



# Battling Emotional Fatigue and Achieving Professional Wellness

Veronica Navarro, MFT 5/21/21

# Agenda

- **REALIZE** that trauma exists in our profession
- **RECOGNIZE** the signs of distress
- **RESPOND** using self-care
- Build Personal **RESILIENCE**



Take a moment.

# DSM definition of Trauma

**Exposure or witness to actual or threatened death or serious injury.**

A deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

# What trauma?

## Client

- ♦ Domestic Violence
- ♦ Sexual Abuse
- ♦ Strangulation
- ♦ Homicide
- ♦ Child Physical Abuse
- ♦ Child deaths
- ♦ Human Trafficking
- ♦ Substance Abuse
- ♦



## DAO

- ♦ View pictures/videos
- ♦ Listen to events
- ♦ Process evidence
- ♦ Continue communication with client
- ♦ Review suspect statements
- ♦ Observing your client reliving their wounds/trauma
- ♦

# Realization

## VICARIOUS TRAUMA-

The cumulative impact of witnessing trauma/ adversity of others over time.

The experience of bearing witness to atrocities committed against another

A disruption of beliefs about safety and the inherent kindness of others.

- ♦ Jan Richardson.



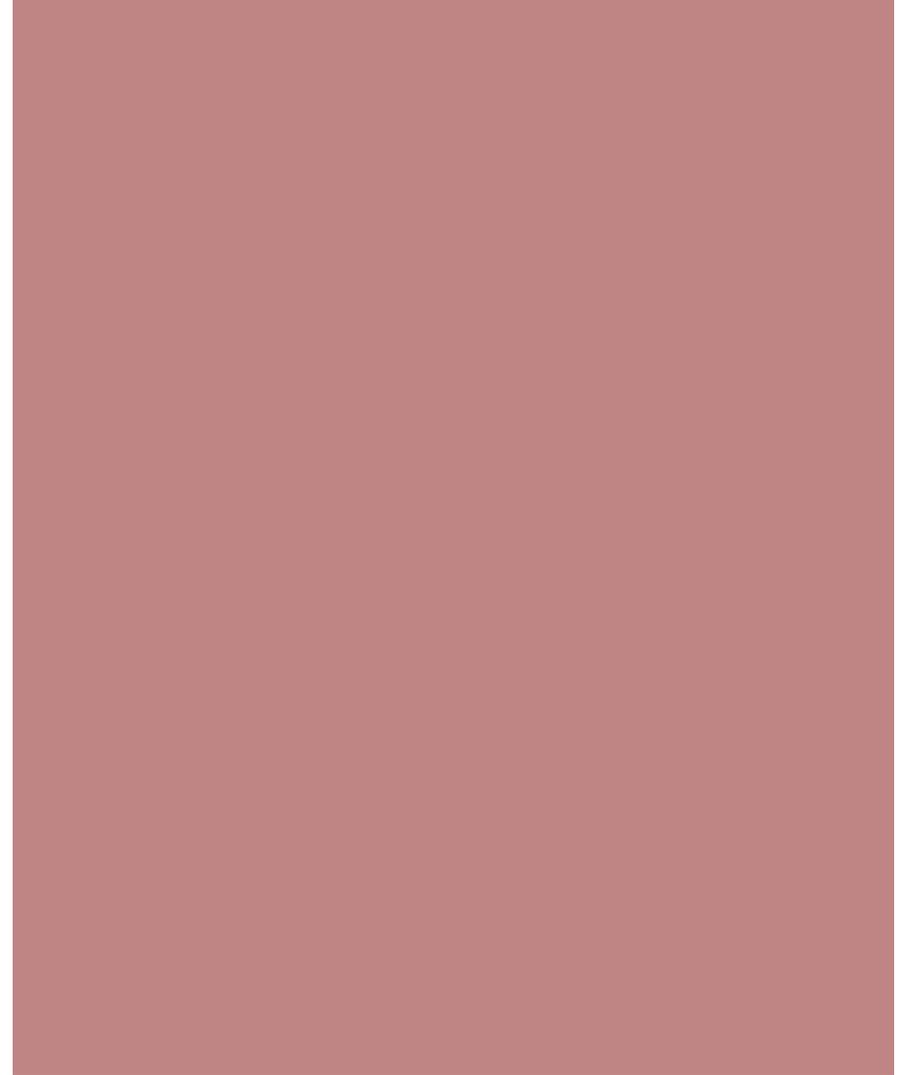
# Realization

## SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

The experience of trauma-related symptoms in a worker as a result of witnessing the trauma/ adversity of another.

