

# The Edge of Compassion: Sustaining Well-being in High-Stress and Trauma-Exposed Environments



**Host:** Diana Vincze, Pallium Canada

**Presenter:** Françoise Mathieu, M.Ed. RP

**Date:** December 11th 2023

# Territorial Honouring



# The Palliative Care ECHO Project

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is a 5-year national initiative to cultivate communities of practice and establish continuous professional development among health care providers across Canada who care for patients with life-limiting illness.

**Stay connected: [www.echopalliative.com](http://www.echopalliative.com)**

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is supported by a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.



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# LEAP Core

- Interprofessional course that focuses on the essential competencies to provide a palliative care approach.
- Taught by local experts who are experienced palliative care clinicians and educators.
- Delivered online or in-person.
- Ideal for any health care professional (e.g., physician, nurse, pharmacist, social worker, etc.) who provides care for patients with life-threatening and progressive life-limiting illnesses.
- Accredited by CFPC and Royal College.



Learn more about the course and topics covered by visiting

[www.pallium.ca/course/leap-core](http://www.pallium.ca/course/leap-core)

# Introductions

## Host

**Diana Vincze**

Palliative Care ECHO Project Manager  
Pallium Canada

## Presenter

**Françoise Mathieu, M. ED., RP., CCC.**  
Secondary Traumatic Stress Specialist  
Executive Director, TEND Academy

## ECHO Support

**Aliya Mamdeen**

Program Delivery Officer  
Pallium Canada

# Welcome and Reminders

- For comments and introductions, please use the chat function!
- For questions, please use the Q&A function, these questions will be addressed at the end of the session.
- This session is being recorded—this recording and slide deck will be emailed to registrants within the next week.
- Remember not to disclose any Personal Health Information (PHI) during the session.

# Conflict of Interest

## Pallium Canada

- Non-profit
- Partially funded through a contribution by Health Canada
- Generates funds to support operations and R&D from course registration fees and sales of the Pallium Pocketbook

## Host/Presenter

- Diana Vincze: Nothing to disclose
- Françoise Mathieu: Nothing to disclose



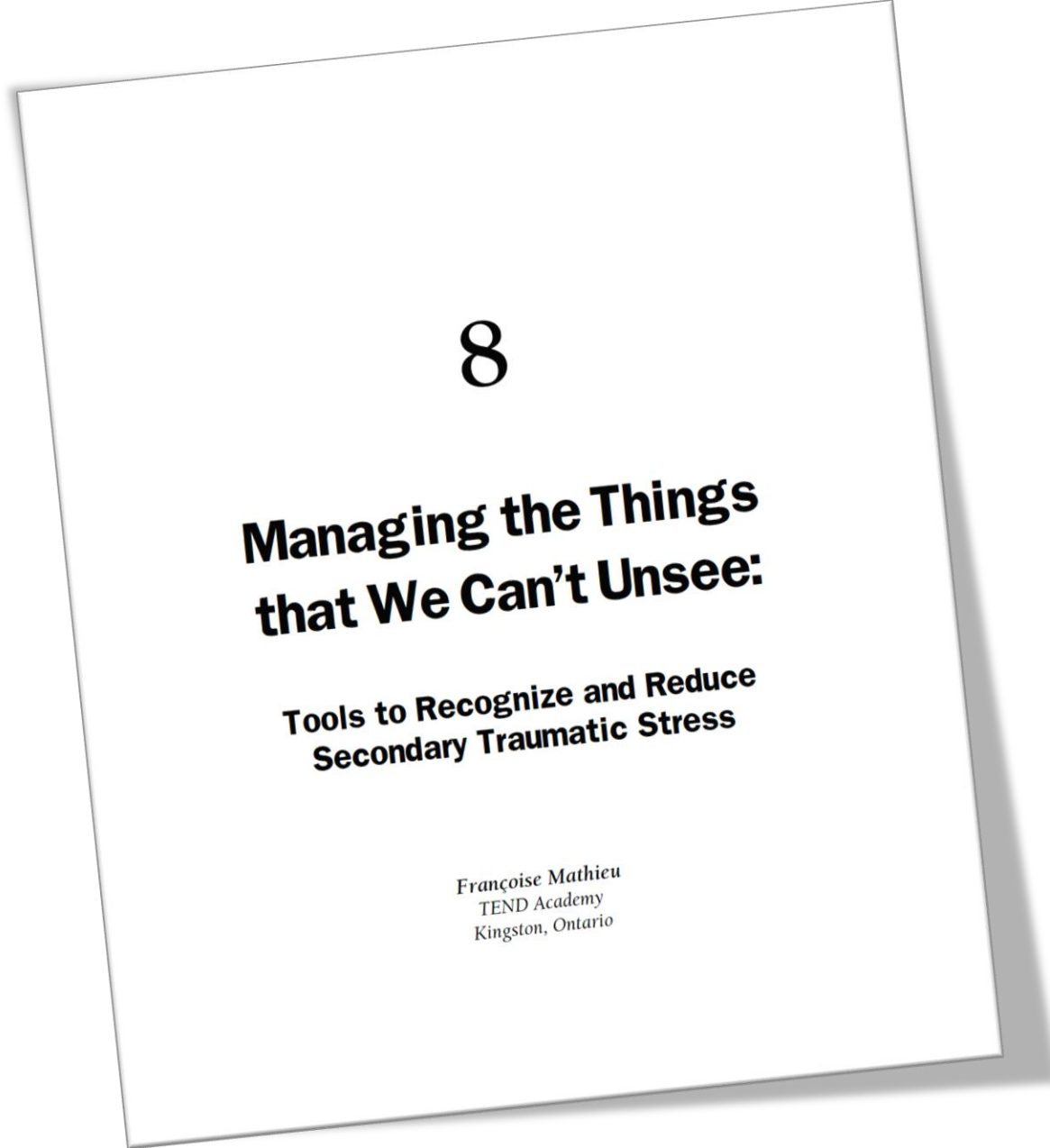
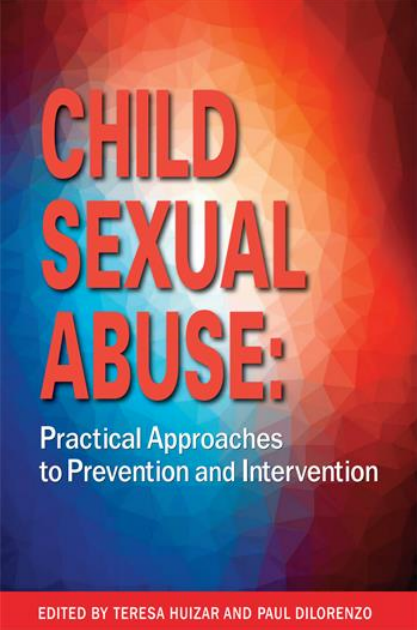
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**Françoise Mathieu, M.Ed. RP.**  
**Executive Director**



