

Beyond Self-Care:

Resilience to secondary traumatic stress as a professional skillset for trauma-informed organizations

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- “I wouldn’t know what to say”

- “I wouldn’t know what to say”
 - How to respond helpfully to trauma disclosures
 - How to cope with difficult thoughts and feelings that arise when we learn about others’ traumas

How does exposure to others' trauma arise in the work we do?

- *mental health*
 - *justice systems*
 - *child welfare*
 - *medical care*
 - *rape crisis/domestic violence*
 - *schools*
 - *gang intervention*
 - *policing/emergency/first responding*
 - *researchers studying trauma and violence*
- Reading trauma-filled case histories
 - Doing trauma history screenings
 - Hearing trauma disclosures
 - Listening to colleagues' cases
 - Carrying out trauma-informed programming

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- Carrying out trauma-informed programming
- Exposure to others' trauma is a potential source of trauma

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5, 2013) definition of **trauma**:

- Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence through
 - directly experiencing
 - witnessing, or
 - **learning about/exposure to** aversive details of an event = **secondary traumatic stress (STS)**

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 - **learning about/exposure to** aversive details of an event = **secondary traumatic stress (STS)**
- Therefore, addressing STS is a **professional competency** for those whose work involves traumatized individuals or trauma-related material
 - Beyond personal “self-care,” skills for recognizing, preventing, and responding to STS are crucial tools in our professional toolkits

Burnout:

Emotional exhaustion and feelings of ineffectiveness due to work-related powerlessness, lack of appreciation

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Feeling of being emotionally “spent” by caring for others without being able to replenish our reserves

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Changes in inner experience due to empathic engagement with a traumatized person

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Changes in inner experience due to empathic engagement with a traumatized person
(may include **moral injury/moral distress**)

Moral injury

- “Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009)
- Moral Injury Scales for Youth (Chaplo, Kerig et al., 2019)
 - Commission with agency
 - “I’ve done things that break my own rules of right and wrong”
 - Commission under duress
 - “I’ve been forced to do things I think are wrong”
 - Omission
 - “I stood by and let a bad thing happen”
 - Witnessing
 - “I’ve seen people do terrible things”
 - Betrayal
 - “Someone I trusted did something I think is really wrong”

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Secondary Traumatic Stress:

Presence of PTSD symptoms (intrusions, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, hyperarousal) resulting from indirect exposure to others’ trauma

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Vicarious Resilience:

Positive effects following upon witnessing another’s recovery from trauma

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Risk and Protective Factors for Secondary Traumatic Stress reactions

Risk	Protective
Isolative work environment	Connection with colleagues
Volume of trauma exposure	Support, debriefing
Empathy	Compassion satisfaction
Shame about STS	Openness and acknowledgement
Our own ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)	Resolution, integration, finding meaning in past experiences
Lack of training/preparation for dealing with trauma	Trauma tools in our toolkits

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like?

- Laura van Dernoot Lipsky (2009). *Trauma Stewardship*. San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler.
 - “We are stewards not just of those who allow us into their lives, but of our own capacity to be helpful ...”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)



Feelings of
helplessness/
low self-efficacy

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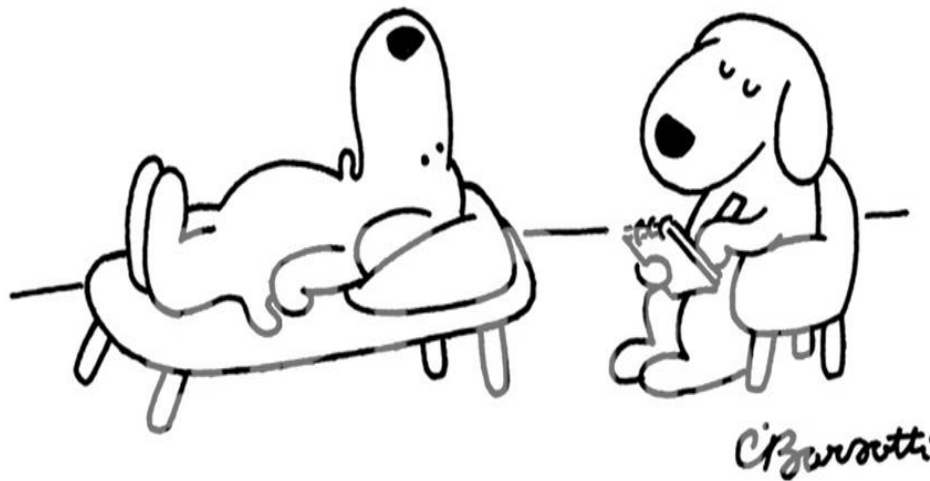


Working so
hard but
feeling we
aren't doing
enough

“My question is, are we making an impact?”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)

Hypervigilance,
being “always on”



“I bark at everything. Can’t go wrong that way.”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)



Loss of pleasure in
life

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)



Avoidance

“No, Thursday’s out. How about never—is never good for you?”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)

Guilt



“Whenever I watch the Nature Channel I get survivor’s guilt.”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)



Cynicism

“She’ll come down eventually, and she’ll come down hard.”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)



Numbness/
Loss of
empathy

“Listen pal, they’re all emergencies.”

What does Secondary Traumatic Stress look like? (Lipsky, 2009)

Helplessness/low self-efficacy

"Though every rescue brings the knowledge of a life saved, it also brings the knowledge of countless other lives not saved. This to me feels like a personal failure."

--Animal rescue worker



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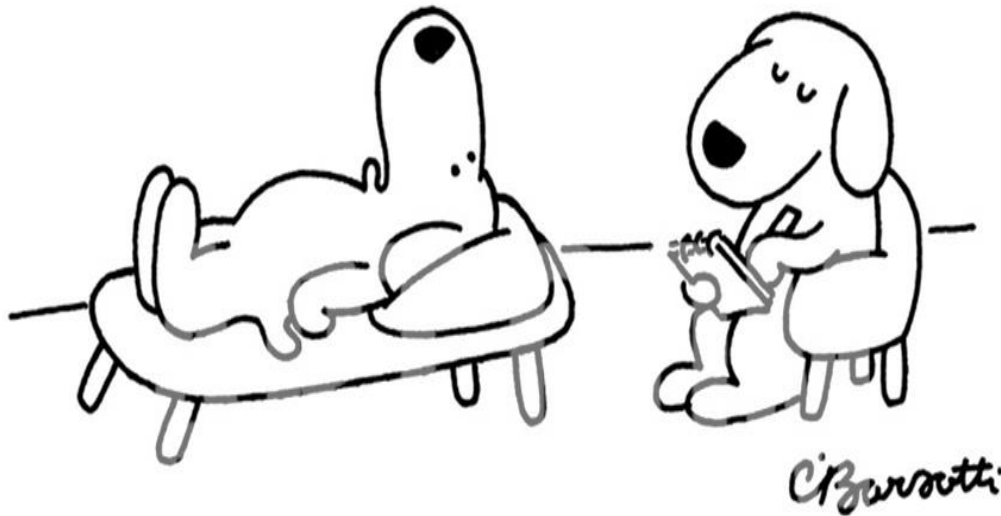


Loss of pleasure in life

"All my energy goes into just getting through my days. I don't do anything anymore but work and go home and watch TV."

