

Secondary / Vicarious Trauma and Self Care

Family Conference on Addiction

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- Secondary trauma is commonly referred to as the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.
- Dr. Laurie Pearlman, an expert in the trauma field prefers the term vicarious trauma to describe the "cumulative transformative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events."
- The difference between secondary trauma and vicarious trauma is that secondary trauma can happen suddenly, in one session, while vicarious trauma is a response to an accumulation of exposure to the pain of others (Figley, 1995).

Fight, Flight, Freeze

The term "fight, flight, or freeze" describes a mechanism in the body that enables humans and animals to mobilize a lot of energy rapidly in order to cope with threats to survival.

How does fight, flight, freeze work?

- A threat is perceived.
- The autonomic nervous system automatically puts body on alert.
- The adrenal cortex automatically releases stress hormones.
- The heart automatically beats harder and more rapidly.
- Breathing automatically becomes more rapid.
- Thyroid gland automatically stimulates the metabolism.
- Larger muscles automatically receive more oxygenated blood.
- The important thing to take away is that the fight or flight response is an **automatic** response.

How does freeze work?

Sometimes the perceived threat is so intense it triggers a "freeze" response. This could be interpreted as the brain being overwhelmed by the threat, or it could also be an adaptive / positive response to a threat. It probably evolved in humans and animals as a way of "keeping still" so a predator's attention would not be triggered by movement.

Either way, for modern humans the freeze response means that the muscles remain tensed and poised for action....action that is never really initiated. That's why we often get "knots" in our backs, shoulders, neck, and arms. We have not discharged the tension.

Flight, Fight, Freeze

False alarms

Even though the fight or flight response is automatic, it isn't always *accurate*. *In* fact most of the time when the fight or flight response is triggered it is a false alarm - there is no threat to survival. The part of the brain that initiates the automatic part of the fight or flight response, the amygdala, can't distinguish between a **real threat** **and a perceived threat**.

Some common symptoms of secondary trauma

- intrusive thoughts
- chronic fatigue
- sadness
- anger
- poor concentration
- second guessing
- fearfulness
- shame
- physical illness
- absenteeism
- stress
- guilt
- anxiety
- depression
- sleeplessness
- intense sense of helplessness
- hypervigilant
- shut down or numb out so they aren't able to engage
- exhaustion (emotional & physical)
- detachment
- burnout

Self Care

Breathing

Damage begins to occur after about 3 minutes without oxygen.

What kind of breather are you — chest or belly, nose or mouth?

Test: Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen. Take a normal breath while looking down. If the hand on your chest rises first, you tend to breathe in your chest. If the hand on your abdomen rises first, you are more of a belly breather.

Self Care Breathing correctly

Mouth and / or chest breathing:

- ~ not inhaling enough oxygen and /or exhaling enough carbon dioxide
- ~ carbon dioxide level is often abnormal
- ~Consequences:fatigue, mental fog and decreased tissue function

Nose and “belly breathing”:

- ~Breathing through the nose invokes the parasympathetic nervous system and the relaxation response.
- ~ “belly breathing” deep, meaningful breaths

To regulate breathing, breath in through nose into “belly”
3 to 10 intentional deep breaths.

Self Care Water & Food

- How long survive without water?
 - Due to variables 2 days to a week
- body 60%
- brain 73%
- 8-10 eight ounce glasses of plain water or
- ½ oz. of water per pound of body
- More when ill

- Consuming good quality food

Self Care

schedule regular time

- walking in nature
- prayer
- reading
- mindfulness
- meditation
- yoga
- spending time with loved ones
- friends
- listening to music
- journaling, a practice proven beneficial by research
- gratitude journal
- hobby
- a personal life
- social activities
- religious community
- self-compassion /kindsight
- positive outlook
- counseling (with professional who has had similar experience and has worked on their own issues)
- perhaps then a support group