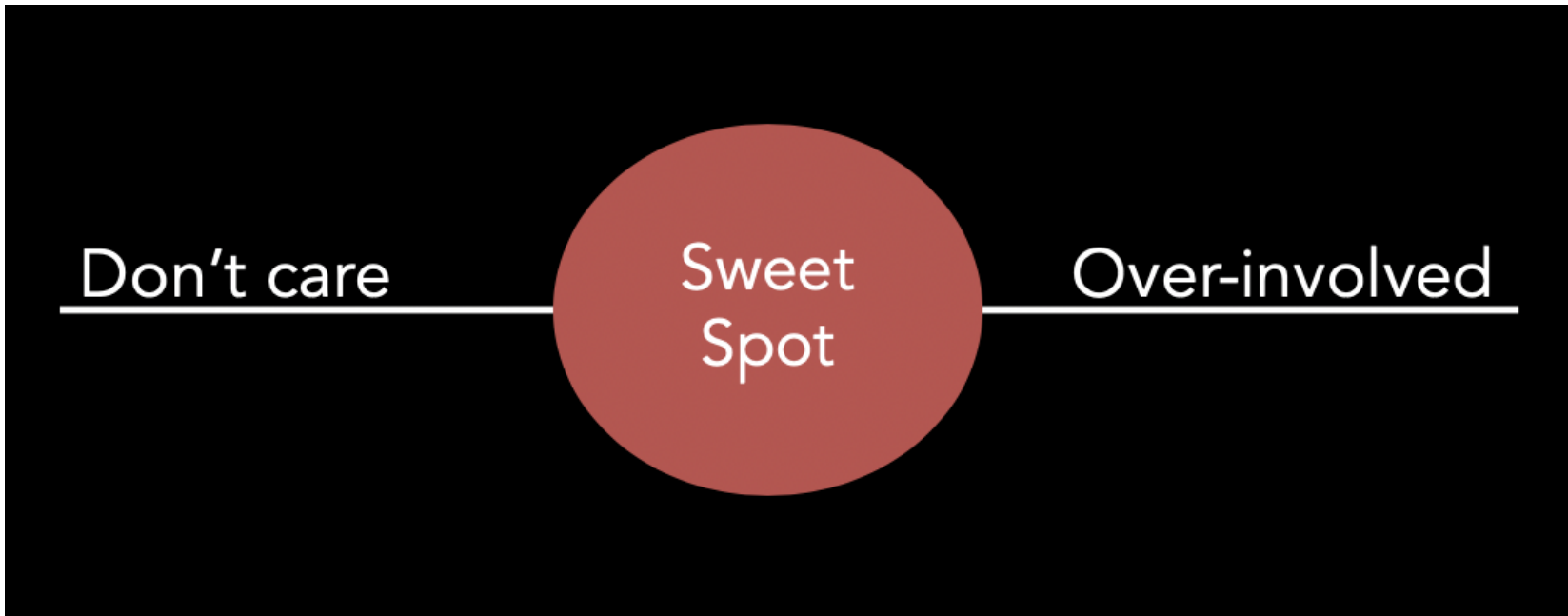






Mathieu, F. (2023) Managing the things that we can't unsee: tools to recognize and reduce secondary traumatic stress in *Child Sexual Abuse: Practical Approaches to Prevention and Intervention*. Huizar, T., D'Irenzo, P. Editors. CWLA Press, Washington.

# Caring “just the right amount?”





# TEDxQueensU



# “Exquisite Empathy”

Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training  
2009, Vol. 46, No. 2, 203–219

© 2009 American Psychological Association  
0033-3204/09/\$12.00 DOI: 10.1037/a0016081

## PREVENTING VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH THERAPISTS: IDENTIFYING PROTECTIVE PRACTICES

RICHARD L. HARRISON AND MARVIN J. WESTWOOD  
*University of British Columbia*

ne of its aimed publishers.  
t to be disseminated broadly.

*This qualitative study identified protective practices that mitigate risks of vicarious traumatization (VT) among mental health therapists. The sample included six peer-nominated master therapists, who responded to the question, “How do you manage to sustain your personal and professional well-being, given the challenges of your work with seriously traumatized clients?” Data analysis was*

*bility shared by employers, educators, professional bodies, and individual practitioners to address this serious problem. The novel finding that empathic engagement with traumatized clients appeared to be protective challenges previous conceptualizations of VT and points to exciting new directions for research, theory, training, and practice.*





