



Befriending The Tiger: Vicarious Trauma, Resilience And Self-Care On The Frontline

**Part 1
9.00am - 1.00pm AEST**

20 July 2024

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**Befriending the Tiger:
Vicarious trauma,
Resilience and Self-care
on the Frontline**



Part 1
20 July 2024

delphi
TRAINING AND CONSULTING

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**Session
outline**

- Opening meditation
- Introductions
- Definitions
- Post traumatic transference and Countertransference
- Risk and Resilience
- Holistic approach to self-care
- Closing meditation

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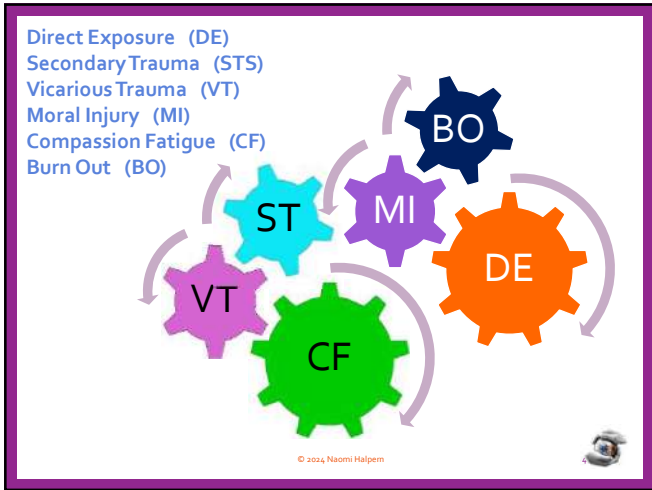
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**Opening
meditation**

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Exposure to trauma

- **Direct Trauma:** the event that happens to us – whatever the nature of the trauma.
- **Indirect Trauma:** exposure to another's trauma

The risk of developing negative effects of indirect trauma depends on:

- Individual Factors
- Organisational Factors

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Risk of Indirect Trauma

Individual Factors

- ❖ Personal history of trauma
- ❖ Pre-existing mental health disorders (e.g. depression, bipolar)
- ❖ Heightened empathy
- ❖ Trouble recognising your emotions
- ❖ Avoiding and / or pushing down emotions
- ❖ Being younger in age
- ❖ Social isolation, not having close friends, social supports, hobbies and interests
- ❖ Limited professional experience working with trauma
- ❖ No established spiritual resources
- ❖ Work style (not prioritising breaks, boundaries with clients, no regular supervision, vacations, working in isolation)

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Risk of Indirect Trauma

Organisational Factors

- ❖ Lack of support at work, especially training and debriefing
- ❖ Limited supervision (and/or supervision that only focuses on the technical not the personal / interpersonal)
- ❖ Working with too many clients
- ❖ Geographical and social isolation
- ❖ Limited training about vicarious trauma and its prevention
- ❖ High percentage of traumatised children, vulnerable clients, offenders
- ❖ Clients who are underserved and disadvantaged
- ❖ Inadequate pay, stressful conditions, with limited resources

Organisational Culture

- ❖ Lack of acknowledgement by agency that indirect trauma exists or only paying lip service
- ❖ Lack of acknowledgement by agency that indirect trauma is a normal reaction to clients' trauma
- ❖ Culture with a "we just get on with it here"



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Indirect Trauma: Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Emotional overwhelm and distress that results from **hearing the firsthand trauma experiences** of another.

Mimics symptoms of PTSD.

Professions at risk: Mental health professionals, human service workers, medical professionals, first responders, lawyers, child abuse investigators, prosecutors, judges, police, animal shelter workers.

Anyone can experience STS



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Vicarious trauma

A transformation of the professional's inner experience, resulting from empathic and ongoing engagement with clients' trauma material

Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995



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VT changes in 'cognitive schema'

- feeling that the world is no longer a 'safe place' (for self and/or others)
- feeling helpless in regard to taking care of self or others
- feeling personal freedom is limited
- feelings of alienation (that work sets apart from others and / or others don't want to know or value your work)

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Compassion Fatigue

Profound **emotional and physical erosion** that takes place when helpers are unable to **refuel and regenerate**

Changes in our **ability to feel empathy and compassion** for our clients

Doesn't include the profound shift in worldview that occurs with vicarious trauma

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Moral Distress and Injury



- Distress caused by **failing to prevent harm to another**
- Party to **acts of omission or commission** that transgress one's moral, political and / or religious beliefs.
- The injury **feels like a betrayal** of self and / or a third party (such as a client, employer / inadequacy of law / organisational conduct etc.)
- Can lead to a sense of **loss of meaning and purpose** (existential crisis).
- Moral injury **increases risk** of trauma related impacts.