--Community organizer

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“I recently received photos from a friend’s wedding and as I sat there looking through them, I thought to myself, ‘I wonder when the domestic violence is going to start’” --

*Domestic violence
advocate*

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue

Physical

- Physical exhaustion
- Not sleeping or oversleeping
 - Headaches, backaches, stomachaches
- Getting sick more often (suppressed immune system)

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue

Behavioral

- Increased substance use
- Other addictions (shopping, gambling, workaholism)
 - Anger, irritability
 - Socially isolating
- “Silencing response”

(shutting people down, changing the subject, giving “pat” answers, minimizing, cracking jokes, spacing out, not listening)

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue

Psychological

- Emotional exhaustion
 - Feeling ineffective
 - Depressed mood
 - Reduced empathy
 - Cynicism
- Loss of pleasure in life
- Changed worldview (moral injury)
- Intrusions, avoidance, numbing, hypervigilance, dissociating
 - Over vs. under-sensitivity

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue

Professional

- Overburdened sense of responsibility
 - Being “always on”
- Avoiding work, absenteeism
 - Resenting demands
 - Dreading the workday
- Difficulty making decisions, self-doubt
- Difficulty separating work and personal life

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Sources on Self-Care

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Strategies for self-care

- *Self-Care Worksheet* (Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996)
 - Taking time off when I can
 - Relaxing activities
 - Physical exercise
 - Healthy food
 - Spirituality
 - Social support

Strategies for self-care



Limits of self-care

- Bober & Regher (2006) study of 246 trauma therapists:
 - Participation in trainings focused on self-care did not increase time spent on self-care activities
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- Most suggested self-care activities take place long after trauma exposure, are reactive, and are divorced from the workplace
 - We need strategies we can use in the *moment*, here and now
 - *Proactive* strategies, to protect us *in anticipation* of exposure
 - *Integrated* with our workplace environments

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- Focus is on solo activities
 - Workplace STS is not solely an individual responsibility
 - We need a workplace culture of recognition and mutual support

Limits of self-care

- Emphasis is on distracting actions, damping down emotions
 - Attempts to avoid emotions can exacerbate them; experiential *engagement*, even with distressing emotions, is associated with recovery and regulation (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011)

Limits of self-care

- Emphasis is on distracting actions, damping down emotions
 - Attempts to avoid emotions can exacerbate them; experiential **engagement**, even with distressing emotions, is associated with recovery and regulation (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011)
- Lack **mindfulness** and **intentionality**
 - E.g., walking in nature may be pleasant, but recovery from STS involves doing so **mindfully** and **intentionally** to address what is underlying our STS reaction (e.g., to counter hopelessness by reminding ourselves of the power of nature's capacities for renewal)

Limits of self-care

- Lack of attention to ethnic, religious, cultural diversity
 - Ethnocultural aspects of PTSD (Marsella, 2010)
 - Beliefs about the underlying processes disrupted by trauma:
 - Cognitive
 - Biological
 - Spiritual
 - Interpersonal
 - Sociocultural worldviews
 - Destiny/fate versus personal culpability
 - Individualism vs communality
 - Patterns of coping, social resources, and meaning-making
 - Language used to encode, interpret, respond to traumatic events
 - Culture-specific idioms of distress: *DSM-5* (2013), pp. 833-837
 - Beliefs about the processes that lead to healing
 - “Self”-focused activities may not be culturally relevant and may not be the most regenerative

What is resilience?

- It doesn't mean being armor-plated and impervious to all adversity



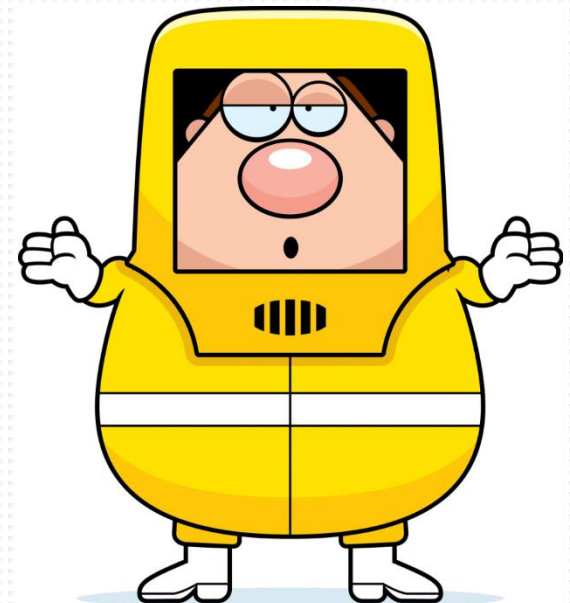
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What is resilience?

- It doesn't mean wearing a psychological hazmat suit
 - Having emotions related to our work is only human
 - Emotions are a valuable tool in our work
 - They tell us when something needs attending to



What is resilience?

- It is not all-or-none
 - Resilient people are affected by their experiences
 - We can be resilient in some ways, struggling in others
- It is not only a matter of our own “true grit”
 - It is made up of strengths and protective factors in several domains



What is resilience? (Grych et al., 2015; Hamby et al., 2018)



Emotional

- Emotional awareness
- Emotion regulation
- Coping
- Honesty
- Humility

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Meaning-making

- Sense of purpose
- Optimism
- Spirituality
- Cultural and family values

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Interpersonal

- Generativity
- Compassion
- Social support
- Community

What enables resilience in the context of STS?

- Just like primary trauma exposure, secondary traumatic stress:
 - Dysregulates us
 - Physiologically (hyperarousal)
 - Emotionally (distress)
 - Cognitively (unhelpful interpretations)
 - Morally (moral injury)
 - Causes us to experience as if in the present something that has happened in the past

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- So the strategies that protect us will be those that:
 - Re-establish our emotional, physical, cognitive, interpersonal, moral balance
 - Ground us in the present
 - Dispel unhelpful thoughts/interpretations/judgements
 - Reconnect us to our strengths, sources of supports, and values

Self-care might be ...

Reactive

Long after the event

Individualistic

Divorced from the
workplace

Experientially avoidant

A personal
responsibility

Resilience- promotion is ...