# Career-Sustaining Behaviours

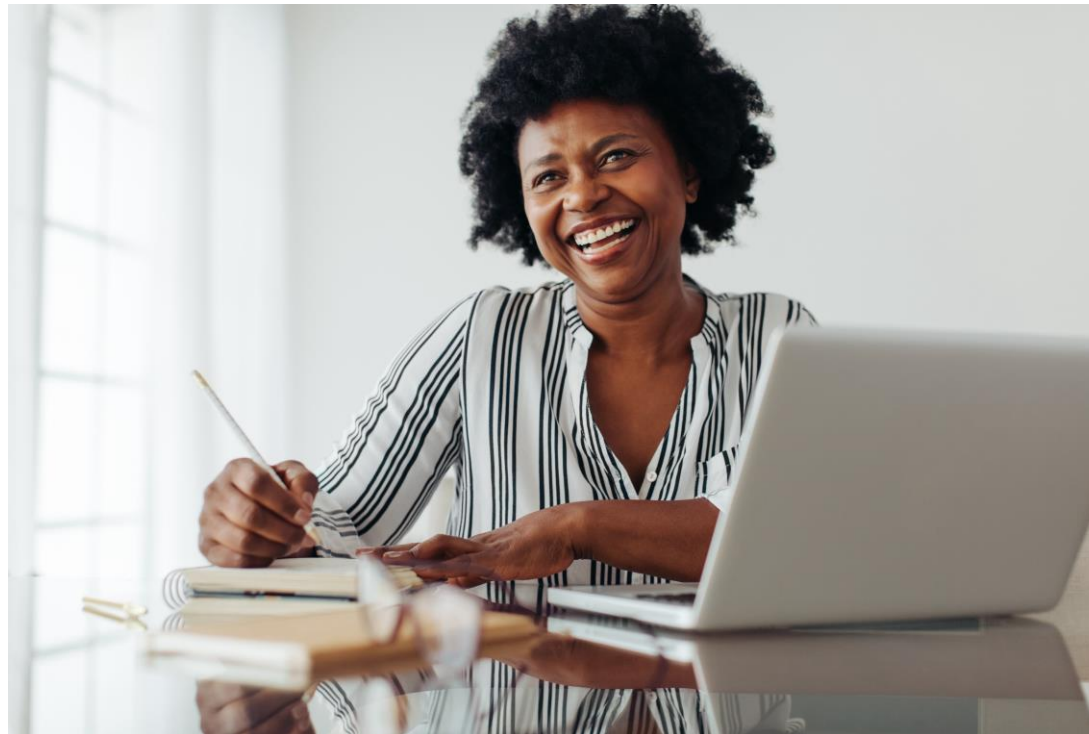


# Why do some people thrive in this work and others don't?

- After a few years in the field, some struggling professionals make the wise decision to move into a different line of work.
- Others choose to stay but experience significant functional impairment and a shift in their ability to experience (and/or demonstrate) empathy towards patients and colleagues.
- (Dagan et al., 2016; Armes et al., 2020)

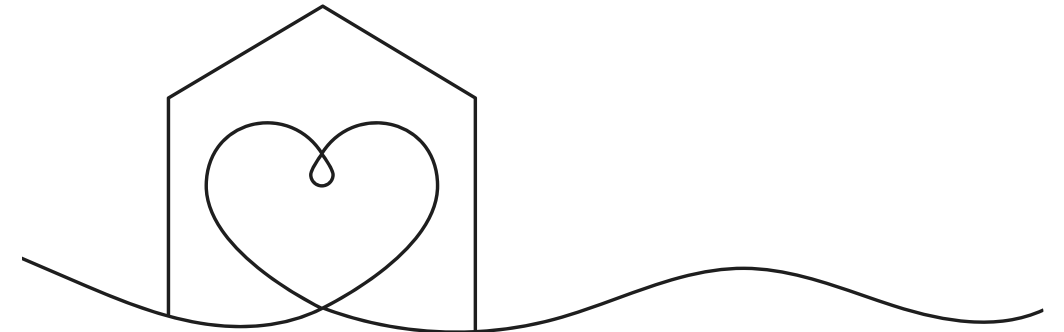


And yet, for a third group, this work is truly a calling, and these individuals seem to be able to continue working in the field for decades without developing debilitating impairment, *while* retaining an overall sense of job satisfaction and well-being. (Dagan et al., 2016; Armes et al., 2020)

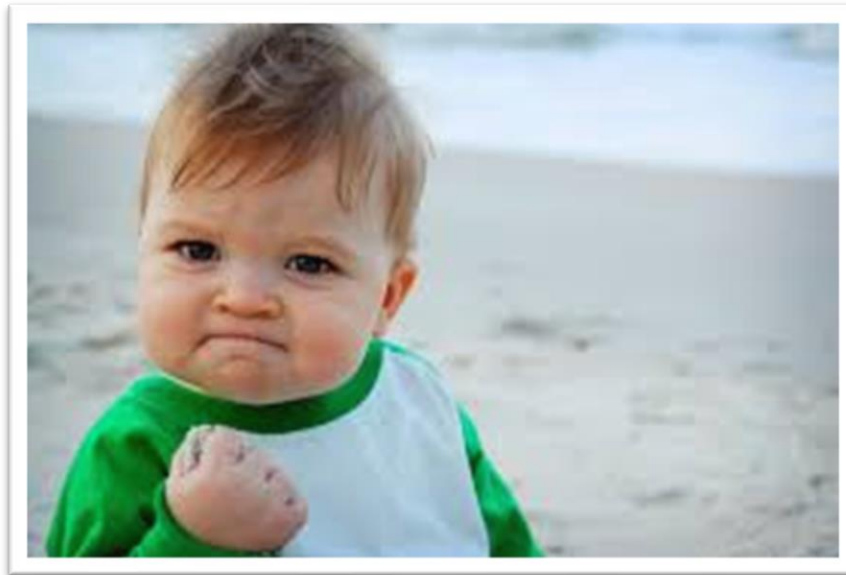


# Career-sustaining behaviours (CSBs)

- Studies found that this third group of professionals all engaged in *career-sustaining behaviours* (CSBs) (Brodie, 1982).
- CSBs are **actions that individuals who experience career satisfaction employ**, which allows them to stay well while remaining in the field for long periods of time. (Miller, 2007; Harrison & Westwood, 2009).
- None of them described having had a perfectly smooth professional journey, but they described their work experience as **being deeply rewarding and soul-sustaining**.



- One of the key CSB is a feeling of ***mastery***, which is defined as a having a sense of **confidence and competence** in our ability to do the work.
- For new staff, not having **time to learn and grow on the job** can be a very stressful experience.
- This is equally true for front line staff as it is for new supervisors and leaders.





# “Necessary evils” and “dirty work” studies

© Academy of Management Journal  
2008, Vol. 51, No. 5, 847-872.

