

Vicarious Trauma

I can't unsee what I have seen.
Now what ?

This workshop will:

- Walk participants through signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma
- Walk participants through what to expect, both physiologically and psychologically, once you have seen the unthinkable
- Discussions will focus on self-care, trauma triggers and how to manage those memories

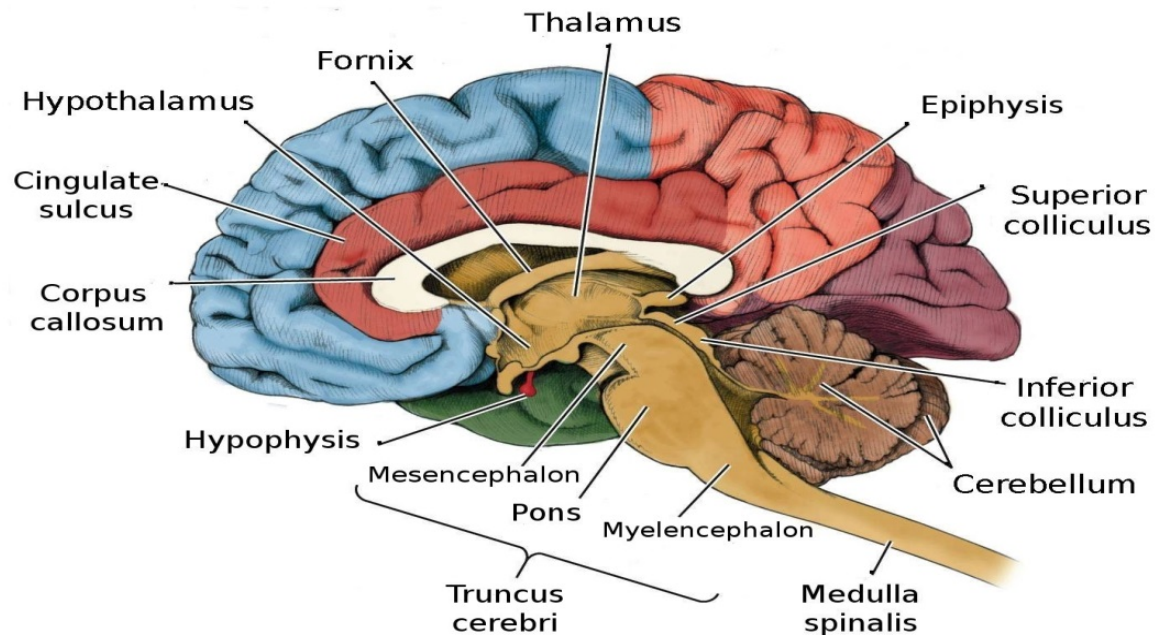


That's
awful!

Physiological Effects of Trauma

Trauma disrupts the stress-hormone system.

It plays havoc with the entire nervous system, and prevents people from processing/integrating traumatic memories into conscious mental frameworks.



Brain changes related to Trauma

Traumatic memories stay "stuck" in the brain in areas where they are not accessible to the frontal lobes which are the understanding, thinking, reasoning parts of the brain.



When the brain functions the way it is supposed to, we function well.

Trauma can change all that; trauma is wounding.



Trauma overwhelms the ordinary adaptations to life.

PTSD is not just an emotional response to troubling events; it is the expression of a persistent deregulation of body and brain chemistry.





Trauma assaults the brain and the neurotransmitters in the brain, wounding it for years, even decades.

While the brain is wounded it can be triggered and you may have flashbacks; trauma creates chaos in our brain.

The amygdala gland is the part of the brain that acts as an alarm.



It interprets messages as dangerous or safe.

This function of the brain knows nothing about reasoning or cognitive functions; it deals only with feelings and emotions.



It becomes highly active during a trauma and when remembering a traumatic incident; it controls our behavior.

You may find yourself caught between amnesia or reliving the trauma, between floods of intense, overwhelming feelings or blank numb states of no feeling.



Traumatized people are used to dissociation and not feeling their bodies; the memories cause them to shut themselves down, go numb, blank and/or frozen in order to not feel anything.

