



# Class 4: Organizational Trauma and Implementation of Trauma-informed Principles in Agency Contexts

# Mindfulness Facilitation



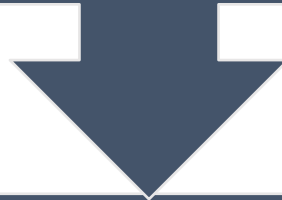
# Being Trauma Informed: An Example

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- What does Wallace identify in terms of trauma that related to what we have already discussed in our class?
- What systems does he name that could be improved by applying a trauma-informed lens.



Agencies and organizations often serve people with trauma exposure, without directly treating them for trauma.



Reasons include:

Presenting problem is  
symptom related

Client does not disclose  
trauma history

Incomplete history  
taken at intake

Barriers to full  
engagement

# Trauma Informed Care

- “To be trauma informed means to know the history of past and current abuse in the life of the consumer with whom one is working;” and
- “To be trauma informed means to understand the role that violence and victimization play in the lives of most consumers of mental health and substance abuse services and to use that understanding to design service systems that accommodate the vulnerabilities of trauma survivors and allow services to be delivered in a way that will facilitate consumer participation in treatment”

(Harris, Fallot 2001)



# Trauma needs a Multi-Pronged & Multi-agency Public Health Approach

- Trauma is a public health problem.
- Individuals' w/ experiences of trauma are found in multiple service sectors not just in behavioral health.
  - Juvenile and criminal justice system
  - Schools
  - Child welfare system
  - Primary care systems
  - What else can you think of?

Public institutions and service systems that are intended to provide services and supports to individuals are often themselves trauma-inducing.

- **What does that mean?**
  - use of coercive practices (ex: restraints and seclusion)
  - abrupt removal of a child from an abusing family in child welfare system
  - use of invasive procedures in medical system
  - harsh disciplinary procedures in educational systems
  - intimidating practices in the criminal justice system
- Can be re-traumatizing for individuals who already enter these systems with significant histories of trauma.
- These program/system practices often interfere with achieving the desired outcomes in these systems.

Many definitions and various models for incorporating it across organizations, but a “trauma-informed approach” incorporates four key elements:

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*A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.*



## Why is this important?

- There is an increasing focus on the impact of trauma and how service systems may help to resolve or exacerbate trauma-related issues.
- These systems are beginning to revisit how they conduct their “business” under the framework of a trauma-informed approach.



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of traumatic  
individuals,  
families and  
communities

Unintended but  
similarly  
widespread re-  
traumatizing of  
individuals within  
our service systems

=

Necessary  
to rethink  
“business  
as usual.”

# Think Pair Share

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What does your agency look like when it's at high stress?

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What does your agency look like on a good day?

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What are some of the basic things you need at your job to feel safe, happy, satisfied?

# Trauma and Organization

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Organizations providing services to traumatized individuals, families, or communities are susceptible to becoming traumatized systems, experiencing the cumulative effects of their work.

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At the agency level, trauma can have significant impacts on the health and culture of an organization.

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Strengthening organizational resilience and nurturing a positive culture can serve as preventive and mitigative measures against this trauma.

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This transformation moves an organization from being trauma-affected to becoming a healing environment for both clients and staff members.



# Sources of Organizational Trauma

- Single catastrophic event (e.g., pandemic)
- Ongoing wounding of staff including abusive practices by leadership (e.g., racism)
- Outdated practices that staff consider harmful to clients
- Empathic nature of the work



Adapted from Organizational Trauma and Healing by Pat Vivian and Shana Hormann (2013)



# Symptoms of Organizational Trauma



- Stress and anxiety contagion (unintentionally spreading fear, distrust in leadership, etc.)
- Organizational amnesia (in denial about trauma in their culture)
- Unrecognized wounding from trauma
- Unproductive relationships
- Limiting attitudes and worldview
- Depression, despair, and loss of hope (e.g., rapid turnover, absenteeism, presenteeism, missed deadlines)

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The “Strengths and Shadows” graphic illustrates the impact of organizational culture on internal dynamics. “Strengths” refers to values and assumptions that support an organization’s successful accomplishment of its mission. “Shadow” refers to elements that are denied, rejected, hidden, and undiscussable.



# Reflection Questions on Organizational Trauma:

- Is there clear transparency regarding the decision-making process and the rationale behind decisions within your agency?
- Are individuals most affected by decisions actively included in discussions before decisions are finalized?
- Does a significant portion of the staff, particularly those in entry-level or lower positions in the organizational structure, also belong to the populations served by the organization? If so, how is this addressed?
- Who is required to adhere to a strict clock-in and clock-out system versus those who have the option to use a timesheet that auto-populates their arrival and departure times?
- Who holds the authority to propose and implement new policies and procedures?
- Which individuals are directly impacted by these policies and procedures?