## NAVIGATING THE BIND OF NECESSARY EVILS: PSYCHOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE PRODUCTION OF INTERPERSONALLY SENSITIVE BEHAVIOR

JOSHUA D. MARGOLIS  
Harvard University

ANDREW MOLINSKY  
Brandeis University

We develop grounded theory about how individuals respond to the subjective experience of performing “necessary evils” and how that influences the way they treat targets of their actions. Despite the importance and difficulty of delivering just, compassionate treatment when it is most needed—when necessarily harming another person—little research has focused on those who must do so. Using qualitative data from 111 managers, doctors, police officers, and addiction counselors, we document how performers both engage and disengage when doing these tasks, unearth multiple forms of interpersonal justice, and identify four styles of response for handling necessary evils.

## NORMALIZING DIRTY WORK: MANAGERIAL TACTICS FOR COUNTERING OCCUPATIONAL TAINT

BLAKE E. ASHFORTH  
Arizona State University

GLEN E. KREINER  
University of Cincinnati

MARK A. CLARK  
American University

MEL FUGATE  
Southern Methodist University

Dirty work refers to occupations that are viewed by society as physically, socially, or morally tainted. Using exploratory, semistructured interviews with managers from 18 dirty work occupations, we investigated the challenges of being a manager in tainted work and how managers normalize taint—that is, actively counter it or render it less salient. Managers reported experiencing role complexity and stigma awareness. Four types of practices for countering taint were revealed: occupational ideologies, social buffers, confronting clients and the public, and defensive tactics. We discuss links between these practices.



Tasks in which a person **must knowingly and intentionally** cause emotional or physical harm to another human being in the service of achieving some perceived greater good or purpose.”

© *Academy of Management Journal*  
2008, Vol. 51, No. 5, 847–872.

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Margolis, J. D., & Molinsky, A. (2008). Navigating the bind of necessary evils: Psychological engagement and the production of interpersonally sensitive behavior. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 51(5), 847–872. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2008.34789639>

- Inflicting pain on a pediatric patient
- Evictions
- Layoffs
- Death notification
- Duty to report
- What else?

“Necessary evils”

# “Dirty jobs”



...occupations that are viewed by society as physically, socially, or morally tainted.”

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Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., Clark, M. A., & Fugate, M. (2007). Normalizing dirty work: Managerial tactics for countering occupational taint. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 149–174. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2007.24162092>

- Pest control
- Corrections
- Probation
- Collection agents
- ER nurses
- Funeral directors
- Internal affairs police officers
- Social workers
- Personal injury lawyers

“Dirty work”



# Coping Strategies

## Reframing

- “Someone's gotta do it so might as well be me”

## Social Buffers

- Going to a convention, having friends who do similar work

## Dark Humour

- Soften occupational taint, relieve tension

## Avoiding

- “I’m a Walmart greeter”, “I work for the government”

## Social Comparison

- Cops vs. EMS

## Distancing

- Blaming clients/patients/parents/individuals

Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., Clark, M. A., & Fugate, M. (2007). Normalizing dirty work: Managerial tactics for countering occupational taint. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 149–174. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2007.24162092>

A grey tabby cat with yellow eyes is walking towards the camera on a wooden fence. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a light-colored wall. The cat's tail is visible, showing dark stripes.

**Confidence & Competence**



# Finding the work interesting, creative & intellectually challenging





**(some) job control**



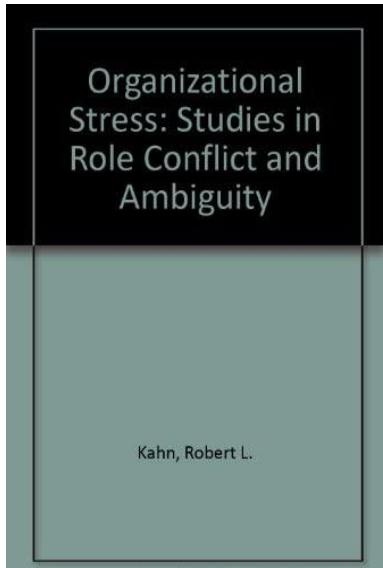
# What do we mean by “Working conditions”?

- **Unreasonable and unmanageable workloads** and **time pressures** (Brady, 2017; Hensel et al., 2015; Jirek, 2020).

Not only true for **front-line workers** but is also a reality for **supervisors** who may themselves be finding their workload unmanageable.

- **Caseload composition** is also frequently an area of concern: several recent studies on have concluded that the **ratio** of complex cases may be a more important stressor than caseload per se (Hensel et al., 2015).





# Three components of a stressful work environment

- **Role conflict:** **conflicting demands**
- **Role ambiguity:** “lack of **clarity** about the expectations associated with a worker’s role”
- **Job overload**

(Kahn et al 1964)

# How much influence do you have on these for yourself (or your staff)?

- Flexibility
- Support/encouragement
- The ability to be autonomous
- Control over timelines
- A sense that you are doing something meaningful
- Confidence and competence in the job
- The ability to grow in the job

Françoise, Circa 2015

**Don't we all  
know how to  
be well?**



# Are self-care and stress balls working?



## Beyond Kale & Pedicures: Can We Beat Burnout and Compassion Fatigue?

Françoise Mathieu, M. Ed, RP

This article was originally published online on April 27, 2015 and updated August 2022.

I have been locked out of the seminar room. Peering through the glazing, I can see two dozen Operating Room nurses in scrubs, milling about inside the auditorium. The space is nearly full, and they are chatting and eating lunch. The session on compassion fatigue and self-care is about to begin, but the door is locked, and I can't get in. I knock once, and then again, a little bit louder. They can see me, but no one comes to unlock the door.

Problem is, I am the presenter, and this isn't

Many of my audiences express growing frustration at working in a system that feels broken, and no amount of kale and yoga can fix that overnight.