Proactive

Here-and-now

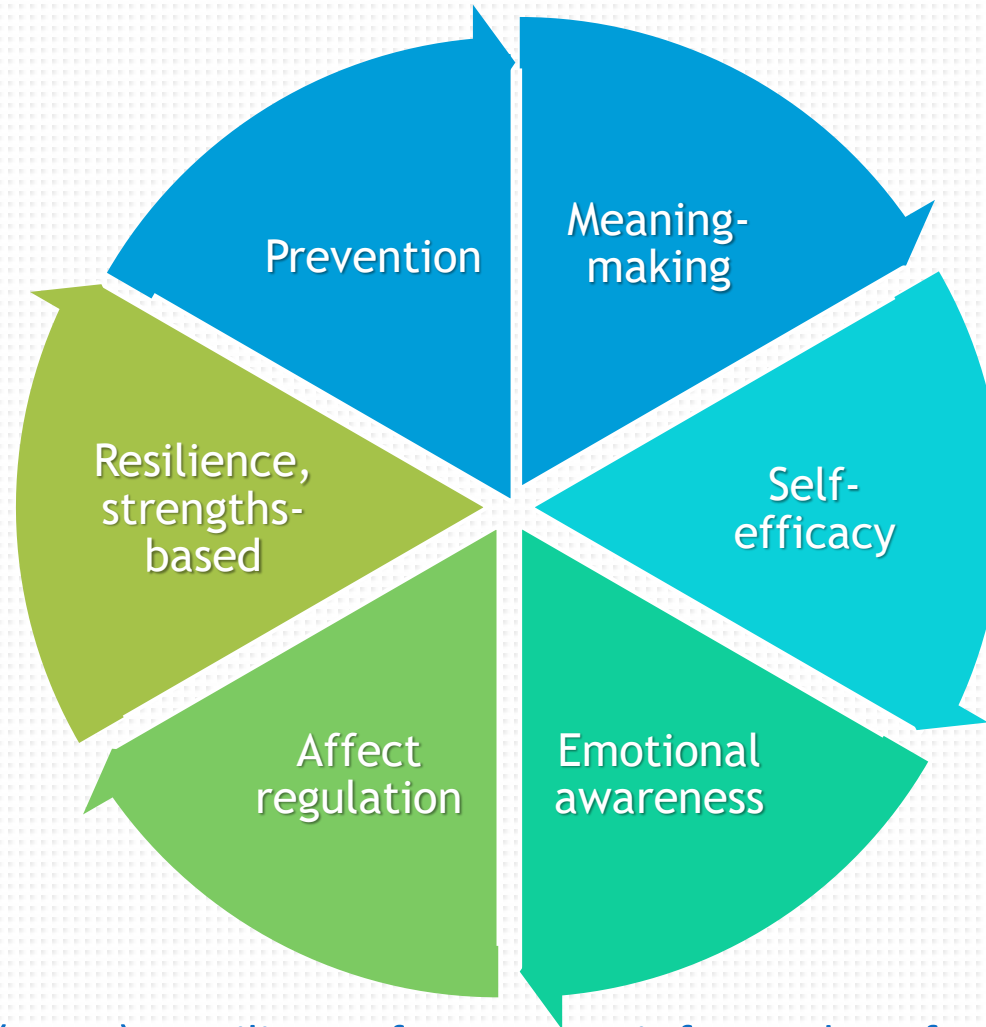
A mutually-supportive
social ecology

Integrated with the
workplace

Experientially engaged

A professional skill

R-TIP Core Principles (Kerig, 2019)



Kerig, P. K. (2019). Resilience for trauma-informed professionals. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, & Trauma*, 28, 613-630.

R-TIP's tools for preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue



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Prevention

- Limiting unnecessary exposure
- Protection from spill-over and contagion

Prior to exposure: Resilience and protection

- Fostering o
- \ur “background” resilience
- Entering situation knowing we have tools in our toolboxes

During exposure: Tools for coping in the presence of secondary trauma exposure

After exposure: Recovery in the aftermath of stress and trauma

- Debriefing in helpful ways
- Mindful self-care, self-compassion, meaning-making
- Creating a social ecology of mutual awareness and support

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- Being ready to respond to disclosures
- Being ready to respond if someone becomes triggered
- Being prepared to make mandated reports in ways that protect clients, us, and the alliance
- Being able to ground/calm/recover in the moment

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Prevention: Limiting unnecessary exposure

- Can staff exposure to graphic details be limited?
 - Identifying those affected by posttraumatic symptoms **in the present** doesn't necessarily require asking intrusive details about what happened **in the past**
 - PTSD Screening Inventory (PSI; Kerig, 2014)
 - Current symptoms of PTSD, not past events
 - Safety Plan (Triggers & Coping Strategies; Kerig, 2004)
 - Triggers for posttraumatic reactions
 - Reactions that show one has been triggered
 - Coping/calming strategies that help

What Makes me Angry, Upset, or Pushes My Buttons? (My "Triggers")