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Examples of moral injury

- Worker in a **First Nations organisation** after the failure of the **Voice referendum**
- Police officer where a **domestic violence charge failed** and the woman was killed
- Psychologist from **Catholic faith** working with **institutional abuse cases**

Moral injury creates higher risk of vicarious trauma and related mental health issues e.g. anxiety, depression

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Burn out

Physical and **emotional exhaustion** experienced when **low job satisfaction** and feel **powerless** and **overwhelmed** at work.

Does not necessarily mean view of the world has been damaged, or lost the ability to feel compassion for others.

Often related to **organisational culture**: bullying, harassment, discrimination or **not appropriate resources, support or supervision** to fulfil work responsibilities.

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Grief

Grief is more than personal losses, we can feel grief around world events. **Universal** but expressions of grief are **personal** and **culturally mediated**.



This can result in grief not being recognised by self, colleagues or significant others and may lead to further distress and feelings of isolation.

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Grief can be masked or defended against with emotions and behaviour such as **anger**, **impulsivity**, **guilt**, **shame**, or **depression**.

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Contributing Factors

- Nature of trauma
- Client presentations or behaviour
- Personal situation
- Organisation
- Societal context

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“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.”

Rachel Naomi Remen

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Post traumatic transference and countertransference



I don't trust you but you're my only hope

Bethany Brand, 2016

The Attachment Dilemma:
I hate you - don't leave me - Meh!

Naomi Halpern, 2020

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Post-traumatic transference

Clients hope for the best but expect the worst.

Unmet **attachment needs**, an expectation of further **betrayals, rejection & re-enactments** of past relationship dynamics will **arise (Parts) in the context of therapy & in relationship with the therapist.**

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Post-traumatic countertransference

Therapists' **attachment needs, countertransference, vicarious trauma, trauma history** and **Parts** will be triggered in relationship with the client.

Awareness of our trigger:




Support our Parts!!




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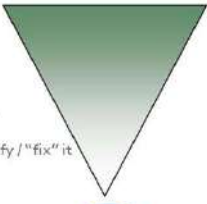
V-R-P triangle activation




Rescuer
Accommodate unreasonable demands and expectations.
Do what you can to pacify / "fix" it.



Persecutor
Fed up, withdraw, insensitive, avoid, passive aggressive






Victim
Feel unappreciated, unvalued, unfairly treated, allow bad treatment

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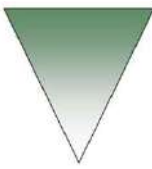
- Think about a time when you found yourself on the triangle with a client.
- What happened?
- How did you respond?
- How did the client respond?
- How did you / do you feel about it – what did you come to understand?


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Staying off the triangle

- Recognise when you are reacting
- Recognise when your attachment is activated
- Recognise when your shame is activated
- Don't get drawn into the blame game
- Don't take sides - all aspects of client are accepted valued and welcome
- Encourage and support communication internally and externally



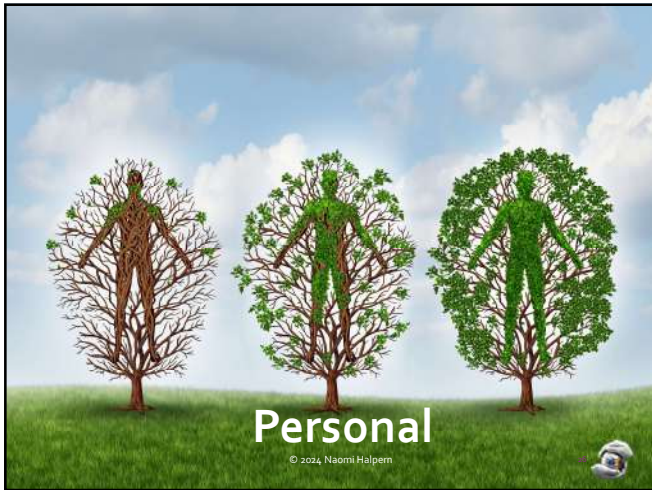


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When stress is unrecognised or ignored

- High staff turn over / stress leave
- Difficulties with clients
- Difficulties with co-workers
- Difficulties with partner & kids
- Health issues, accident proneness

Pearlman, 1993

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Chronic stress and mental health

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mood changes, irritability, anger
- Intrusive thoughts, images, memory
- Eating too much or too little – bingeing
- Too much alcohol or other drugs
- Overspending – gambling – gaming / compulsive activities and behaviours
- Problems in relationships
- Loss of meaning / existential crisis



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Chronic stress impacts on physical health

- Headaches / migraines
- Aches and pains with no other cause
- Fatigue
- Sweating
- Changes in appetite
- Sleeping difficulty
- Shaking
- Dizziness
- Memory problems
- Loss of libido
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Heart disease
- Cancer