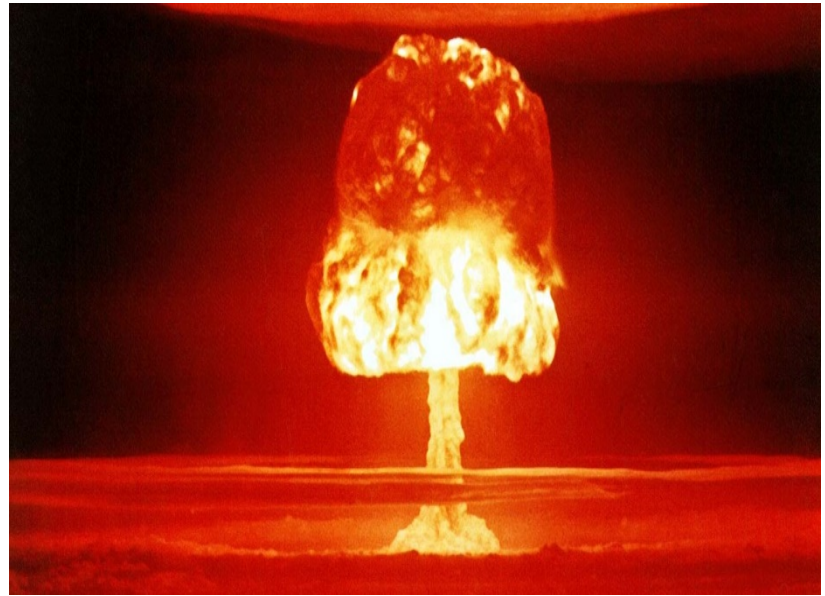




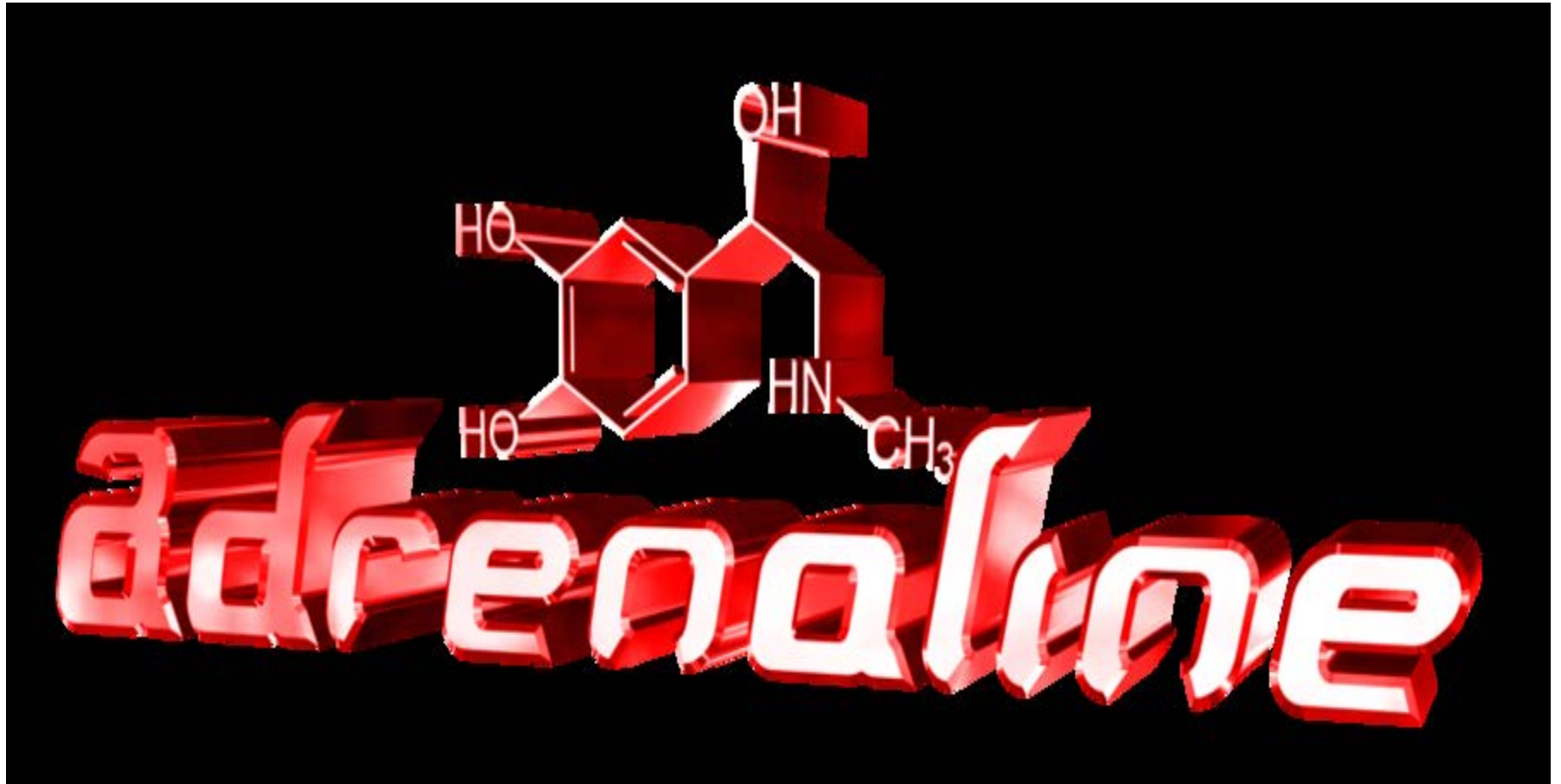
You may have vivid graphic thoughts about what happened but no emotion.

