
• Multi-disciplinary
• Culturally responsive
Our Objectives

• Understand how our work with families might affect us physically, emotionally, and spiritually
• Consider the role of transference and countertransference in home visiting
• Define burnout, secondary trauma, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue
• Explore ways we can mindfully practice self-care

All emotions are contagious—both the ones that are pleasant and the ones that are unpleasant.

YOU are unique

What is YOUR story?
– What are your strengths?
– What ghosts do you carry with you?
– What angels do you carry with you?
Our empathy is our major, greatest, and most reliable tool.

Freud wanted his clinicians to be a blank slate so clients could project feelings from past experiences onto the analyst. This is what traditionally was known as “Transference.”

Freud came to understand we are ALL stirred by the experiences we hear and see when faced with all the emotions brought forward by our client families. He called this process “Counter-transference.”

Today, practitioners understand counter-transference may help a home visitor to have empathy, or clues to understanding what is going on with the client family.

While there are many definitions for counter-transference, we will define it as: “the practitioner’s reactions to his client that have roots in his own past.”
Let’s Reflect

How have you used empathy to help build a trusting relationship with your client families?

Were there times when you carried the family’s story home with you, or found yourself thinking about a past incident in your life after a visit with a family?

Blurred Boundaries

When “their” story is “your” story...

Empathy

[em-puh-thee]

Noun
1. The psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another

“I know how you feel”
How Do We Show Our Empathy?

• We lean in to hear what they have to say
• We match our expression to their expression
• We imagine what it might be like
• We work to understand their experience

Empathy

• Damasio differentiated emotion, or all things body—sensations, autonomic and somatic muscular changes, movement and feeling—or the label that describes the summation of these body states.
• Ekman confirmed Darwin’s theory that each feeling has a specific, observable somatic manifestation including one’s facial expression and body posture.
• Elaine Hatfield and colleagues at the University of Hawaii studied emotional contagion. She noted the body is central to emotion contagion.
• How our bodies respond through mirroring or mimicry when we empathize to create similar body experiences as the object of our empathy, or the same emotions.

Triggers

Empathy may also trigger our memories of previous traumatic experiences, our ghosts that we carry with us. These awakened memories may be re-experienced in our bodies in a way that is different than our normal memories

– Normal memories are organized with a beginning, middle and end.
– Traumatic memories are disorganized and include details that are sometimes too clear—smells, images, sensations while leaving out other details such as sequencing.
The Price of Caring: Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Trauma and Burnout

The Definitions

- **Compassion Fatigue**, introduced by Figley, is applied to anyone who suffers as a result of serving in a helping capacity.
- **Burnout** is reserved for those whose health is suffering or whose outlook on life has turned negative due to workload or type of work done.
- **Primary Trauma** is the result of a traumatic incident with a clear victim of that incident (including loss of a relative or close friend from that incident, etc.)
- **Secondary Trauma** is usually reserved for those who witness trauma, becoming overwhelmed by what is seen or heard. It is a direct experience of witnessing.
- **Vicarious trauma** is used for those who are impacted by working with traumatized individuals in the workplace.

Vicarious Trauma

- Even though the home visitor was not involved directly in the traumatic incident, the home visitor vicariously feels the experience in her nervous system.
- It is a sign that a client’s history is having an extreme effect on the home visitor.
Compassion Fatigue

- Those in the helping field know that compassionate work can lead to exhaustion
- Use of self and the use of empathy may result in the emotional sensations residing in the helper’s body

Burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disengaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job ... and reduced professional efficacy</td>
<td>depleted (exhausted, overworked), have a love/hate relationship with work (love it and feel fulfilled, but can also hate it and be upset at work), and experience a lack of support at work (feel annoyed, unappreciated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deeply dissatisfied and describe their experience akin to depression (feeling helpless, hopeless, worthless)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How Much Can We Hold?

- My own stuff
- My family’s stuff
- My client’s stuff
- SuperVisitor

Copyright © 2019. All rights reserved.
The Ethical Imperative of Self-Care

- Cannot build relationships or trust without empathy
- We know the importance of parallel process: as we are with families, they will be with their children.
- We are our primary tool in our work with families. We cannot do our best work if our primary tool isn’t functioning at capacity.

Self-Care As Buffer

A reflective attitude about one’s personal well-being can help the [home visitor] identify early signs of burnout, vicarious trauma, or compassion fatigue.

Balancing Our Needs with the Work
“If providers prioritize self-care, they are giving two gifts—one to themselves and one to the children in their care.”

What do you do to practice self-care?

Reflection in Action
Reflective Supervision

Reflective supervision is a collaborative relationship for professional growth that improves quality and practice by cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities to generate growth.

What might this look like in your work setting?

Collaboration

- Having a partner in the work and in the reflection
- “You are not alone. We’re in this together.”

Professional Boundaries

How do boundaries promote professional self-care?
Mindfulness

Staying in the moment and focusing on the here and now while practicing ways to act in a non-judgmental fashion...mindfulness meditation bolsters a healthier way to cope with life’s daily struggles.

A Mindful Minute

“We are not invulnerable, but if we maintain a strong sense of community among ourselves, we can be resilient.”

(Catherall, 2008)
References


