Staying Inside Our Window of Tolerance: Strategies for Managing Secondary Trauma and Distress

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Learning Objectives

• Enact skills to self-monitor and move inside the Window of Tolerance when dysregulated.
• Use peer and supervisory support strategies to address secondary traumatic stress and build resilience.
• Apply knowledge and skills in real time to address occupational stress.
Definitions

• **Secondary traumatic stress** (STS) is the emotional distress that results when an individual is exposed to the firsthand trauma experiences of another.
• **Burnout** is not a trauma condition. Rather, it is the result of long hours and few resources.
• **Moral distress** is knowing what to do but not having the ability to do the right thing.
Trauma Symptoms After Indirect Exposure

- No trauma symptoms
- Trauma symptoms but no functional impairment
- Trauma symptoms and functional impairment but no PTSD
- PTSD
“ARE YOU SURE ALL THIS TRAUMA WORK HASN’T GOTTEN TO YOU?”

JERRY LITNER, GUADALOUPE
Laura’s Struggle
The Complexity of Occupational Stress

Protective and Response Factors
- Resilience
- Intervention utilization
- Practice strategies

Co-existing Conditions
- Moral distress
- Burnout
- General distress
- Other health or mental health conditions

Organizational Context
- Type of work
- The degree to which the organization is STS informed
- How the socio-environmental context affects the organization

Nature of Exposure
- Type
- Severity
- Dose

Personal Risk Profile
- Prior trauma history
- PTSD risk factors

Socio-environmental Context
- Historical or community trauma
- Racism, disproportionality
- Social support
- Social priorities
Window of Tolerance Model
Moment of Reflection

• What are three occupational stressors you are currently experiencing?
  ▪ Be as detailed as you can. Are the stressors related to a particular situation or interaction with research participants who have experienced trauma?
  ▪ Is there a time of day or sensory experience that is associated with your distress?

• How does this move you outside your Window of Tolerance?
  ▪ Do you see signs of hyperarousal?
  ▪ Do you see signs of hypo-arousal?
Screening and Assessment Considerations

• Individual Considerations
  ▪ Pay attention to when and how often you are moving outside your Window of Tolerance.
  ▪ Be self-aware in the moment.
  ▪ Take advantage of supervision.

• Organizational Considerations
  ▪ Tie screening to action.
  ▪ Promote STS as a normal occupational hazard.
  ▪ Respect privacy and make confidentiality paramount.
Individual Assessment Tools
STS-Informed Organizational Assessment

- Provides a baseline to see what programs, policies, and procedures are in place and what STS-related resources are needed.
- Track progress toward desired change over time.
- Describe characteristics of an STS-informed organization.
- Assist organization members in identifying areas of STS risk, and highlight where the organization is doing a good job of promoting resiliency.
- Provide a blueprint for individualized training.
- Operationalize the organization’s role in creating an STS-informed culture.

1. Promotion of STS resilience-building activities
2. Promotion of a sense of safety
3. STS-informed nature of organizational policies
4. STS-informed nature of leadership practices
5. STS-informed nature of other organizational practices
6. Evaluation/Monitoring of STS-informed policies/practices

STS-Informed Organizational Assessment (cont.)

Window of Tolerance Model

HYPER-AROUSED
Fight-or-flight response

HYPO-AROUSED
Freeze response

Staying inside the Window of Tolerance requires:

Individual Strategies

Organizational Strategies

BEFORE
DURING
AFTER
Window of Tolerance Model (cont.)

Staying inside the Window of Tolerance requires:

Individual Strategies

Organizational Strategies

Window of Tolerance
## Individual Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-monitor</td>
<td>Mark boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultivate a self–other perspective</td>
<td>Express gratitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage in reflective meaning making</td>
<td>Be your own story editor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employ cognitive flexibility</td>
<td>Manage trauma inputs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build your support network</td>
<td>Enact real-time practice strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seek professional help when needed</td>
<td>Engage in self-compassion</td>
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Self-monitoring

Free, anonymous screeners at https://ctac.uky.edu/projects-and-programs/wellwork/tier-3
Available Screening Tools

- Take this screener to see if Secondary Traumatic Stress is an issue for you.
  - STSS

- Take this screener to see if Moral Distress is an issue for you.
  - MOS-R

- Take this screener to see if Stress is an issue for you.
  - PSS

- Take this screener to see if Burnout is an issue for you.
  - PROQOL BURNOUT SCALE

- Take this screener to see if Compassion Satisfaction is an issue for you.
  - PROQOL COMPASSION SATISFACTION SCALE

https://ctac.uky.edu/projects-and-programs/wellwork/tier-3
Manage Your Trauma Inputs

Low-impact processing

1) Increased Self Awareness
2) Fair Warning
3) Consent
4) Low Impact Disclosure
Marking Boundaries
Cultivate a Self–Other Perspective
Be Your Own Story Editor
Seek Professional Help

Evidence-Based Treatments

• Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
• Cognitive processing therapy (CPT)
• Eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy
• Prolonged exposure (PE)
Supervision/Peer-Support Strategies

• STS-informed supervision
• Resilience buddies
• Peer-to-peer psychological first aid (PFA)
• Helping Our Peers Excel (HOPE) teams
Individual Plan

Looking at the three challenges you identified in the reflection exercise earlier, pick one to look at first. Of the strategies that were discussed, which ones might move you inside your Window of Tolerance?

- Identify individual strategies
- Identify peer-support strategies
- How will you implement these strategies?
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STSI-OA download:
www.uky.edu/CTAC/stisoa

Take our free screeners:
https://www.uky.edu/ctac/tier3screening
Evaluation

Please let us know what you thought about this webcast!
https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7161563/Eval-SecTraum
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