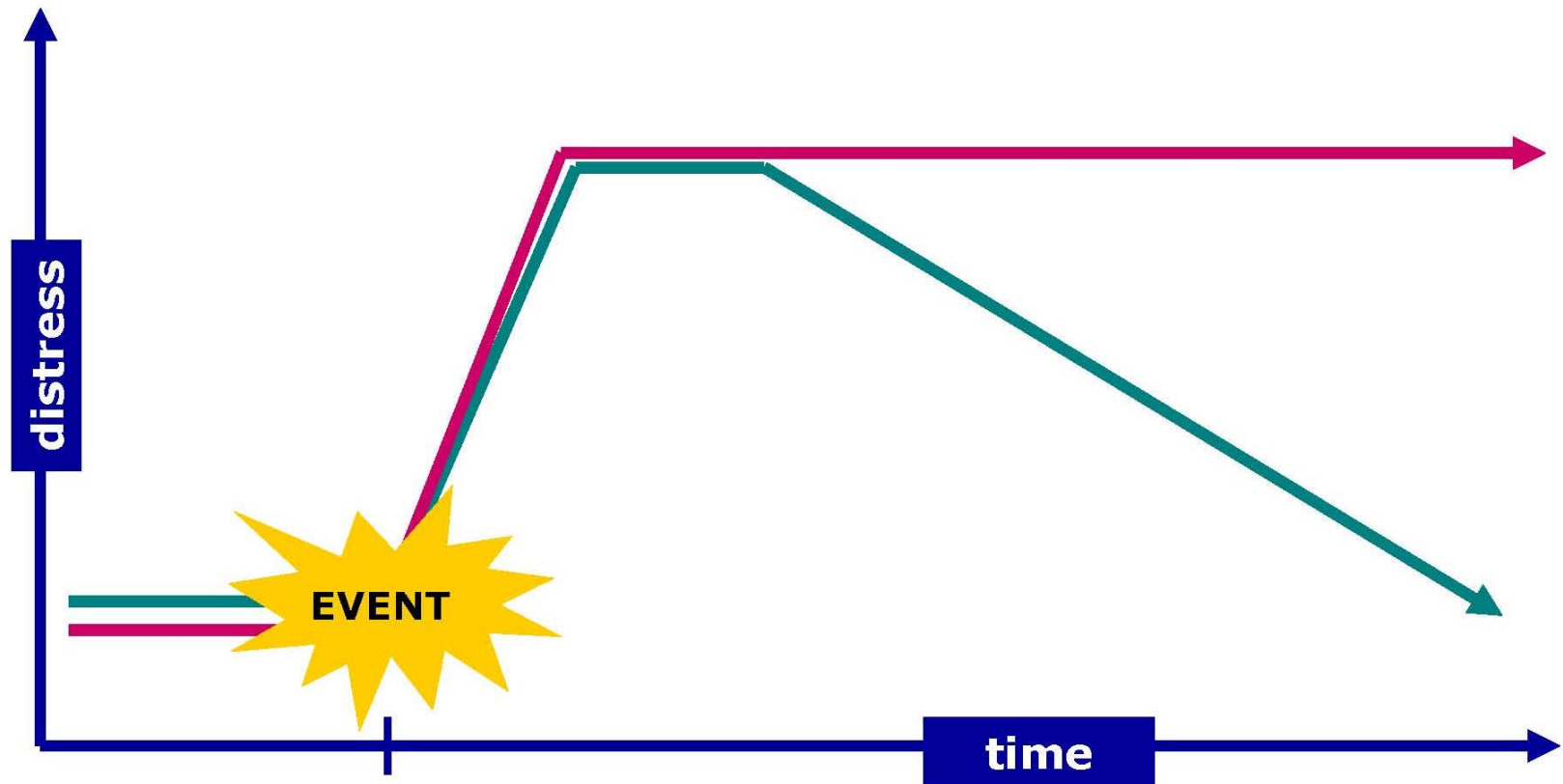
 Being alone	 Feeling crowded	 Being ignored	 Being told what to do
 No privacy	 Not being listened to	 Loud noise	 Not understanding what is going on
 Not having control	 Feeling like I don't matter	 Being touched	 Bad dreams
 Being bullied	 People yelling or arguing	 Darkness	 Being away from home
 Being dissed or not respected	 Being forced to talk	 Not knowing what is going to happen to me	 Being disappointed (things going different than I expected)
 Not being allowed to do what I want	 Seeing others be out of control	 Being around men	 Being around women
 Being stared at	 Feeling pressured	 Having limits set on my behavior	 Certain time of day
 Certain day/time of year	 Things that remind me of		

Prevention: Containing contagion

- When coworkers debrief or seek support after exposure to traumatic material:
 - STS is contagious, are we “passing it on”?
 - Can we still benefit from getting support without sharing every graphic detail?
 - Can we gently steer others from sharing TMI?
- Limited Impact Debriefing (LID; Mathieu, 2012; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)
 - Awareness
 - Fair warning
 - Request and receive consent
 - Thoughtful disclosure



What might keep us “stuck” in a trauma story, even after debriefing?



Role of appraisals (beliefs, cognitions, interpretations, schemas) in STS

- About the event
 - Malice, intention
- About what it means about us, others, or the world
 - Vulnerability (e.g., “We can’t protect ourselves or our families”)
 - Permanence (e.g., “She will never recover from this”)
 - Blame (e.g., “He should have done something to stop it”)
 - Trauma reactions (e.g., “I shouldn’t be feeling this;” “I must be losing my grip”)
- Appraisals
 - Impact emotions, behavior, relationships
 - Can be helpful → resilience; unhelpful and → PTSD/STS
 - Are open to change



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Prior to exposure:
Resilience and protection

During exposure:
Tools for coping in the presence of secondary trauma exposure

After exposure:
Recovery in the aftermath of stress and trauma

- Being ready to respond to disclosures
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- Being prepared to make mandated reports in ways that protect clients, us, and the alliance
- Being able to ground/calm/recover our balance in the moment

Being ready to respond in the moment to disclosures

Guidelines	What helps	What doesn't help
1. Be present	Keep eyes focused where you usually do	Looking away, staring intently, changing the subject
2. Show you're listening	Reflect back what you've heard	Interpretations, questions, sharing own experiences
3. Stay calm and focused	Find a centering, calm thought to focus on in your own mind	Over-reactions, even with empathy

Being ready to respond in the moment to disclosures

Guidelines	What helps	What doesn't help
4. Bear witness	Express appreciation for participants' willingness to tell	Overly-praising
5. Normalize	Indicate person's reaction is understandable	Trying to "make it better"
6. Make a bridge to intervention	Therapy is a form of talking, just like this	Rushing in to "therapize" if you aren't the therapist

Being ready to respond if someone becomes triggered

- Recognizing the signs of a triggered response
- Check your own level of arousal
 - Remember the airplane “oxygen mask”
- Use a calm voice
- Put a label on what’s happening
- Invite person to engage in a self-calming or grounding exercise with you that *you* like and that *you* actually do
 - Deep (“belly”) breathing
 - Centering thought
 - Grounding with the five senses
 - “Safe place” imagery
 - SOS (TARGET: Julian Ford, ©University of Connecticut)
 - Mindfulness exercise

Ways to Engage Mindfulness

Breathing is part of all types of mindfulness and meditation.



Make sure your breathing is deep, slow, and regular.
Breathe in through your nose, down deep into your middle. Notice the pause.
Breathe out through your mouth, slowly and completely.
Notice your breath as it moves through your nose, your chest, your middle, and back again.
It might help to count breaths or to say to yourself, "In. Out."

Imagery



Focus on a pleasant image in your mind, such as the moon shimmering on a mountain lake, a design of a beautiful blue color, or a bubble slowly rising from the bottom of the ocean.

Sound



Focus on a sound or sentence. Say it in your mind as you slowly breathe in and out. A "mantra" can be anything you choose—the word "om," a sound you like, or a sentence that brings pleasant feelings ("I am calm and relaxed." "I am here in this breath.")

Safe Place



Picture yourself in a place where you feel relaxed and happy. It could be a real place and time where you once felt completely calm and peaceful (a beach, Christmas morning at grandmother's house, playing Frisbee in the park, snuggling with your pet) or a place in your imagination (a cabin in the woods where no harm can come to you).
Imagine the sounds you would hear, the smells, the sights, how it would feel to touch.

Here And Now



Focus your attention on what is going on right here and now, inside you and around you. Notice the physical sensations of your body, the sounds you hear, the sights, the smells, as they ebb and flow. Notice without judging, labeling, telling stories, or getting caught up in it. Just notice. Every time your mind wanders notice that—without judging it—and gently bring it back to the here and now.