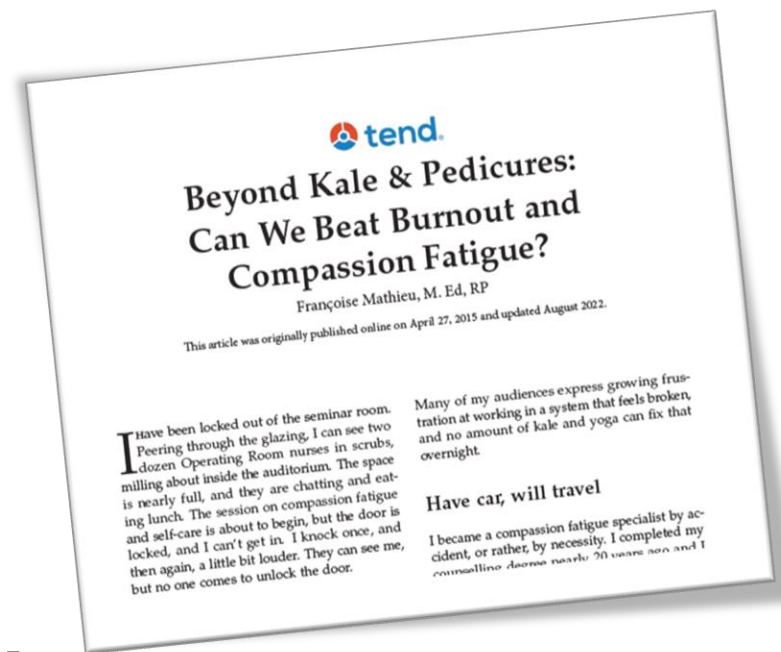
### Have car, will travel

I became a compassion fatigue specialist by accident, or rather, by necessity. I completed my counselling degree nearly 20 years ago and I was very fortunate in receiving first-rate train-

Mathieu, F. (2022, August). *Beyond kale & pedicures: Can we beat burnout and compassion fatigue?* TEND. [www.tendtoolkit.com/beyond-kale-and-pedicures/](http://www.tendtoolkit.com/beyond-kale-and-pedicures/)

“I was far more upset about my **working conditions** and **unmanageable workload** and was much more **distressed, morally,** about turning clients away than I was about their trauma stories.”

[www.tendacademy.ca/beyond-kale-and-pedicures/](http://www.tendacademy.ca/beyond-kale-and-pedicures/)





The Chadwick Center's Annual  
**SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE**  
on Child and Family Maltreatment

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for Children & Families







# SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS CONSORTIUM

A TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAM  
FOR REDEFINING WELLNESS



# REAL SELF-CARE

(CRYSTALS, CLEANSSES, AND  
BUBBLE BATHS NOT INCLUDED)

**POOJA LAKSHMIN, MD**



A TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAM  
FOR REDEFINING WELLNESS



# REAL SELF-CARE

(CRYSTALS, CLEANSSES, AND  
BUBBLE BATHS NOT INCLUDED)

**POOJA LAKSHMIN, MD**

## Lakshmi book: Four principles

- Setting boundaries & learning to deal with guilt
- Developing self-compassion
- Getting clear on your values
- Collective action

First Principle:

Setting boundaries  
and learning to deal  
with guilt





# Disappoint Someone Today

## An Invitation to Make Space

by Françoise Mathieu  
July 23, 2018



**A few years ago, I was running late one morning and rushed out of the house to get to work.**

My teenage daughter called me a few hours later and told me on speakerphone, with all her friends in the car, "Mom, you left the straightening iron on. It could have caused a fire. I'm not angry – I'm just disappointed." And then she burst out laughing.

Mathieu, F. (2019). *Disappoint someone today*. TEND. <https://tendtoolkit.com/disappoint-someone-today/>

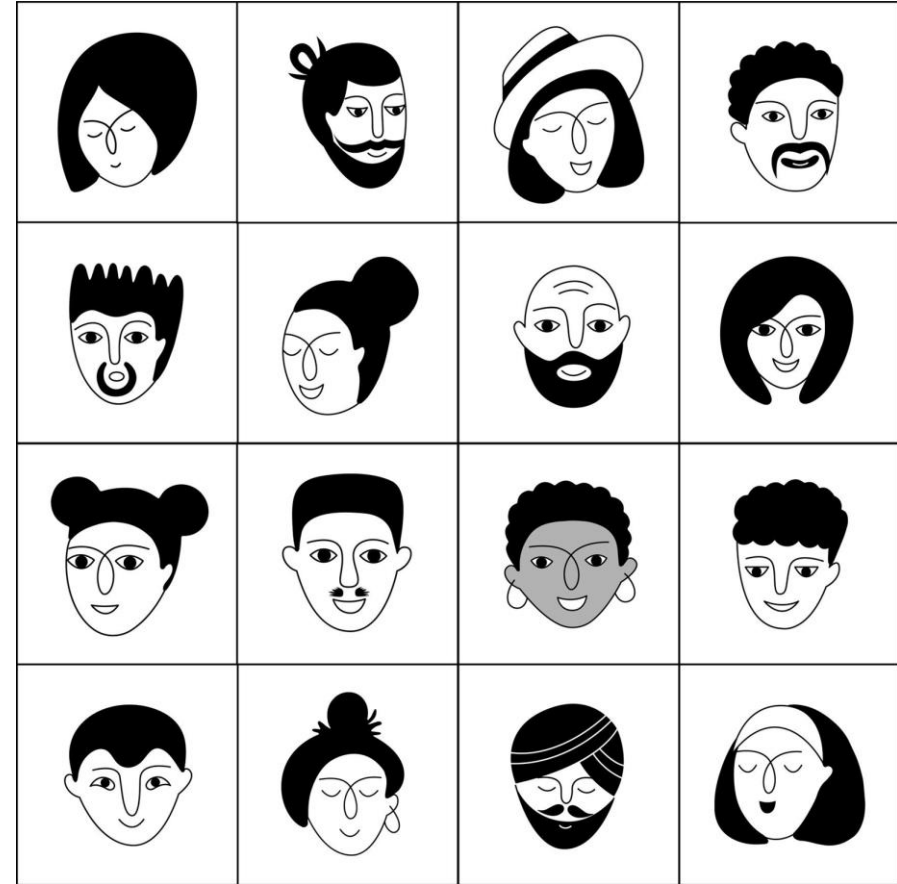
# Structural reasons why boundaries are difficult

- Inequity
- Resource Scarcity
- Policies & Practices
- Workplace Culture
- Gendered & Racialized Norms



# Individual reasons why boundaries are difficult

- Childhood Experiences
- Personality Factors
- Behavioural Choices & Habits
- Aversion to conflict, disagreements, or to disappointing others.





“

“There is no such thing as a  
guilt-free boundary.”