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Self-Care iceberg

Exercise
Socialising & fun
Time with family & friends
Holidays & weekends away
Treating ourselves
Hobbies

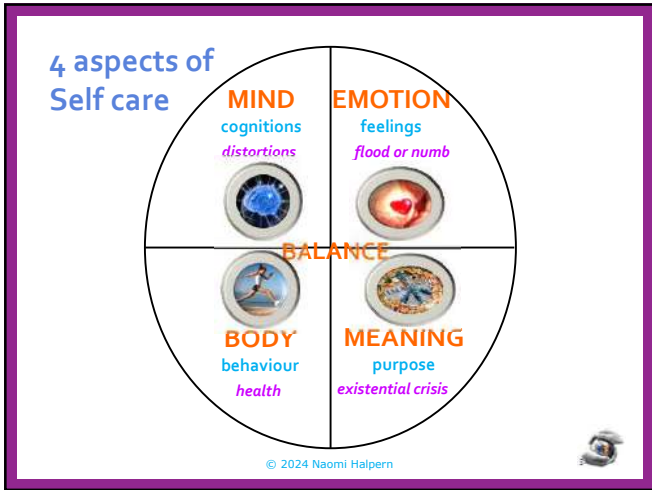


Setting boundaries
Difficult conversations
Facing past hurts & trauma
Learning from triggers
Proper rest & nourishment
Connect & express emotions
Reaching out & being vulnerable

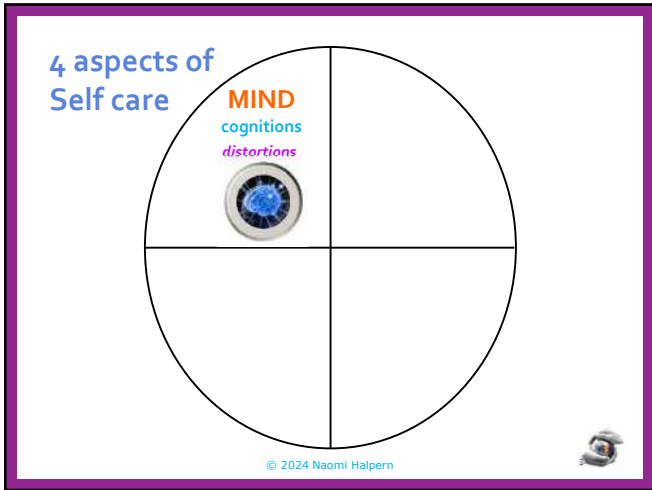
adapted unapologetically surviving © 2024 Naomi Halpern



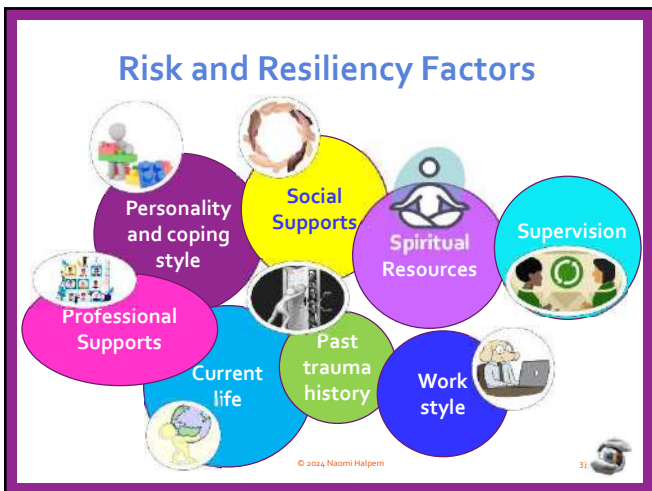
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Factor	How this factor operates or is experienced
Personality & coping style	Your personality and coping style is open, flexible and you reach out if you need help, support or assistance.
Trauma history	If you have past trauma you have worked through it and/or know your triggers and how to support yourself.
Social supports	You have people in your life with who you feel safe, trust, can confide in and regularly have fun with.
Supervision	Your supervisor supports and encourages your professional development.
Spirituality	You have a philosophy or belief system that nurtures and sustains you.
Current life circumstances	You can manage whatever is currently happening in your personal and professional life effectively.
Work style	You structure work to support you to best fulfil your work responsibilities and have flexibility when needed.
Professional supports	You have a network who encourage you to develop professionally and who you can rely on when needed.

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Your stress profile

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Stress factors Signs of stress

What is your stress profile?

