

# Understanding the Effects of Trauma on Advocates

RECOGNIZING AND PREVENTING  
SECONDARY TRAUMA AND COMPASSION  
FATIGUE



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## Challenges for Advocates

- Role Expectations vs. Reality
- Burnout
- Compassion fatigue
- Triggering
- Transference
- Countertransference
- Vicarious Traumatization or Secondary Trauma

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## Activity: Line It Up

- On a post-it note, list three qualities that you bring to your work as an advocate
- Circle the one that is most important to you
- Put the post-it note on your shirt

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# Why do relationships matter in our work?

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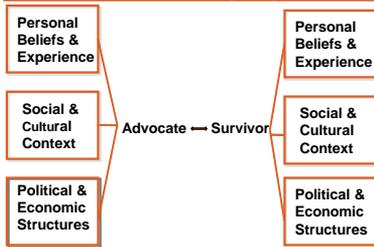
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## In a Trauma-Informed Approach, We Are Part of the Equation

### Context of Empathy



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## Role Expectations VS. Reality



What have you noticed in your work?

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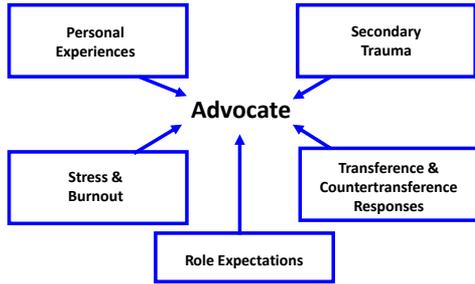
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### Attending to Our Own Personal Experiences & Responses



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### Awareness of Our Own Responses:

- Fear of being overwhelmed or making bad decisions
- Reluctance to identify with “victim”
- Helplessness & inadequacy if can’t “fix” or predict outcomes
- Frustration with survivor for not responding to our needs to do a good job
- Lack of attention to personal history and secondary trauma
- Avoid, dismiss, blame, label, control

*When competence is tied to mastery & control*

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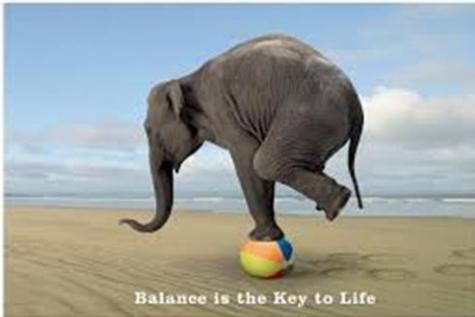
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Sometimes, finding our balance can be challenging.

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## Stress & Burnout

- Based on characteristics of the work experience, organizational culture & the quality of supervision and management
- Results in feelings of exhaustion, cynicism & ineffectiveness related to organizational stressors.

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## Trauma Reminders

- Sensing things in the environment &/or interactions that bring our own responses to the surface.
- For example, a particular smell or tone of voice can bring about the need to defend.

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## Interactions: What is Below the Surface?



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## Transference

- Responses to people in our present that we bring with us from our past.
- For example, I realize I am avoiding interacting with a particular survivor or co-worker because there is something about her voice that reminds me of a teacher who picked on me in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

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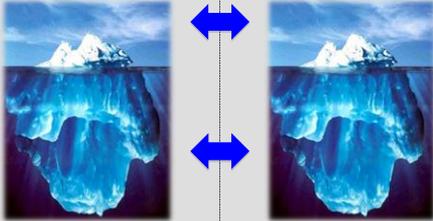
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## Confusing Interactions

What's going on below the surface for me?

What's going on below the surface for you?



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## When what is below the surface impacts our relationships . . .