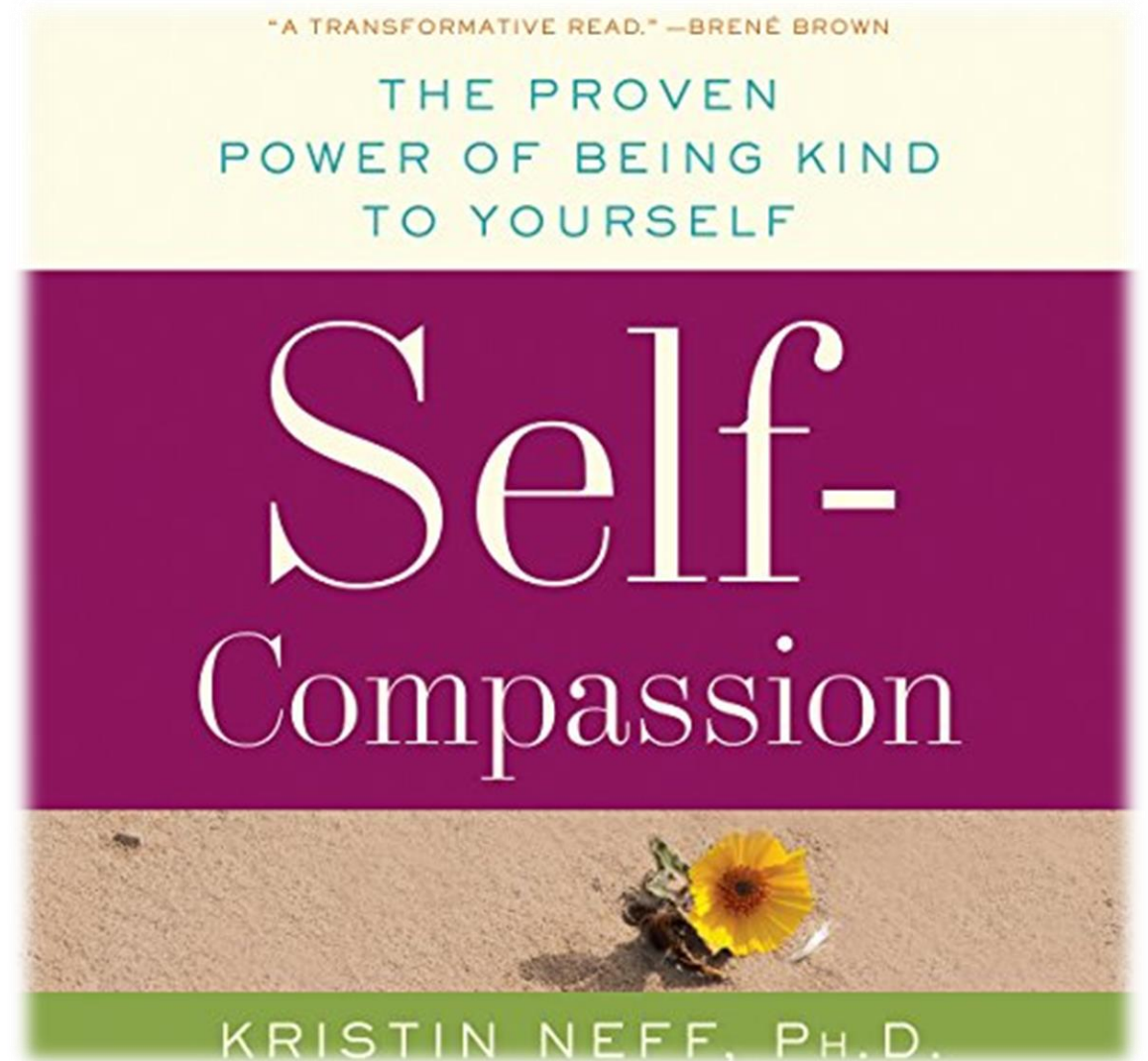
Tawwab, N. G. (2021). *Set boundaries, find peace: A guide to reclaiming yourself*.





# Second Principle: Developing self- compassion

Lakshmi





**Self-Compassion**

# Self-Compassion “on the Fly”

1

“This is a moment  
of suffering.”

*(Mindfulness)*

Dr. Kristen Neff, 2016

Well@work | Tier 3  
Screening and Resources



UK Center on Trauma & Children



<https://ctac.uky.edu/projects-and-programs/wellwork/tier-3>

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.

MDS-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

Take this screener to assess your level of self-compassion

SCS-SF



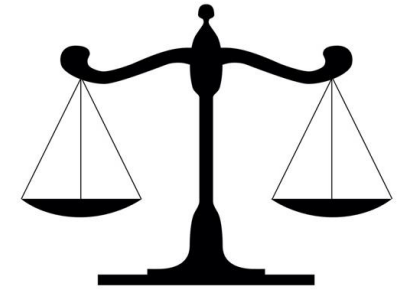
# Third Principle: Getting clear on your values

Lakshmi



# Moral distress

Inconsistencies between a helpers' beliefs and his or her actions in practice (Baylis, 2000).



When policies or routines conflict with beliefs about patient care (Mitchell, 2000).