## COMPASSION FATIGUE

Emotional and physical fatigue when a helper feels compassion for those they help and who do not have adequate time to recharge by caring for themselves



# Why is this important to DAO?

Professionals who work with  
trauma victims

are at increased risk of  
experiencing:

changes in their behaviors,  
thoughts, and feelings  
regarding their relationships,  
their lives, and the world.



**“Lawyers, police, researchers and mental health workers have all been found to experience high levels of vicarious trauma. One American study found that out of 105 judges working in criminal, family and children’s courts, 63% experienced symptoms of vicarious trauma, with female judges being especially vulnerable. ”**

Reference: [www.sydneycriminallawyers.com.au/blog/lawyers-and-vicarious-trauma-in-the-](http://www.sydneycriminallawyers.com.au/blog/lawyers-and-vicarious-trauma-in-the-legal-system/)

[legal-system/](http://www.sydneycriminallawyers.com.au/blog/lawyers-and-vicarious-trauma-in-the-legal-system/)



Secondary Traumatic Stress >

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Workplace symptoms

Personal life symptoms

Sources of Secondary Traumatic Stress

September 01, 2015

# Understanding Secondary Trauma: A Guide for Lawyers Working with Child Victims

Christina Rainville

Share:



# Thoughts or reactions to video?

- VT changes how you see the world
- Strong or weak for this line of work
- Responsibility to take care of employees
- What do I need to stay healthy and do this work?
- Recognize the toll of VT
- How is staff reacting
- What's difficult about the work we do
- Adversely impact the quality of our work and lives

# What VT Looks Like: Personal

- ♦ **Physical** ♦ Headaches, impaired immune system, fatigue, stomach aches, difficulty sleeping, lack of interest in sex
- ♦ **Emotional** ♦ Feelings of powerlessness, numbness, anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, depletion, hypersensitivity, sadness, helplessness, severe emotional distress or physical reactions to reminders
- ♦ **Behavioral** ♦ Irritability, sleep and appetite changes, isolate from friends and family, self destructive behavior, impatience, nightmares, hypervigilance, moody, easily startled or frightened
- ♦ **Spiritual** ♦ Loss of purpose, loss of meaning, questioning goodness versus evil, disillusionment, questioning prior religious beliefs, pervasive hopelessness
- ♦ **Cognitive** ♦ Diminished concentration, cynicism, pessimism, preoccupation with clients, traumatic imagery, inattention, self doubt, racing thoughts, recurrent and unwanted distressing thoughts
- ♦ **Relational** ♦ Withdrawn, decreased interest in intimacy or sex, isolation from friends or family, minimization of others' concerns, projection of anger or blame, intolerance, mistrust

# What VT Looks Like: Professional

- ♦ **Performance**
  - ♦ Decrease in quality / quantity of work, low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard, setting perfectionist standards, difficulty with inattention, forgetfulness
- ♦ **Morale**
  - ♦ Decrease in confidence, decrease in interest, negative attitude, apathy, dissatisfaction, demoralization, feeling undervalued and unappreciated, disconnected, reduced compassion
- ♦ **Relational**
  - ♦ Detached / withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication, conflict, impatience, intolerance of others, sense of being the “only one who can do the job”
- ♦ **Behavioral**
  - ♦ Calling out, arriving late, overwork, exhaustion, irresponsibility, poor follow-through

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)