Walking Meditation



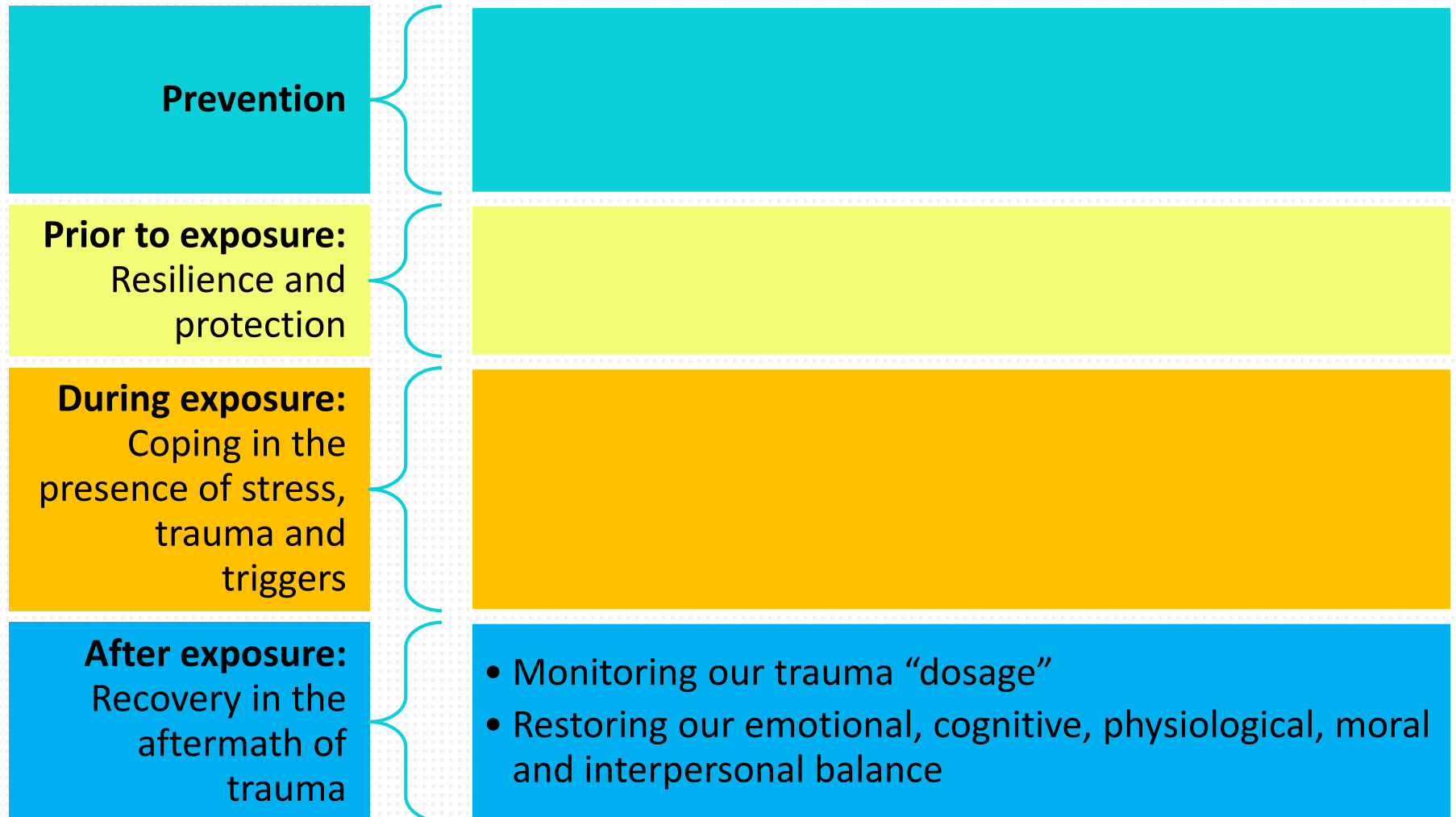
Find a safe and quiet place. Walk at a relaxed, slow, but normal pace. Focus your attention on the sensations of your body as you walk—the alternation of your left and right foot, the swinging of your hips and arms. Notice how the soles of your feet feel as they make contact with your shoes and ground and the sensations as they bear your body. Allow your awareness to move up through every part of your body, noticing the sensations as you walk in your ankles, shins, calves, knees, thighs, pelvis, back, shoulders, arms, neck and head. If you become aware of any tension in your body, let it go, and keep your attention on the rhythm of your walking.

Loving-Kindness Meditation



Start by becoming aware of yourself and focusing on feelings of peace, calm, and tranquility. Let these feelings grow in strength and confidence and fill your heart—you might use an image, such as a golden light flooding your body, or a phrase such as "may I be well, may I be happy, may I have peace." Second, think of a friend, bringing them to mind vividly as you think of their good qualities. Feel your connection and your liking of them and allow that to grow as you visualize a shining light from your heart to theirs or say the phrase, "May they be well, may they be happy, may they have peace." Then think of someone toward whom you feel neutral, who you do not particularly like or dislike.

R-TIP's tools for preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue



Recognizing our own Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Self-check tools:
 - Professional Quality of Life Scale (Stamm, 2009;
http://www.proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL_5_English_Self-Score_3-2012.pdf)
 - Burnout
 - Secondary Traumatic Stress
 - Compassion Satisfaction
 - Measure of Moral Distress—Healthcare Professionals (Epstein et al., 2019)

Developing an early warning system

- Your “dosimeter”



- What signs do you experience most at work?
- What signs do you bring home most often?
- Who can partner with you on this?
 - Who knows you, maybe even better than you do?
 - Who can help you monitor your “dosage” when you are not aware?

Restoring balance after trauma exposure

- While at work
 - How do you ground yourself/regulate your emotions while participants/clients/coworkers are talking about trauma?
 - What do you do to re-ground yourself after being shaken up by someone's traumatic story?
 - How do you know you're ready to get back to work?

Restoring balance after trauma exposure

- While at work
 - How do you ground yourself/regulate your emotions while participants/clients/coworkers are talking about trauma?
 - What do you do to re-ground yourself after being shaken up by someone's traumatic story?
 - How do you know you're ready to get back to work?
- In the transition between work and home
 - What do you do at the end of the workday to put difficult stories behind you before you go home?

Restoring balance after trauma exposure

- While at work
 - How do you ground yourself/regulate your emotions while participants/clients/coworkers are talking about trauma?
 - What do you do to re-ground yourself after being shaken up by someone's traumatic story?
 - How do you know you're ready to get back to work?
- In the transition between work and home
 - What do you do at the end of the workday to put difficult stories behind you before you go home?
- At home
 - How do you recharge your batteries?