Or you may experience intense emotions but without the thoughts or actual memories of the event in that moment.

Your brain, due to the wound, may not be able to distinguish a real threat from a false threat.



Intense stress or trauma triggers adrenaline.



Adrenaline surges through the blood stream causing the heart to beat faster and prepare the body for an emergency.

This flood of hormones produces the "fight or flight" response in most people.



This causes the heart to continue to beat faster, but also signals various parts of the brain to supercharge that intense emotional memory.

These hormones assist the individual to mobilize in the event of emergency.



They also sweep through the body, return to the brain, and trigger the release of more equally powerful hormones.



When a trauma hits, up to 70% of our brain-bound oxygen is diverted into our muscles to propel us somewhere else.



And for some, it produces a "freeze" mode.

If you freeze, all those hormones rushing through the body have no appropriate physical response and the stress has paralyzed the person. ⁽¹⁾





Psychological signs after having been triggered

- Difficulty managing emotions
- Difficulty accepting /feeling okay about yourself (esteem issues)
- Difficulty making good decisions (or any decisions)



- Problems managing boundaries between you and others (taking on too much, problems leaving work at work, trying to step in/control other's lives)
- Over sharing



- Problems in relationships
- Difficulty feeling connected to what is happening around/in you
- Loss of meaning/hope