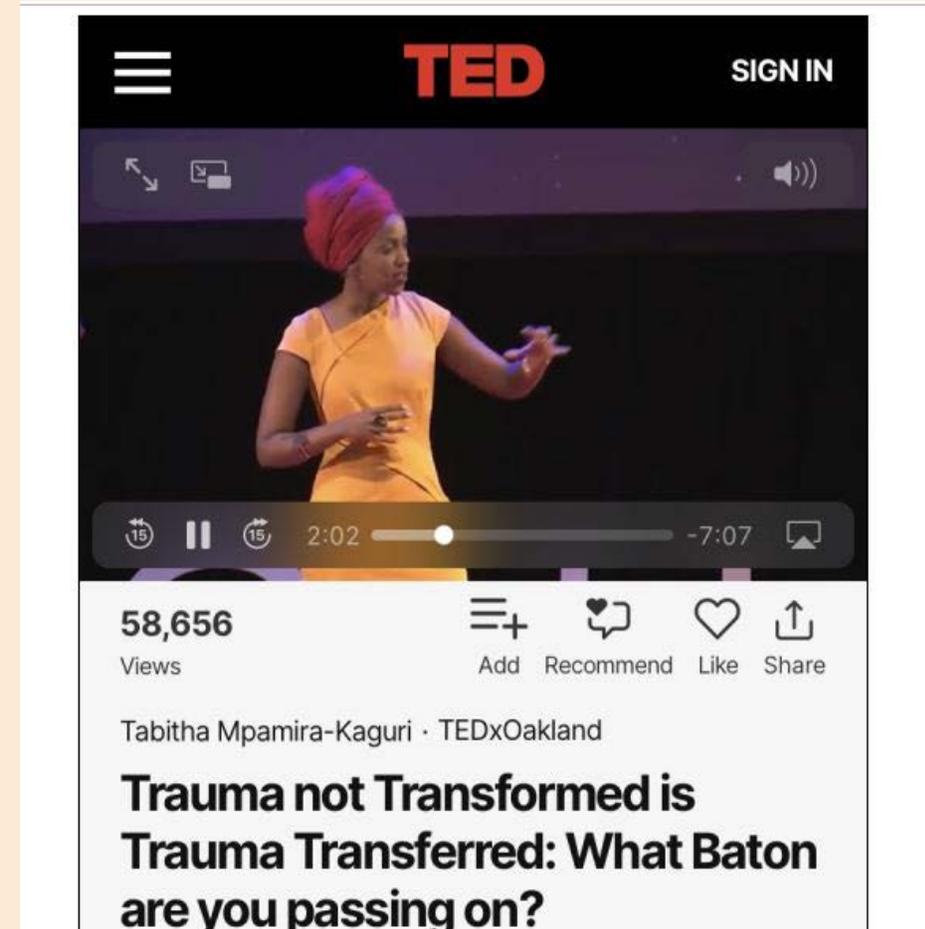
VT/STS  
may cause a  
professional in the  
helping field TO:

- Try to avoid cases with traumatic content
- Downplay a case's degree of severity
- Rationalize the case's destructive impact
- Attempt to rescue a client, and become over-involved
- Fail to maintain professional boundaries