Restoring balance after trauma exposure

- While at work
 - How do you ground yourself/regulate your emotions while participants/clients/coworkers are talking about trauma?
 - What do you do to re-ground yourself after being shaken up by someone's traumatic story?
 - How do you know you're ready to get back to work?
- In the transition between work and home
 - What do you do at the end of the workday to put difficult stories behind you before you go home?
- At home
 - How do you recharge your batteries?
- In the longer term
 - What preserves your sense of purpose, meaning, and satisfaction in the work you do?

My personal STS protection toolkit

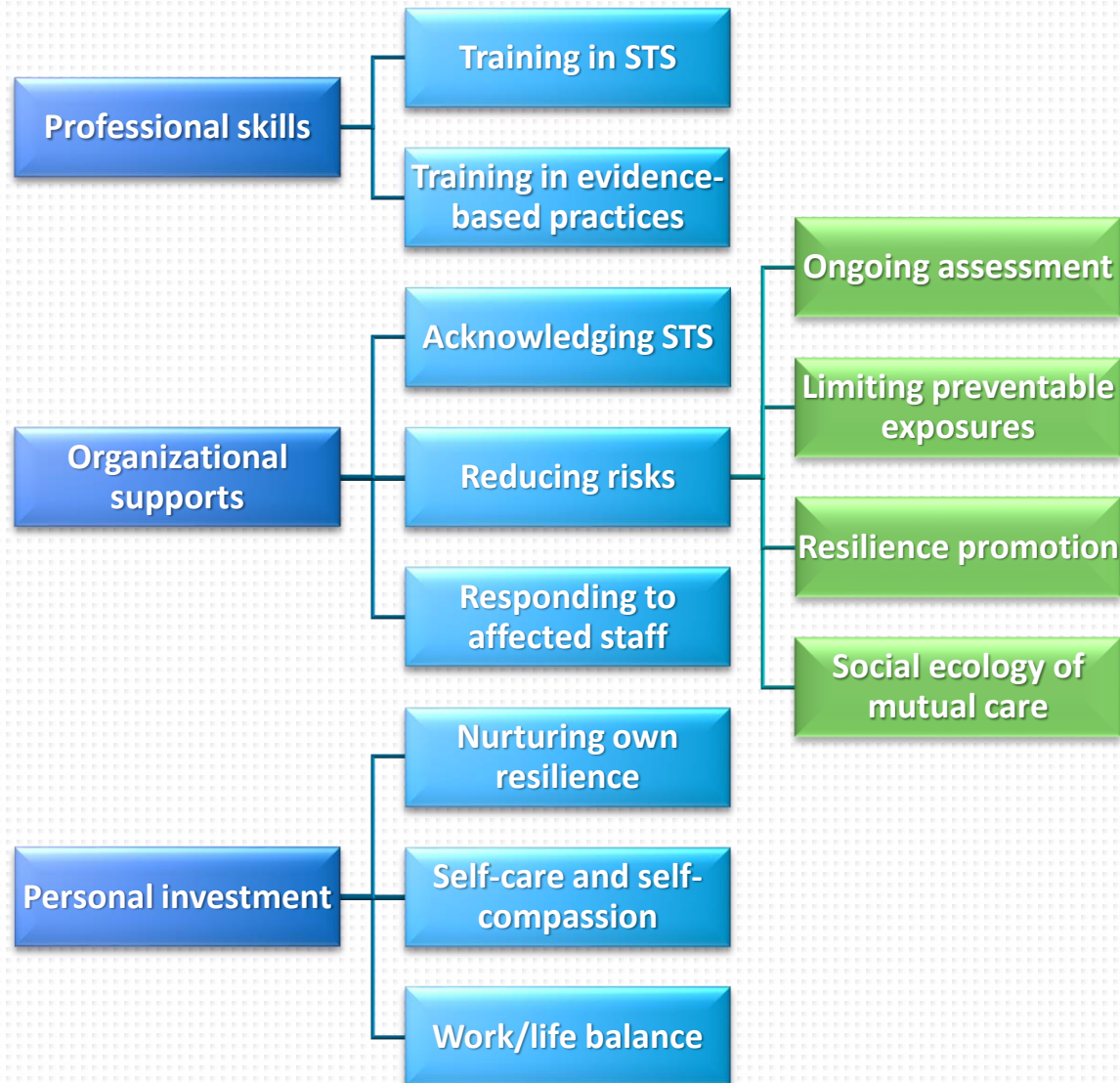
What are my key warning signs?	What lets me know I'm in my green zone?	What do I look like when I'm in my yellow zone?	What do I look like when I'm in my red zone?
Regular, weekly self-check, engaging others I trust who know me well	When?	Where?	With whom?
In anticipation: Strategies that help me prepare for exposures	Mindfulness:	Mental rehearsal:	Support/consultation:
During exposure: Strategies for maintaining balance	Calming, centering, regulating:		Emotional awareness/acceptance:
After exposure: Balance-restoring/self-regulation strategies I'll actually use	While I'm still at work:	Transition between work and home:	At home:
Stress resilience and prevention strategies for the longer term	What recharges my batteries?	What helps me stay physically and emotionally healthy?	How do I nurture my compassion satisfaction?

What gets in the way of engaging in resilience-promotion?