# Building Resilient Organizations:

Resilient organizations are cultivated through a foundation of organizational respect, a robust sense of identity, deliberate establishment of structures, processes, and spaces for reflection, optimistic leadership, and fostering positive connections both internally and externally.

**1.Acknowledge Organizational Trauma:** Create an environment conducive to facilitated sharing and transparency about trauma and toxic culture. This allows for the identification of organizational stressors and the sharing of stories highlighting program strengths.

**2.Provide Safe Spaces:** Establish trusted and secure spaces where employees can access information on coping with anxiety and vicarious trauma. This validation and support are crucial for employees navigating their experiences.

**3.Lead by Example:** Demonstrate kindness and compassion in interactions with staff and partner agencies, setting a standard for behavior within the organization.

**4.Learn from History:** Normalize the acknowledgment of mistakes and learnings from the past. This prevents the recurrence of errors and fosters a culture of continuous improvement.

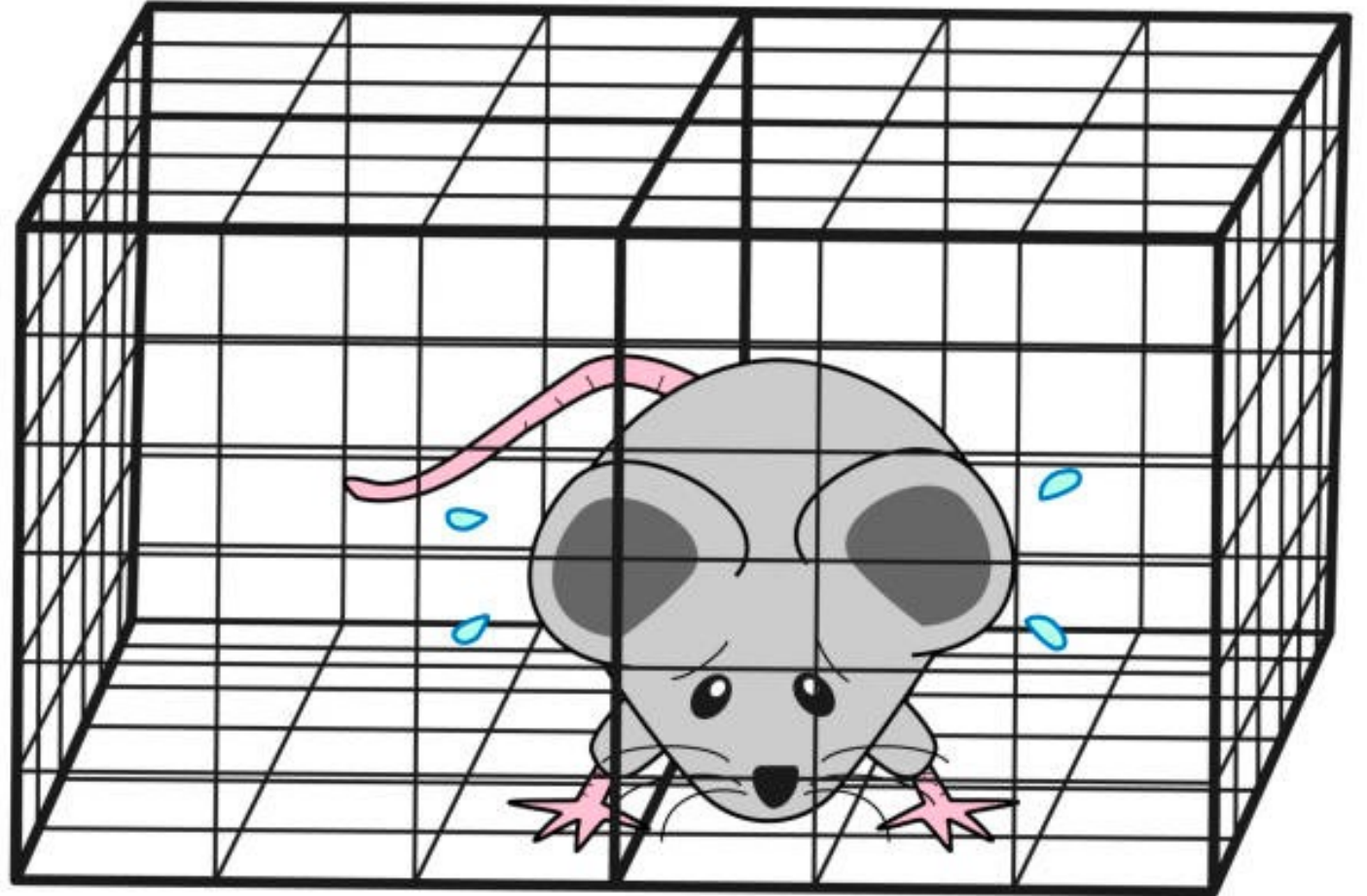
**5.Cultivate Organizational Identity and Respect:** Foster a sense of connection to the agency's mission among staff. Offer optimism, celebrate achievements through rituals, and provide positive affirmations for successes, both big and small.