\*Seamone, Major Evan R. (2014). Sex Crimes Litigation as Hazardous Duty

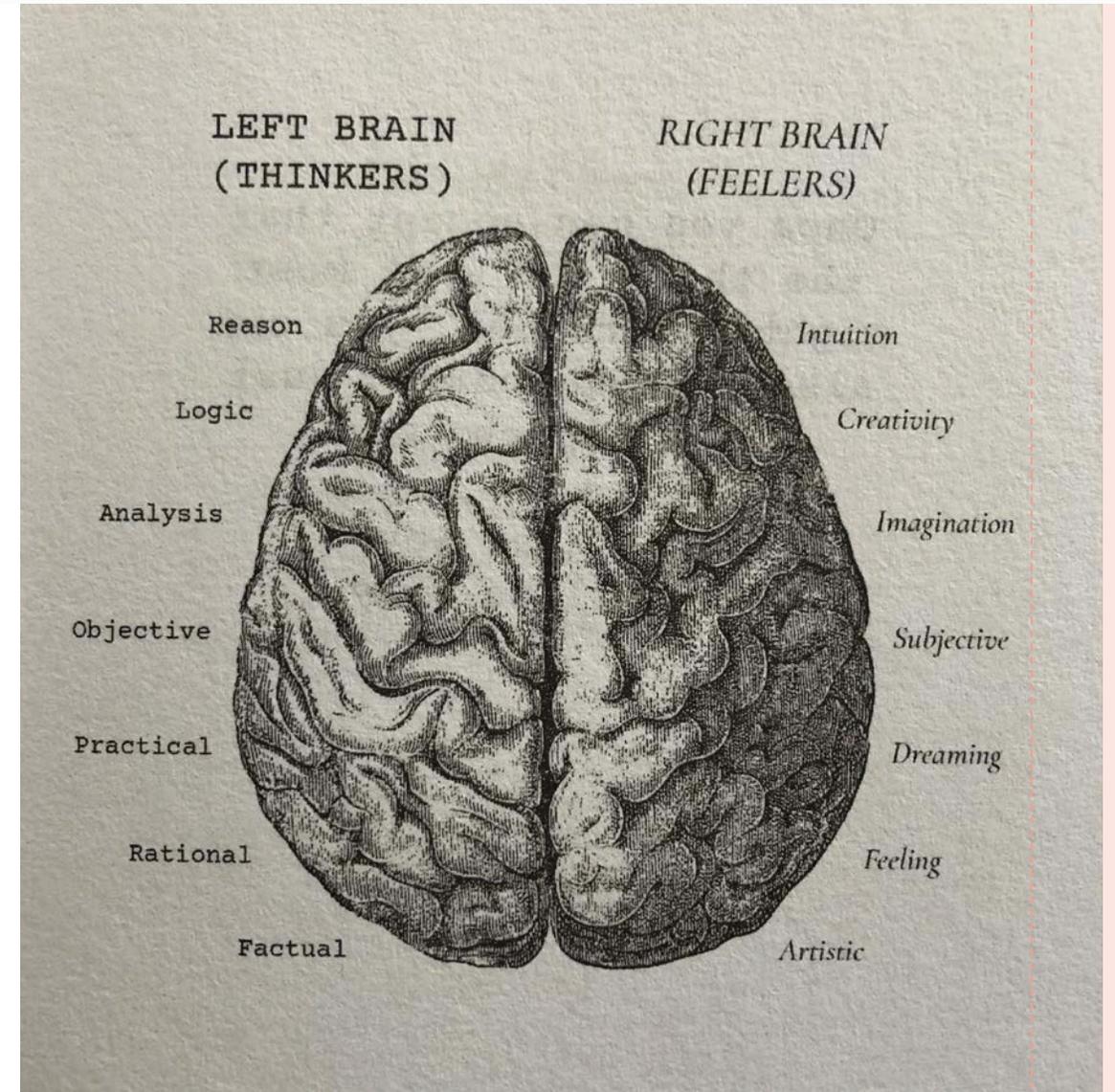
# Intergenerational Trauma

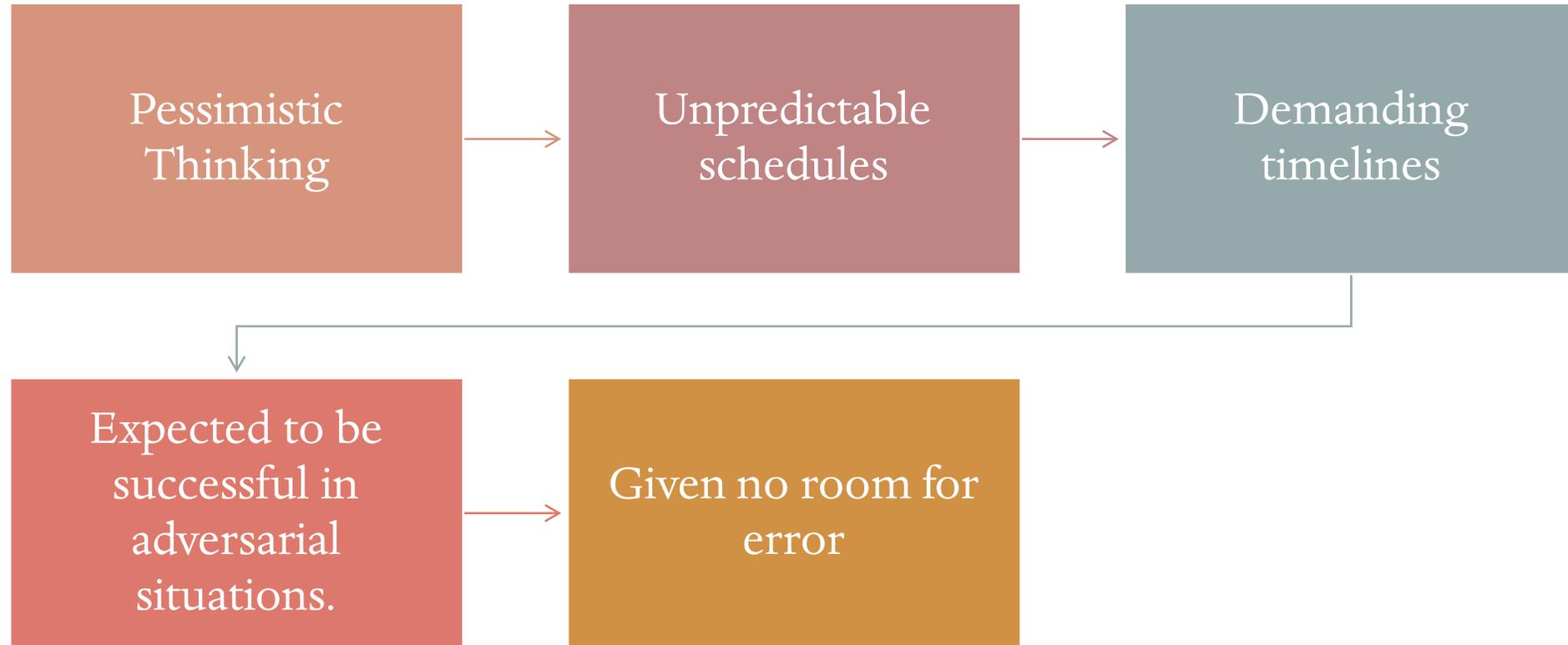
What trauma have you inherited? How has that impacted your worldview and/or behaviors?