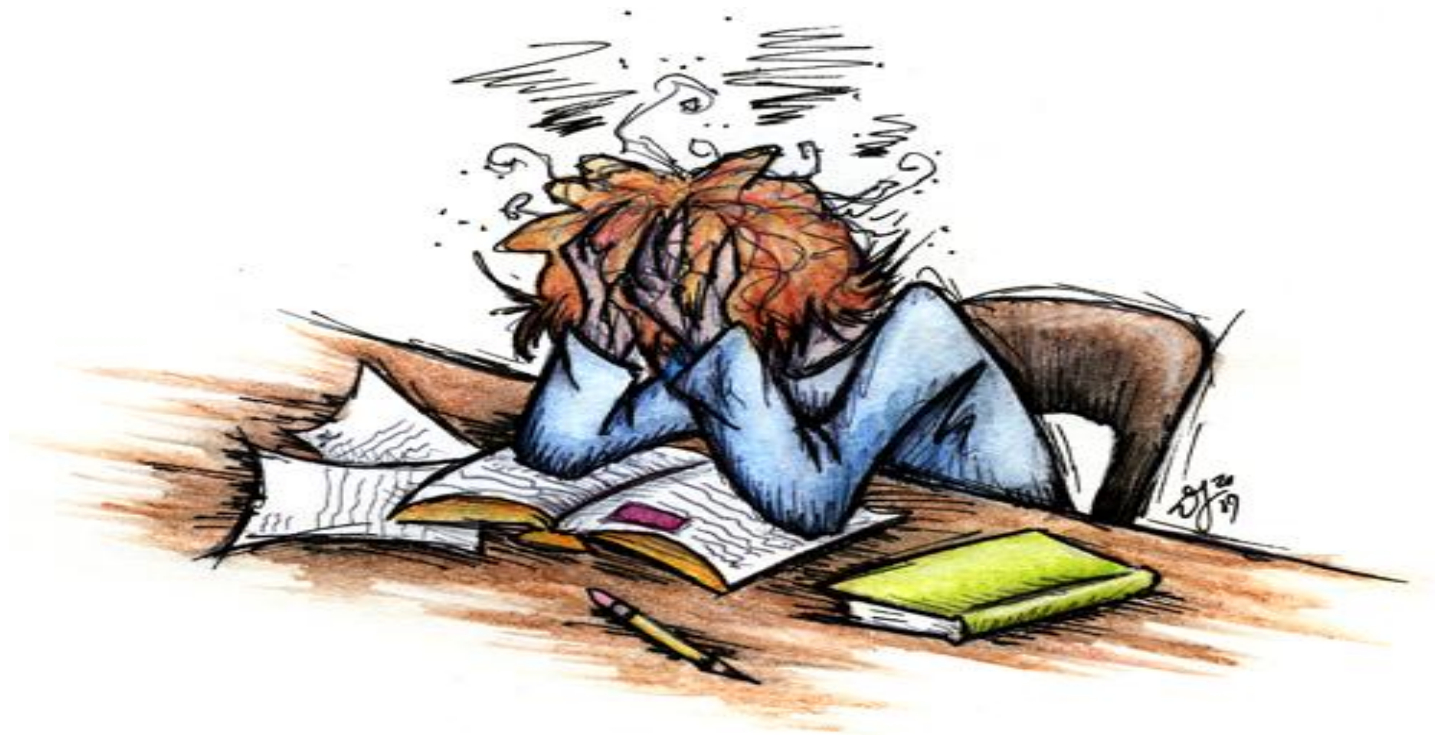


Vicarious Trauma/Compassion Fatigue

- This is a result of engaging empathically with another's trauma, and this carries risks
- It can effect the helper's inner experience



- It is an accumulative process
- It is an occupational hazard for many jobs
- It can lead to burnout



Psychological Signs of Vicarious Trauma

- You may be quick to anger/cry and irritability
- Be cynical or have a loss of idealism
- Feel disgust
- Have nightmares and/or sleep problems
- Have fear or intrusive thoughts of the trauma event(s), real or imagined



- Feel despair or survivor guilt
- Feel numb or easily startled
- Feel hopelessness
- Have an increased sensitivity to violence



Behavior/relationship signs of Vicarious Trauma

- Problems setting boundaries and separating work from home
- Taking no “me” time
- Having no energy for yourself
- Increased conflict in relationships
- Social withdrawal
- Decreased interest in pleasurable activities



Take a deep breath



“Now what?”, you ask

What are some things you do regularly to take care of yourself?

1. Reading, exercising, taking a break regularly at work
2. Calling someone to check in
3. Seeing a therapist



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How do you manage stress?

- Eating salty snacks?
- Binge watching the Hallmark Channel?
- Shopping therapy?
- Drinking heavily?