# Fourth Principle: Collective action







MORE  
INCLUSIVE  
WORK  
PLACE

Fair  
Wages  
Now

AFPC  
PSAC

CIU-SDI

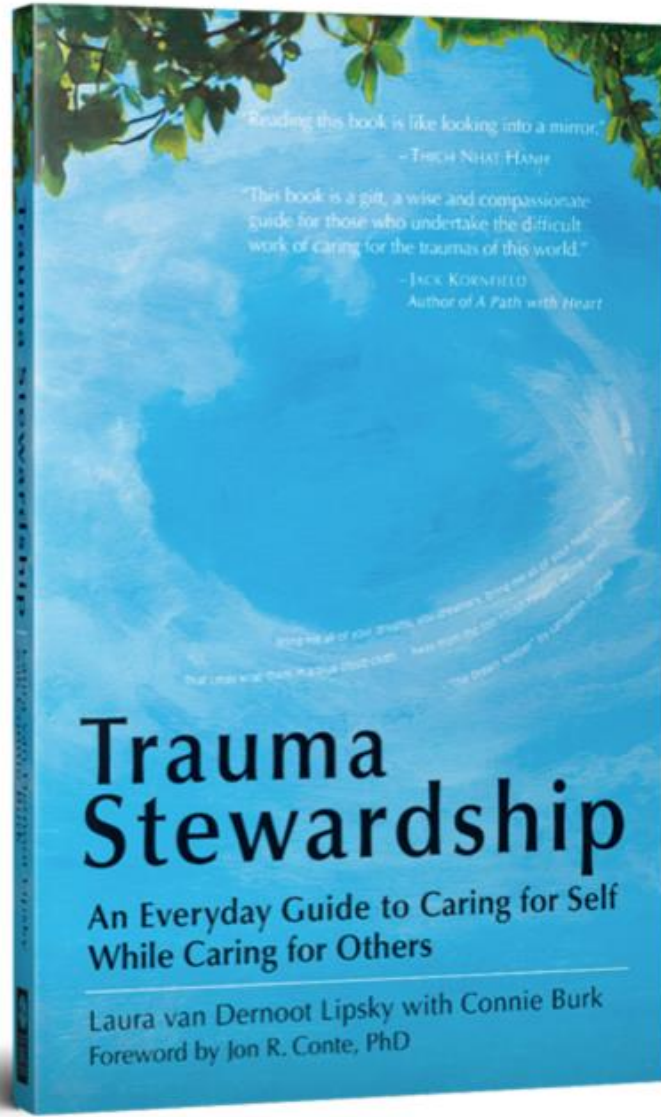
AFPA

Collective action



# My two favourite tools

- “What’s going on here?”
- “Check me out!”





## Best Practices for Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress

### PRINCIPLES FOR INDIVIDUALS & ORGANIZATIONS

Research has established that STS is an occupational hazard for those who provide mental health services to trauma-exposed populations. Mental health professionals and paraprofessionals indirectly exposed to trauma are at risk of experiencing STS symptoms. STS is associated with negative outcomes among providers such as functional impairment and poor physical health. High rates of STS within an organization can negatively affect organizational culture and climate and the quality and effectiveness of services provided by that organization.

Bride, B.E., Sprang, G., Hendricks, A., Walsh, C.R., Mathieu, F., Hangartner., Ross, L.A., Fisher, P., Miller, B.C. (In press) *Principles for STS-Responsive Practice: An Expert Consensus Approach in Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*



## Best Practices for Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress

PRINCIPLES FOR INDIVIDUALS & ORGANIZATIONS

Research has established that STS is an  
services to

INDIVIDUAL GUIDANCE

ORGANIZATIONAL GUIDANCE

To download the principles:  
[www.stsconsortium.com](http://www.stsconsortium.com)



## INDIVIDUAL GUIDANCE

Ongoing learning about STS

Tools for emotional arousal recovery

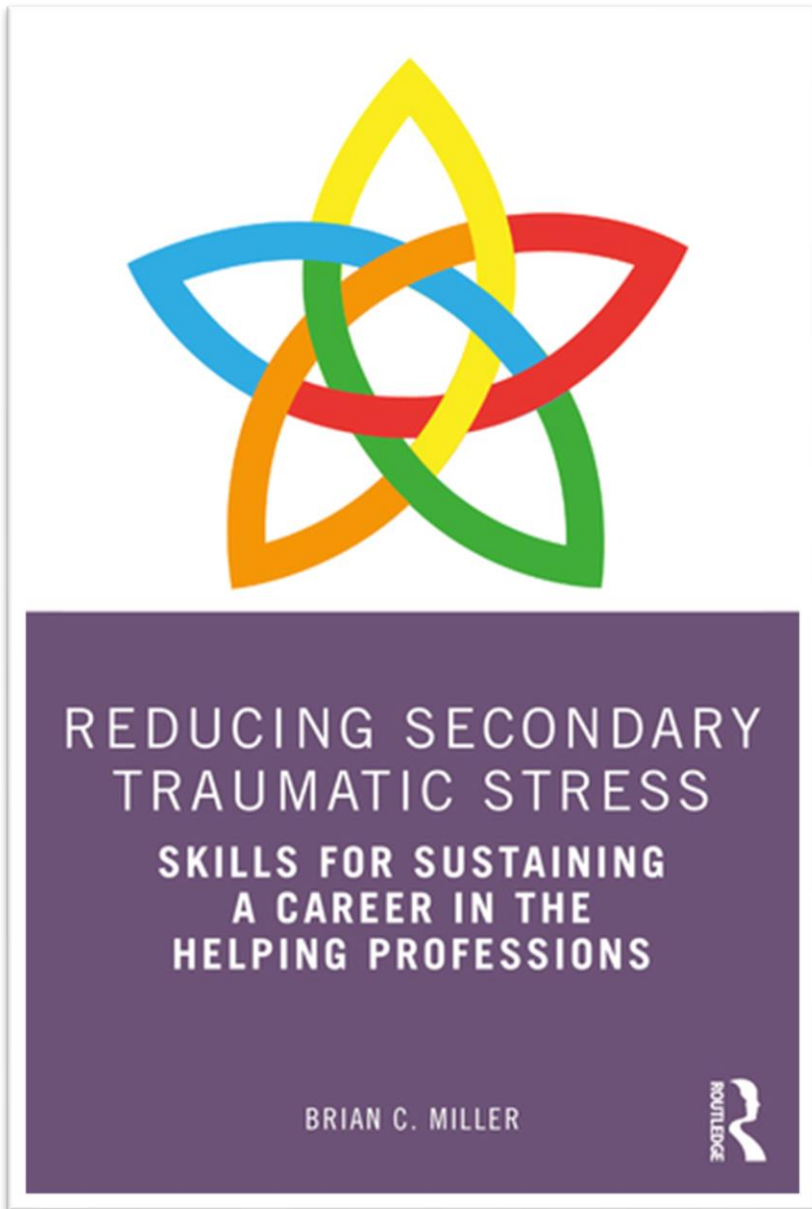
Cultivating meaning & purpose

Know your strengths and vulnerabilities

Community support

Self-monitoring & responding

External professional support prn



- Miller questions the benefits of the “after-work recovery” method of waiting until work is done to process difficult exposure. (Miller, 2021, p.12)
- When we are dysregulated, even if we successfully pretend to the world that all is well, we are more likely to lose the ability to be fully present and able to think clearly and problem-solve (Rothschild, 2006; Siegel, 1999).



