

# *Peer Support Reflection & Skill-Building*



Session #1 - February 16, 2023





A pink flower with a dark center and a small orange bud on a black stem with green leaves. A piece of purple tape is wrapped around the stem.


01

# *Part 1: Reflection*

A blue flower with a dark center and a small orange bud on a black stem with green leaves. A piece of green tape is wrapped around the stem.

Discuss successes and challenges in peer support



A pink flower with a dark center and a small orange bud on a black stem, with green leaves and a piece of purple tape on the stem.

02

## *Part 2: Skill-Building*

A blue flower with a dark center and a small orange bud on a black stem, with green leaves and a piece of green tape on the stem.

Building wellness and responding to challenges  
that peer support professionals face





## *Potential stressors in peer support*

- Working with people in distress
- Challenge of managing and balancing relationships and boundaries
- Utilizing oneself as a person as a support and managing one's own emotions.
- Interactions between work demands and personal stressors.
- Potential stress from listening to peers describe their traumatic life experiences especially when they are shared experiences
- “Culture of helping” and expectations to put others' needs first
- Feeling responsible for another's well-being
- Work-life balance and organizations that don't always prioritize self-care
- Compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious trauma



# *A Quick Look...*



**Recognizing Compassion  
Fatigue, Vicarious Trauma, and  
Burnout in the Workplace**





## *Defining Burnout*

“Burnout is a syndrome with dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment.”

-Chris Llyod






## *Warning Signs*

- Diminished sense of purpose, accomplishment, or enjoyment of work
- Chronic fatigue, insomnia
- Poor physical health
- Pessimism
- Detachment and isolation
- Feeling apathetic and hopeless
- Reduced productivity
- Decreased capacity for empathy



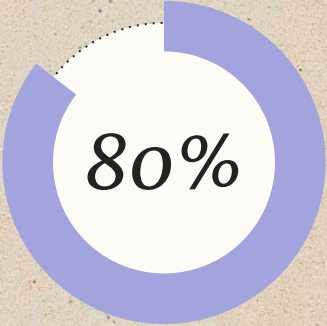
# Three Stages of Burnout



50%

*Stressors  
Appear*

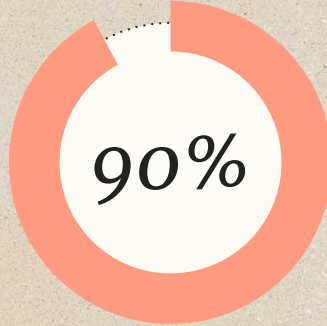
Personal,  
Interpersonal,  
Organization



80%

*Strain from  
Dealing with  
Stressors*

Emotional exhaustion,  
physical symptoms,  
interpersonal conflict



90%

*Long-term  
Changes*

Changes in attitudes,  
thoughts, or  
behaviors develop





## *Defining Compassion Fatigue*

“Compassion fatigue is a state experienced by those helping other people in distress. It is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it creates secondary traumatic stress for the helper.”

-Dr. Charles Figley







# Warning Signs

- Intrusive thoughts about peers' traumatic situations
- Developing a negative **worldview**
- Increased anxiety
- Distrust, **guilt**, loss of hope
- Difficulties concentrating
- Flashbacks or preoccupation about traumatic situations of peers
- Reduced feelings of **empathy**
- Issues separating work and personal life
- Anger, irritability, depression
- Inability to maintain empathy/objectivity
- **Withdrawal** from friends/family
- Feeling alienated
- Countertransference
- Problems in personal **relationships**
- Addictive behaviors to cope
- Poor self-care
- Poor physical health, issues sleeping
- Loss of **enjoyment** in life





## *Defining Vicarious Trauma*

Vicarious or secondary trauma is emotional distress experienced by people having close contact with a trauma survivor and is a natural response to the hearing and empathizing to their stories.

It brings up disruptions related to safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control. (Pearlman and Saakvitne 1995)







## *Defining Vicarious Trauma*

- Symptoms align with acute or post-traumatic stress
- Intrusions (flashbacks, thoughts, nightmares)
- Avoidance of people, places, and situations
- Anxiety, panic attacks, hypervigilance
- Helplessness, hopelessness, numbness
- Depression, thoughts of self-harm
- Substance use or other maladaptive coping
- Withdrawal and isolation


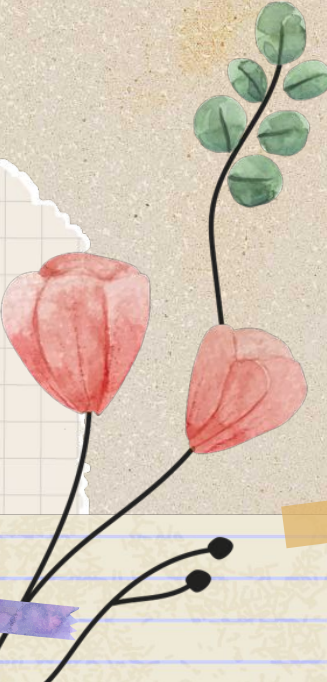




# Strategies

- Self-awareness of the signs
- Professional Quality Of Life Assessment (ProQOL Version 5)
- Personal reflection and assessment
- Setting boundaries
- Eat, sleep, and take care of yourself regularly
- Connect with other people
- Have realistic expectations about your role
- Maintain ongoing supervision and training
- Balance peer support work with other areas of your life





“If we are compassion fatigued, reconnecting with ourselves and others can help us to heal.”

—Vidette Todaro-Franceschi

“Slowly you may have transformed from a helper to one in need of help. It’s important to talk about this, to identify the wounds you carry.” —Jenn Bruer



# Discussion

- Have you ever experienced burnout, compassion fatigue, or vicarious trauma?
- What signs are you going to watch out for?
- What risks does peer support pose to the different dimensions of wellness?
- How can we create proactive wellness plans to reduce the risk of developing these?