# What does this mean for the built environment?

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- Dr. Jaak Panksepp's Research Study
- *How do we design to minimize the cat hairs in our buildings? ... Especially for the most vulnerable among us?*





# Being Trauma Informed: TID in Supportive Housing An Example

- What does Macur identify in terms of trauma that related to what we have already discussed in our class?
- What systems does she name that could be improved by applying a trauma-informed lens. What could be added?

## How Spaces Can Hurt or Heal



# Mindfulness Facilitation



Why social  
work?

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What drew you to the  
field?

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What do you love about  
it?

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What keeps you going?





# Compassion Satisfaction

Pleasure one derives from being able to do one's work well  
(Stamm, 2009)

- Pleasure in helping others through work
- Positive feelings about colleagues
- Positive feelings about contributing to work setting and/or to greater good of society

# Compassion Fatigue

Compassion Fatigue has two components (Stamm, 2009):

- Burnout
- Secondary Trauma (Vicarious Trauma)





# Burnout

“A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotional demanding situations” (Pines & Aronson, 1988)

Associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing one’s job effectively (Stamm, 2009)

Gradual onset



Stressed Eric



Burnt out Eric

(Eric was too  
tired to pose for  
this cartoon,  
apologies)

©hills www.myburnoutthing.com

# Burnout

Physical symptoms:

- Fatigue, sleep problems, gastrointestinal difficulties, illness

Emotional symptoms:

- Irritability, anxiety, depression, guilt

Behavioral symptoms:

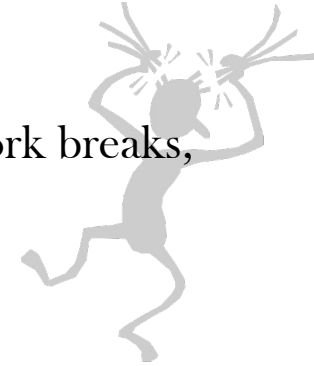
- Aggression, callousness, pessimism, substance abuse

Work-related symptoms:

- Poor work performance, missing work, being late for work, misuse of work breaks, quitting job

Interpersonal symptoms:

- Inability to concentrate/focus on communication
- Withdrawal from others (clients, coworkers)
- Dehumanized, intellectualized interactions/excessive distancing



(Kahill, 1988)

1. You are hoping to get sick, just to have a reason to stay in bed for a day.

2. Your children shudder in fear when your boss's name is mentioned.

3. You've wondered (often) if your cell phone would float if hurled into water.

4. You start using a pencil instead of a pen to put dates with your partner in your schedule.

5. Medical journals or case files have become "light bedtime reading."

<http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf>

6. Your best friends think you've moved away because they haven't heard from you in so long.

7. You consider Red Bull a part of a balanced diet.

8. You fall asleep during trips to the dentist's office, because it's the only time you put your feet up.

9. You're too tired to remember the name of your dog.

10. It takes you six days of vacation to even begin to feel relaxed, and six minutes back in the office to make you forget that you took a vacation at all.



What are your burnout  
warning signs?

# Secondary Traumatic Stress / Vicarious Trauma

Work-related, secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events  
Compassion fatigue/Secondary Traumatic Stress can be the result of “the exposure of helpers to experiences” of students, plus “the empathy that they experience for their” students (Collins & Long, 2003)  
Can be sudden and acute

# Signs and Symptoms of Vicarious Traumatization Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995)

## General Symptoms

- Numbing
- Social withdrawal
- Nightmares
- Despair and hopelessness
- No time or energy for yourself
- Disconnection from loved ones
- Increased sensitivity to violence



# Internal Transformations

1. Frame of Reference:

World view (e.g., question goodness of others, loss of hope or optimism); Identity; Spirituality

2. Diminished self capacities

Capacity to tolerate strong affect, and maintain connection with self and others.

3. Alterations in sensory and memory experiences

Student's memories become incorporated into helper's memory

#### 4. Disrupted psychological needs

Safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, control

#### 5. Ego Resources (Internal Resources)

Ability to establish and maintain boundaries

Ability to take perspective

Empathy and sense of humor

Ability to strive for personal growth

Awareness of psychological needs

Clear cognitive processing

Ability to be introspective

# Mindfulness Facilitation