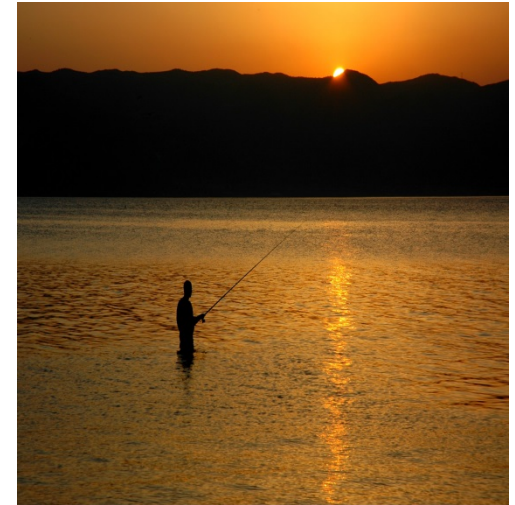
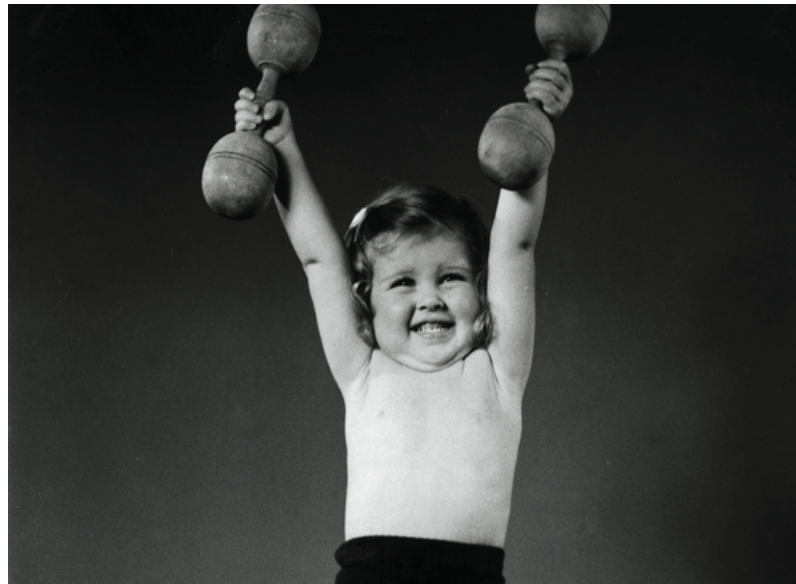
What Self-Care Looks Like

- Acknowledge stress and vicarious trauma
- Get support
- Give support
- Attend to your inner experience
- Develop and use coping skills
- Practice daily self-care strategies
- Breathe
- Laugh
- Forgive yourself



Physical Well-Being

Regular exercise, yoga, recreational activities, being outside, stretching, breathing, walking



Mental Well Being

Exercise your brain with reading, puzzles, board games, mind teasers, stimulating conversations, coloring or painting, doing crafts



BIODIVERSITY

ACROSS

- 1 Hidden supply
- 6 Angry response to a comé-on
- 10 Farm animal that gives milk
- 14 Playful, web-footed swimmer
- 15 Feature of a rooster's head
- 16 Golem
- 17 Huge, thick-skinned African animal
- 19 Giant panda's continent
- 20 Butterfly catcher
- 21 Yankee Doodle's mount
- 22 Late-blooming flower
- 23 Rabbit's refuge
- 24 Homes for 60-Across
- 26 Begin to grow, as a plant

- 29 Ferocious felines
- 33 "What's the ___?"
- 34 Moved on ice
- 35 Shape of a horse's racecourse
- 36 Tennis shoe feature
- 37 On all ___ (how a 10-Across walks)
- 38 Freshwater food fish
- 39 Disgusting
- 40 With 22-Down, predatory insect that travels in vast swarms
- 41 ___ for (hose)
- 42 Prickly plants with purple flower heads
- 44 Works the dough
- 45 Web addresses, familiarity
- 46 Animal with antlers
- 47 Ornate, like a peacock's tail
- 50 After-bath powder
- 51 Even if, for short
- 54 Stink like a skunk



Spiritual Well Being

Be with nature, create a supportive community,
do gardening, attend religious services,
volunteer



Social Well Being

Join an interest group, socialize, network with co-workers, invite someone to lunch, host a meal



Breathe



Scott Magoon

When you get triggered, get grounded

- Stop, take a breath
- Count to ten, or 20 or 100
- Focus on an object in the room
- Look for same colored items around you (5 blue objects or 4 green things)
- Pull over if you are driving



Remember




- Triggers don't always make sense
- It is normal to be triggered
- You cannot control your triggers
- Do not let your triggers control you, acknowledge it is happening and
- Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.



Don't forget

- Sit down
- Call someone, talk to someone near you or next to you
- Take care of yourself regularly
- Seeing a therapist is not a weakness
- Research EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy)

How did the presentation go?

- Did I walk participants through signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma?
- Did I walk participants through what to expect, both physiologically and psychologically, once you have seen the unthinkable?
- Did we have discussions on self-care, trauma triggers and how to manage those memories?

References

(1) How Trauma Impacts the Brain

Talking Points from seminar for Rachel's Vineyard Ministries; Theresa Burke, PhD