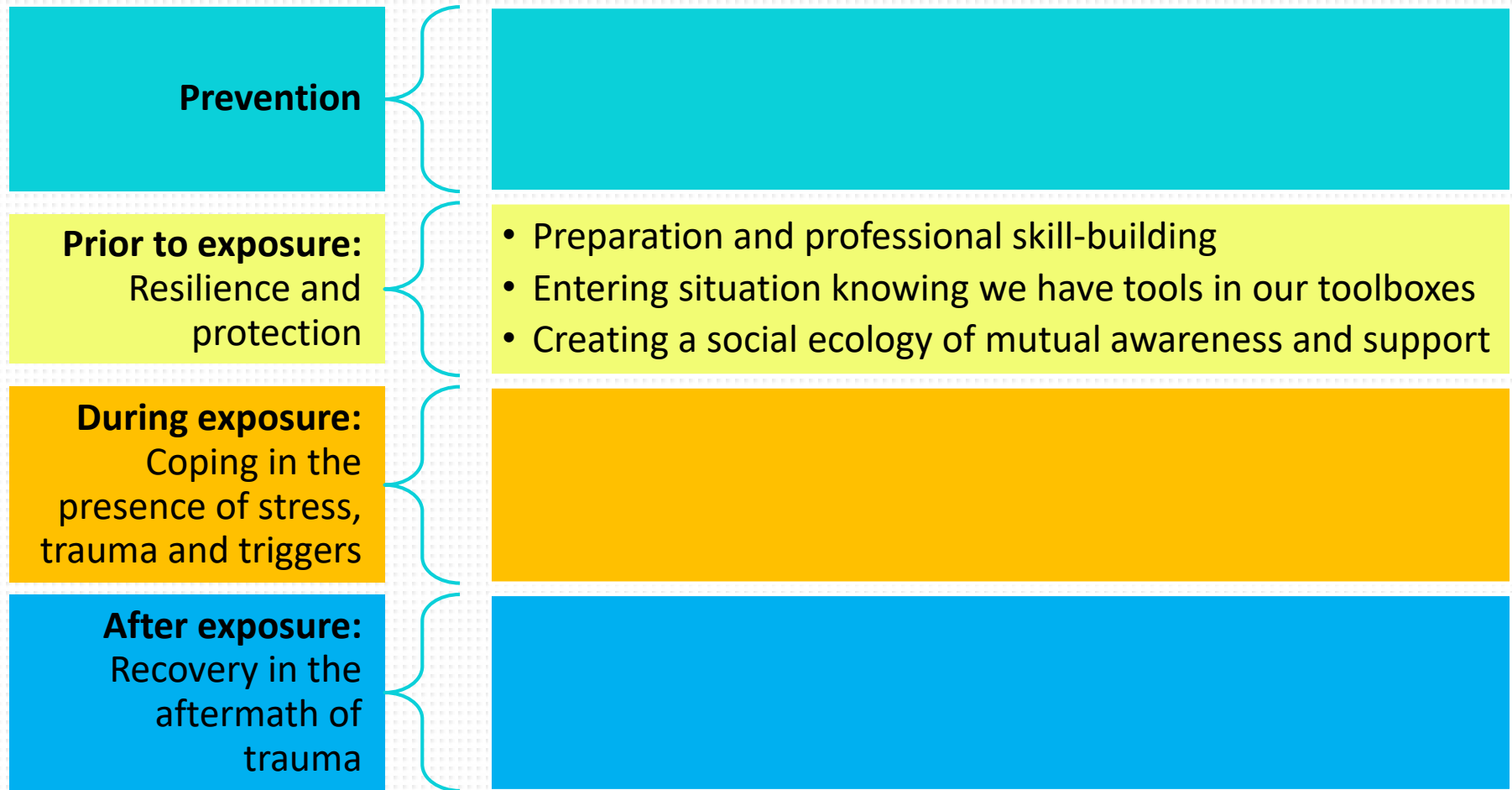
- Thinking “self-care” = “selfish”
 - We can best help others when we are clear-thinking, calm, and healthy ourselves
 - “We have an obligation to our clients, as well as to ourselves, our colleagues and our loved ones, not to be damaged by the work we do” (Saakvitne et al., 1996)
- Waiting too long to use the tools in our toolboxes
- Not practicing what we preach
 - Self-regulation skills don’t work unless we actively use them!
 - Just reading about them is like trying to fix a flat tire by reading your car’s owner’s manual (Mathieu, 2012)