- We may blame & see other people as the source of the problem
- We may lose touch with our empathy
- We may respond to other's needs in ways that aren't helpful or supportive
- We feel bad about our responses

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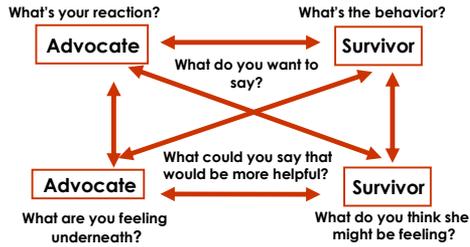
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## Understanding & Transforming Our Responses




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## Reflective Advocacy Scenario

- What are you aware of feeling in this moment?
- What do you want to say to Robyn (even if you don't say it)?
- What do you find most challenging about this situation?
- What do you feel underneath these feelings of frustration?
- What do you think Robyn might be feeling?
- What could you say to Robyn that would be more helpful?
- What did you learn about yourself by going through this reflective process?

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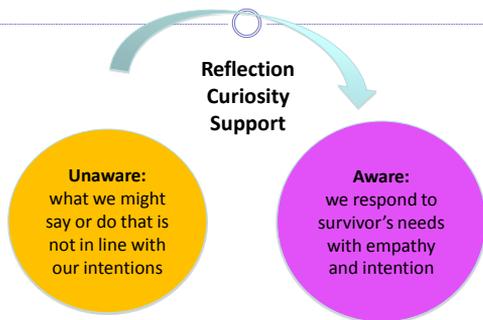
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## Reflection & Transformation




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## Sources of Our Responses

- Our reactions to the person's experiences of abuse & violence
- Our reactions to the adaptations survivors develop to survive
- Our response to the other person's internal experiences
- Our responses to the other person's strong responses to us
- The interaction of our own history & style with that of the person we are working with

Saakvitne, et. al. 2000

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## Secondary Trauma

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## The Terms We Use

- **Burnout**
  - × A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long involvement in emotionally demanding situations with inadequate supports and supervision.
- **Compassion Fatigue**
  - × Fatigue, emotional distress or apathy resulting from the constant demands of caring for others – a "failure of empathy."
- **Secondary (Vicarious) Trauma**
  - × The cumulative inner transformative effect of bearing witness to abuse, violence, and trauma in the lives of people we are open to. When we allow ourselves to be open and attuned, open to other people's experiences or to partner with others, we too are affected.

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## Secondary Trauma

- Occurs when the impact of other's life experiences with trauma, also impacts advocates, supporters, or helpers' lives.
- When we open our hearts and minds, when we bear witness, are willing to know and to create the emotional safety for people to share their experiences, we are affected.

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## Secondary Trauma

- A common effect of domestic violence & trauma work that impacts one's world view.
- It can diminish hope & optimism, which are essential gifts we bring to our work.
- One of the most important factors in the success or failure of doing this work is the attention paid to the experience & needs of providers.
- Addressing this is an ethical imperative.

Saakvitne et. al. 2000

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## Silent Witness Exercise



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### Silent Witness Exercise

- Write down three signs of the impact of secondary trauma that you are currently aware of in your life.
- You will be asked to share your list with others, so only write about those things you feel comfortable sharing.
- For the next 10 minutes, walk silently around the room & read each other's lists, but do not comment or speak.

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### Transforming Secondary Trauma: ABCs

- **Awareness**
  - Be attuned to one's needs, limits, emotions, resources
  - Heed all sources of information — cognitive, physical, intuitive
  - Practice mindfulness & awareness
- **Balance**
  - Work, play & rest
- **Connection**
  - To oneself, to others & to something larger
  - To things that are meaningful

Saakvitne et. al. 2000 p. 173

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### A Reflective Approach to Practice

- Creates a safe & non-judgmental space to reflect on feelings & responses that arise in doing this work
- Fosters attunement, empathy, non-judgmental stance to survivors & their children
- Reduces burnout & secondary trauma responses
- Values self-care & agency supports
- Sustains hope & faith in the human spirit

Blumenfeld, 2010

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**Other Strategies for Cultivating Awareness and Nurturing Empathy**

- Time for reflection & quiet places
- Regular supportive supervision
- Team approach
- Incorporation into staff meetings & service planning discussions
  - Onsite or phone support from trauma-informed clinicians
  - Mindfulness practices
- Time for restorative activities on & off-site

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**Balance**

*What brings you peace and joy?*



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