# Left or right brain ?

Typical examples of **left** brained careers include lawyers, accountants, scientists, engineers, librarians, programmers, clerks and bankers





# A Lawyer's Tough Tale: Depression at a BigLaw Firm



*This a guest blog by a lawyer, who wished to remain anonymous, and his difficult journey with bipolar depression and his BigLaw firm.*

Once upon a time, I was a trial attorney at a personal injury defense firm. I was good at it. I always pushed hard; always did the best job possible. I won a good share of cases, and, of course, lost a few as well. I was valued highly enough to be made a partner shortly after

joining the firm.

But I had a dirty little secret. I had bipolar disorder, which was well-controlled through a close partnership with a good psychiatrist. Still, in my mind, if word ever got out, my employers would see me as weak, a liability. To a degree, I understood. If the insurance companies that paid the bills learned that one of the firm's trial attorneys had such a condition, their mandate would be clear: *if you want our business, get rid of him.* That is what I assumed.

# Depression

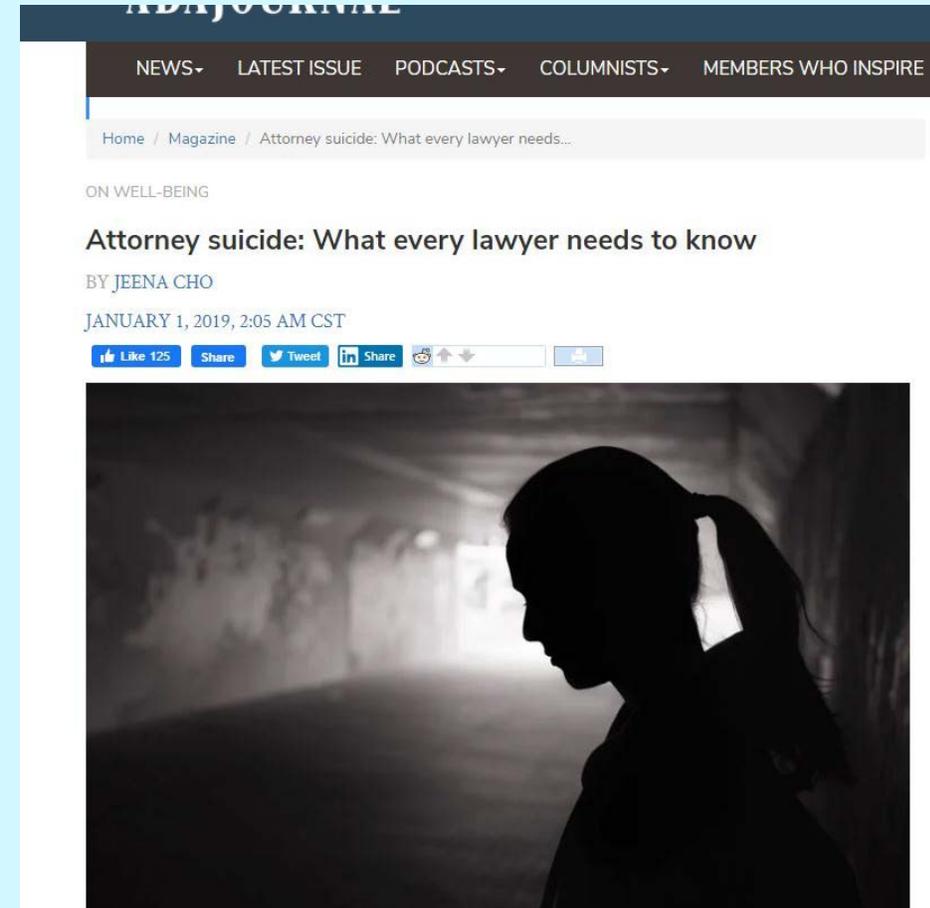
Depressed Mood  
Loss of energy / focus  
Appetite / Sleep Changes  
Suicidal Thoughts  
Sadness  
Irritability  
Psychomotor agitation  
Feelings of worthlessness  
Diminished Interest of pleasure