Helpful strategies Unhelpful strategies

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Making Professional and Personal Connection a Priority

Professional development & Peer Support

Social connection

Supervision

Emotional Support

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Mindfulness practices




slow deep breathing



eating and cooking



gardening




progressive muscle relaxation




walking




brushing teeth



notice your thoughts



meditation



bathing


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Mindfulness

Potential Pros

- Decreased physical and psychological symptoms
- Increased ability to cope with stressful situations
- Improved self-esteem
- Greater enthusiasm for life
- Greater energy
- Improved pain levels or coping with chronic pain



Potential Cons

- Meditation: increased depression, negative emotions and flashbacks during meditation for individuals with trauma or mental health issues
- Meditation: induced feelings of being unreal (depersonalization)
- Detached and emotionally unresponsive
- Contraindicated for people with active suicidal thoughts

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Mind reflection exercise

- Am I experiencing work related worry, anxiety and/or intrusive thoughts / images?
- Do I take time regularly to reflect on how my work impacts me and conduct a self-care assessment?
- Am I having regular supervision / case consultation and is it meeting my needs?
- Am I pursuing professional development training to assist with developing my knowledge and skills in my work practice?
- Am I actively supporting and pursuing personal development (journaling, courses, therapy / other interests and activities)?

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Mind: cognition, connection, planning, problem solving

- Risk and resiliency factors
- Stress profile & self care plan
- Mindfulness practice
- Personal and Professional supports

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4 aspects of Self care

EMOTION
feelings
flood or numb

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Survival – threat responses	Behaviours
Freeze: Hyper	Protect self through dissociation: cold/frozen skin or parts of body, hold breath, racing thoughts, body rigid, increase heart rate. Can look like procrastination and indecisiveness.
Freeze: Hypo	Protect self through dissociation: Numb, shut down, exhaustion, disconnected from self / emotions, immobile, decrease heart rate. Can look like disinterest, carelessness, aloof.
Flight	Protect self through escape: restless legs/feet, anxiety – panic, shallow breathing, darting eyes, fidgety, perfectionistic, over-think, comfort eating, substance misuse. Can look like perfectionism and/or avoidance.
Fight	Protect self through conflict: clench fists / jaw, eyes glare, angry voice, rage, knotted or burning stomach, nausea, crying. Can look like defensiveness or aggression.
Fawn (submit)	Protect self through placation: difficulty saying no, excessive flattery, over apologise, neglect own needs, pretend to agree. Can look like being inauthentic – people pleaser.

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Emotion reflection exercise

- How do I regulate myself when I am feeling intense, uncomfortable or overwhelming feelings?
- Do I allow myself to connect with uncomfortable feelings or do I try to cut them off, push them down or away?
- Do I practice self-compassion when I am feeling difficult emotions and/or when I feel I have made a mistake, not acted towards self or others in a way I feel is fair, ethical or to my values?
- Do I engage in self-reflection practices that support me on a regular basis?
- Do I reach out and allow trusted people to support me when I am at my most vulnerable and insecure?



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Emotion: feelings – our Achilles heel



Don't imagine client story happening to you or someone you love

Explore and work with your personal issues, resolve past hurts, set clear and appropriate boundaries in personal and professional relationships

Allow space for your feelings – self soothing - balance empathy and compassion

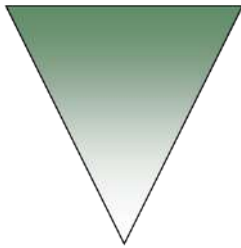
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Victim-Rescuer-Persecutor

Reflection Exercise

Think about a time when you found yourself on the triangle with a client.

What happened?

How did you respond?

How did the client respond?

How did you feel about it at the time?

How do you feel about it now – what did you come to understand?





Risk and Resiliency Factors Exercise





Reflecting on the factors below, which of these factors are working well in your life and boost your resilience in the face of stressful situations and circumstances? Which of these factors do you feel you are challenged in some capacity? What would assist you to develop areas that are challenged? **IMPORTANT:** Being impacted by distressing stories and presentations of clients is normal - not a weakness. Addressing VT and Compassion Fatigue is also an organizational and cultural responsibility. This exercise focuses only on self-awareness, not what an organization can do and may need to address.

Factor	How this factor operates or is experienced
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Current life circumstances	You can manage whatever is currently happening in your personal and professional life effectively.
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Resilience and Risk worksheet

Factor	Resilience	Risk
 <p>Personality & Coping Style</p>		
 <p>Trauma history</p>		
 <p>Social Supports</p>		
 <p>Supervision</p>		

Factor	Resilience	Risk
 <p data-bbox="172 728 325 763">Spirituality</p>		
 <p data-bbox="71 1135 427 1171">Current life circumstances</p>		
 <p data-bbox="172 1603 325 1639">Work Style</p>		
 <p data-bbox="102 1975 399 2011">Professional Supports</p>		



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Mind Reflection Exercise

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