Addressing STS is a multi-pronged effort



R-TIP's tools for preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue

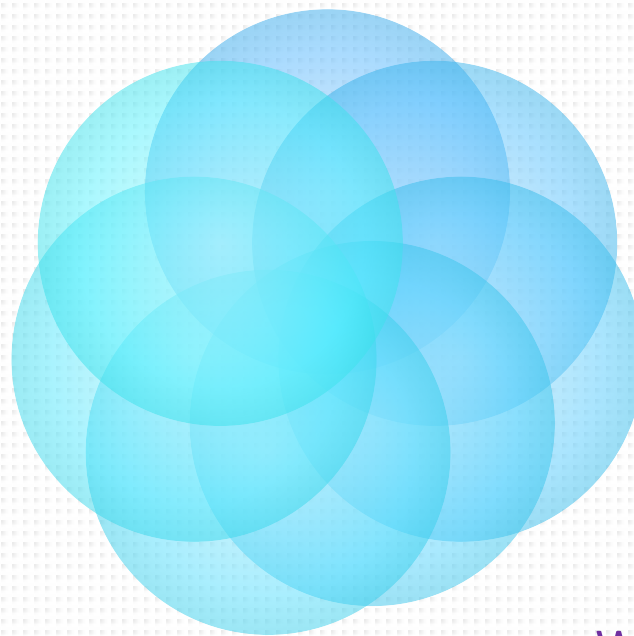


Organizational strategies: Preventing

Climate of Mutual
Support

Promoting
Compassion
Satisfaction

Risk Reduction

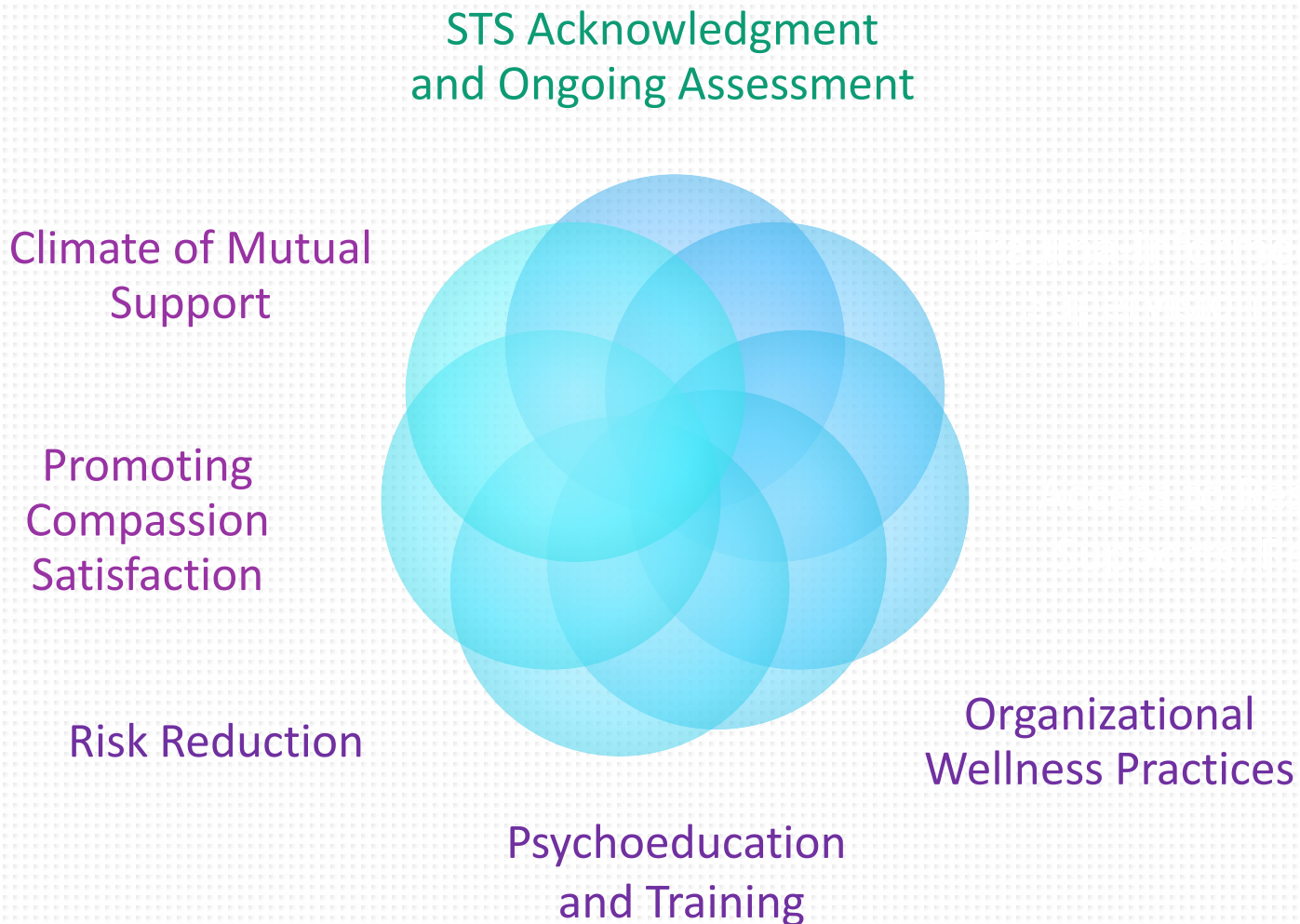


Psychoeducation
and Training

Organizational
Wellness Practices

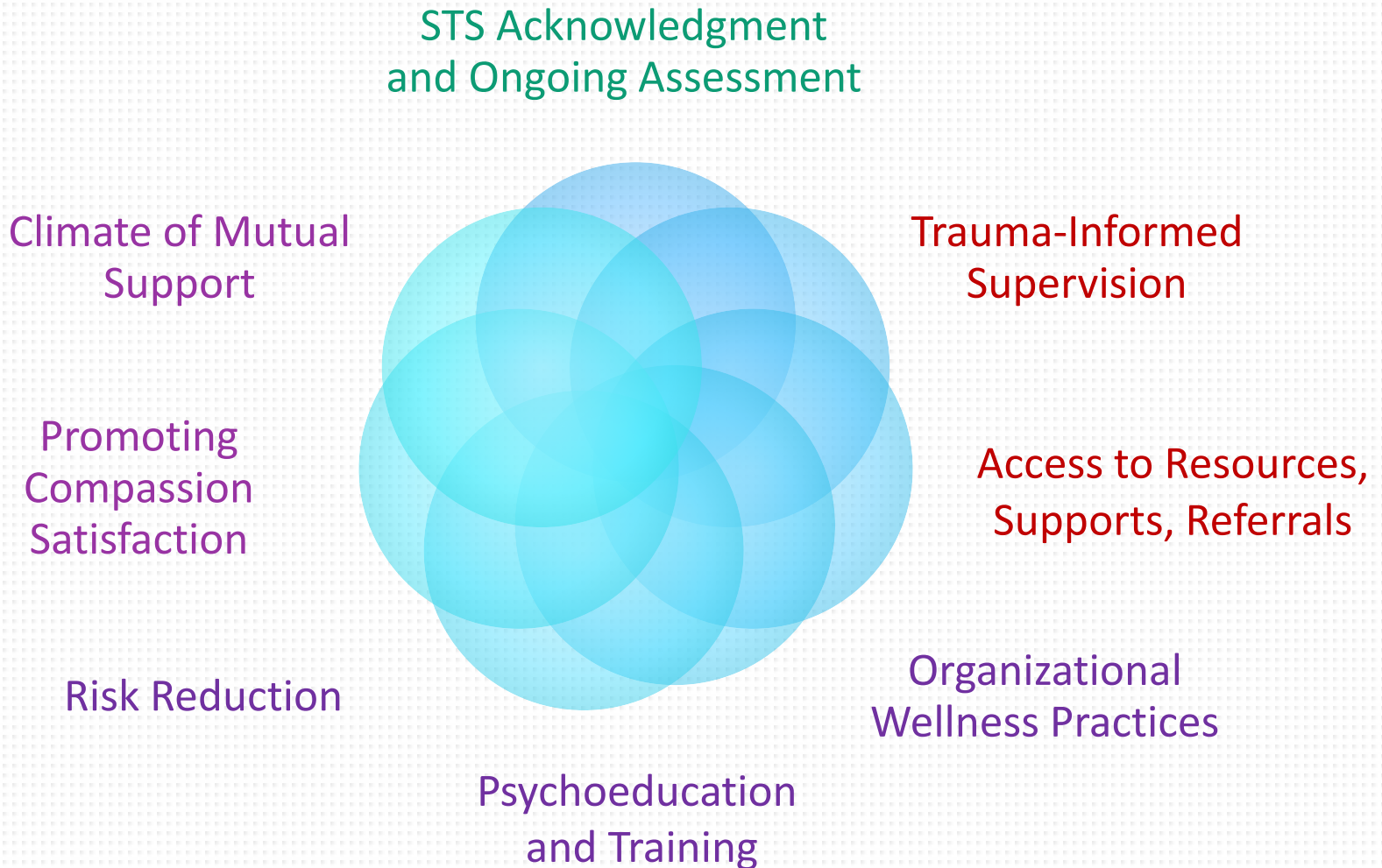
Organizational strategies:

Preventing, monitoring



Organizational strategies:

Preventing, monitoring, responding



Resources: STS-Informed Organizations

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organizational Assessment** (Sprang et al., 2018, <http://www.uky.edu/CTAC/STSI-OA>)
- **STS Committee of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Essential Elements of an STS-Informed System** (www.nctsn.org)
- **STS Core Competencies in Trauma-Informed Supervision** (<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/using-secondary-traumatic-stress-core-competencies-trauma-informed-supervision>)
- **STS Core Competencies in Trauma-Informed Supervision Self-Rating Tool** (Sprang, 2018)

Resources: Intervening with STS

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Resources: Research on STS

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Resources: Research on STS


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Activity: Tapping into our compassion satisfaction

In the midst of stress, it helps to take the time to step back and remember WHY we are doing this work and what keeps us going (adapted from Volk et al., 2008)

- 
- Think about the most rewarding moment you've had doing this work.

- 
- What are three things that you love about this work?

- 
- Describe one person whose life you have touched through this work.

- 
- What is the best compliment you've received from a coworker, or something you know you do well?

Thank you!

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