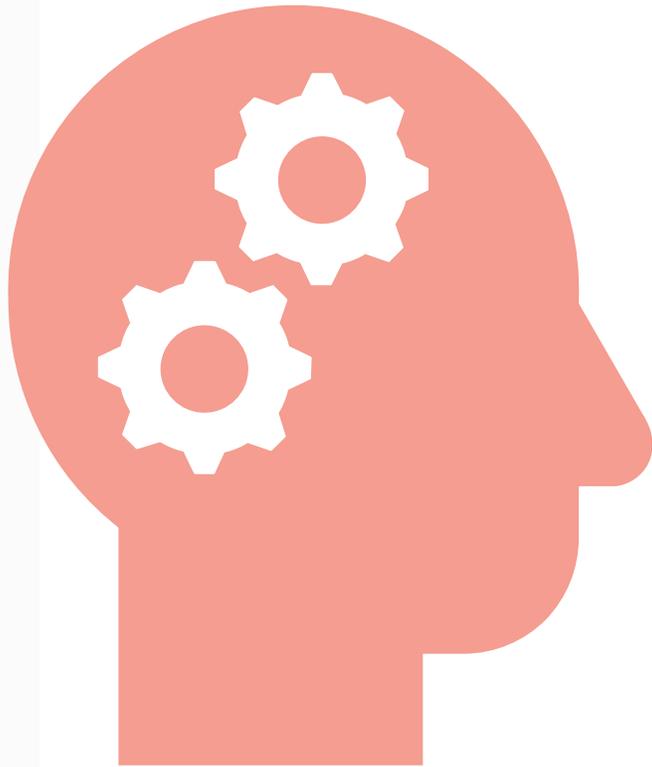
# Anxiety

Excessive Worry  
Avoidance of trigger  
Panic Attacks  
“What if?”  
Somatic Symptoms  
Social / Specific / Generalized  
Restlessness  
Muscle tension  
Feeling Powerless

## Contributing factors of lawyer suicide include:

depression,  
anxiety,  
job stress, unfulfilled  
expectations, and/or  
sense of failure.





**Which work  
related  
stressors impact  
your  
wellness?**

# Inventory of Self

- Who do you turn to when you are struggling?
- When do you share the emotional components of your work?
- What do your “dark moments” look like?
- How do you impact group morale?



# Covid (aka groundhog day)

- Not “normal” living experience
- Air Quality
- Fires
- Schools Closed
- Expanded Work hours
- 1:4 parents have worsening mental health
- Concern for immuno-compromised
- 1:7 worsening behavior in children
- Isolation
- Anxiety, fear, sadness, loneliness
- Caretake of elders
- Sickness / deaths / funerals
- Celebrations
- Constant distractions

American Academy of Pediatrics, Mayo Clinic

# Burnout

A gradual process of a staff member experiencing feelings of hopelessness, fatigue, and being overwhelmed as a result of a lack of support, excessive workloads and/or unrealistic expectations.

Not part of a traumatic event.

Three big warning signs – chronic exhaustion, cynicism and feeling ineffective

#### BURNOUT

## How to Address Burnout in the Legal Profession

We need to learn more about burnout in law so that we can address its causes.