# Developing your evidence- informed roadmap





Start with you.

Take a careful audit of the factors that contribute to increasing your STS, and those that help mitigate the impacts of the work.

Identify your warning signs and your zone of tolerance.

Remember that **research on emotional arousal recovery** show that there are strategies that trauma-exposed professionals can use in their **daily practice to reset** and recalibrate - take some time to learn what those are for you.



# YOUR BALANCE MAP

Françoise Mathieu, M. Ed, RP




Simplifying	Physical Health	Stress Relief
Understanding how I react to change	Social/Emotional supports	Stimulating and engaging work & hobbies
"Trauma Stewardship"	Managing occupational stress/resentment	Giving back

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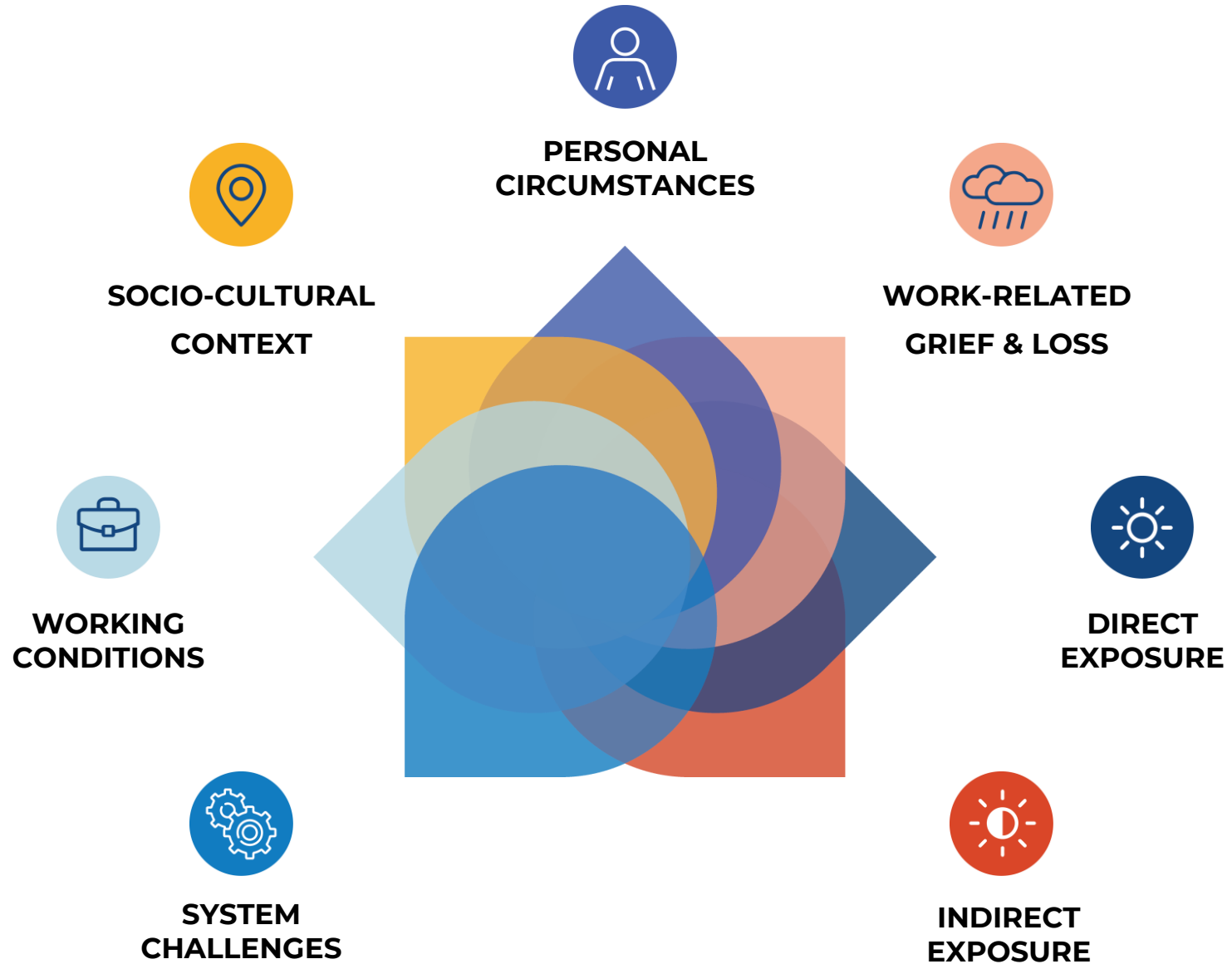


Simplifying	Physical Health	Stress Relief
Understanding how I react to change	Social/Emotional supports	Stimulating and engaging work & hobbies
"Trauma Stewardship"	Managing occupational stress/resentment	Giving back



Surround yourself with **colleagues that you trust and feel safe** being vulnerable with.

If you are a **supervisor**, I encourage you to reflect on your **own functional capacity** and on the impact that secondary trauma exposure has on your own well-being, as well as your own strategies to recalibrate when staff turn to you for support and guidance.





# Conclusion:

“Sometimes when people ask us, “How can you do this work?” we think, “How could we not?” [...] there is no other work that we would find this meaningful, challenging, and rewarding.”

(Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995 p.400)





- When we're tired and in the weeds, we forget the basics.
- How do we connect back to the foundational concepts that we already know?
- We need to find ways to check in with ourselves and with each other.





# CARE<sup>®</sup> 4YOU CONFERENCE



 **tend.** | TOOLKIT

# A Library of Tools for Helping Professionals



The TEND Toolkit is a **searchable database** of resources, strategies, and education to support helping professionals working in complex workplaces.

<https://tendtoolkit.com>

Q & A





# Session Wrap Up

- Thank you for joining us!
- Please fill out the feedback survey following the session—a link has been added into the chat.

# Thank You



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