Posted May 6, 2021 | Reviewed by Chloe Williams



#### KEY POINTS

- Burnout is the experience of chronic exhaustion, chronic cynicism, and

## I Fought The Law And The Law Won: My Burnout Story



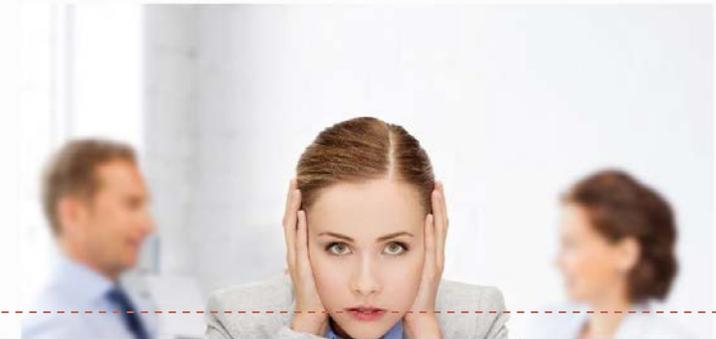
**Paula Davis** Contributor  
Careers

*I write about stress resilience, burnout and well-being at work.*

f

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in



acknowledgement



# Creating Change

# Vicarious Resilience

Positive meaning-making and shift of a workers experience as a result of witnessing the resilience of others

Ex: Prosecutor reaffirms the reason he decided to go into law after seeing a survivor return to her typical life

# Vicarious Post-Traumatic Growth

Development of positive changes and growth in workers world view as a result of witnessing the post-traumatic growth in others.

Ex: DA Inspector reflects on how she has become more compassionate and self-aware over the years as a result of witnessing the growth of her clients.

# Professional Satisfaction

- ♦ How did I make a difference?
- ♦ How is my role as a (supervisor, colleague, manager) unique?
- ♦ How can I use my role to support others?
- ♦ How can I/ my team disconnect from work before the weekend?
- ♦ Continue assessing and advocating for your needs as well as those of your colleagues
- ♦ Be realistic with the projection of your career



# SELF-CARE

Literally ANY combination of  
(healthy) activities that makes you  
feel good...

and repeating those activities to  
prevent an accumulation of stress.

# Self-care activities:

- Saying “no”
- Acupuncture
- Massages
- Running/ Walking
- Going out with friends
- Reading a book
- Laughing\*
- Yoga
- Talking to friends
- Playing video games
- Disconnecting
- Retail therapy
- Gardening
- Creative writing
- Journaling
- Organizing
- Lifting weights
- Staying in bed
- Pedicures
- Sleeping
- Dance
- Ask for a hug
- Play an instrument
- Setting boundaries
- Positive thinking
- Taking a break

# My self-care equation

alone time + balanced eating + walking +  
journaling + music + essential oils +  
hot shower/bath + art/creativity + venting  
setting boundaries = my self-care

# Your personal equation to self-care

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{_____} & + & \text{_____} & + & \text{_____} & + & \\ & & \text{_____} & + & \text{_____} & = & \text{self-care} \end{array}$$

## Types of Stress

- Isn't always damaging
- Can be motivating
- Comes with "welcome" change

- More serious threat
- Coping skills, loving support, and good health help

- Severe and/or lasting
- Body cannot easily return to calm state
- Can lead to serious health problems



Source: SAMHSA

# The silent factors

- ◆ Caffeine
- ◆ Alcohol
- ◆ Exercise / Lack of
- ◆ Internalization of emotions
- ◆ Disordered eating
- ◆ Nicotine / Vaping
- ◆ Inconsistent sleep
- ◆ Lack of boundaries
- ◆ Lack of self awareness



But how much do I need to do?

Whatever amount feels sustainable

SMART goals:

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely

# Universal Wellness Elements

I am grateful for: \_\_\_\_\_

Positive Thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

Did I get enough :

SUN & AIR

SLEEP

WATER

NUTRIENTS

JOY & FUN

How was today:

0

1

2

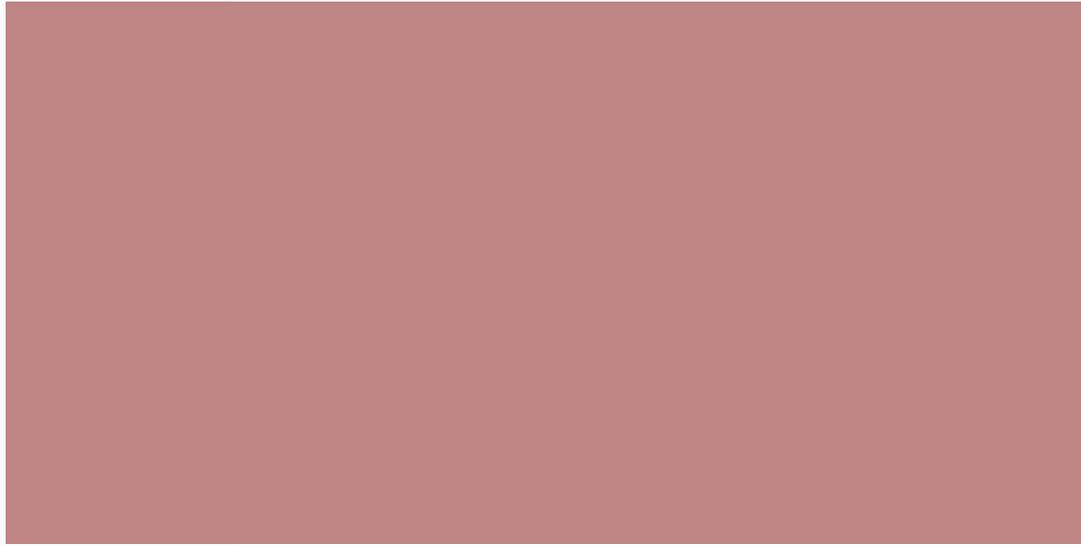
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What can be improved tomorrow: \_\_\_\_\_

Life & Apples

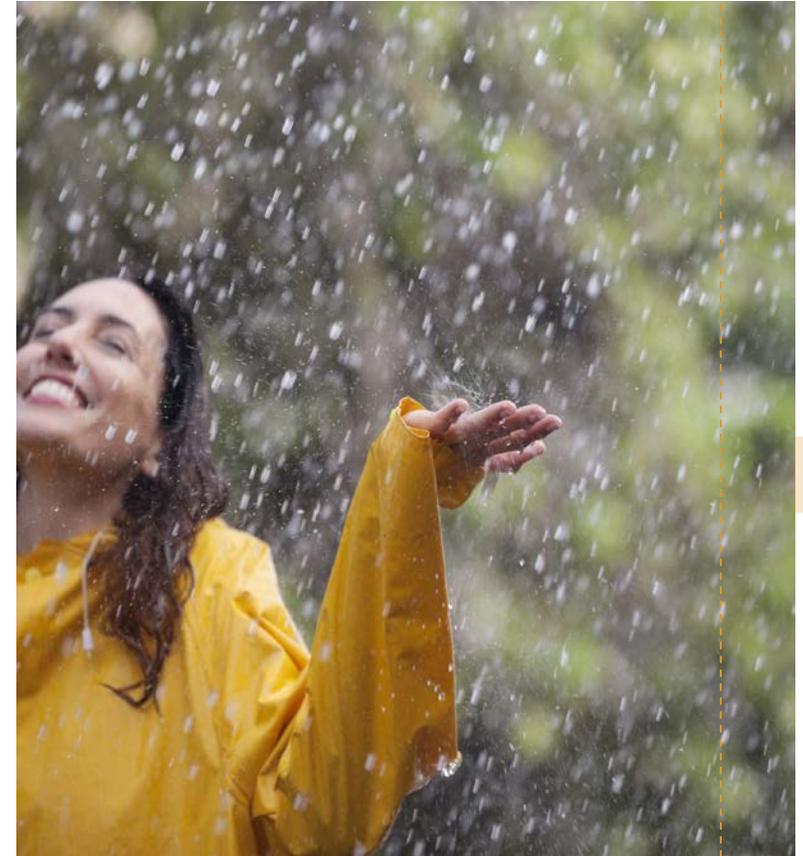


“No one can whistle  
a symphony.  
It takes a whole orchestra to  
play it.”

-HE Luccock

# Resources & Possibilities

- ♦ EAP/Therapy
- ♦ Addressing VT, STS at team meetings
- ♦ Champion/County Wellness Champion
- ♦ Supervision
- ♦ Peer Support
- ♦ Encouraging debriefs after cases
- ♦ Encouraging staff health and wellness
- ♦ Taking a pulse
- ♦ [ProQOL Measure](#)
- ♦ Calm/HeadSpace app
- ♦ Create supportive atmosphere
- ♦ Watch out for “sliming”
- ♦ “Normalize” convos about STS/VT





Take a moment.

# Thank You

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