

Trauma-informed self-care: how to care well for yourself while you care well for others.

*"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation."
Audre Lorde*

*"We have not been directly exposed to the trauma scene, but we hear the story told with such intensity, or we hear similar stories so often, or we have the gift and curse of extreme empathy and we suffer. We feel the feelings of our kids and families. We experience their fears. We dream their dreams. Eventually, we can lose a spark of optimism, humor and hope. We tire. We aren't sick, but we aren't ourselves."
Charles Figley*

— Naming The Problem —

Compassion Fatigue: The emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.

Secondary trauma: can be incurred when an individual is exposed to people who have been traumatized themselves, disturbing descriptions of traumatic events by a survivor, or others inflicting cruelty on one another. Symptoms of secondary trauma are similar to those of PTSD.

— Some of the Origins of the Problem —

- We are more disconnected and divided than ever before.
- Our support systems and agencies are complex and can often fail children.
- Empathy is a double-edge sword.
- Demands far outweigh our capacity.
- Our lack of sleep is killing us.
- Anxiety is a way of life in our culture. We are an exhausted and overstressed people.
- We are a culture dominated by expenditure and not renewal.

— Defining the Solution —

Margin [**mahr-jin**]; noun

1. the space around the printed or written matter on a page.
2. an amount allowed or available beyond what is actually necessary.
3. a border or edge.

Creating a clearing in our lives that opens up an emotionally clutter-free space that allows us to feel, think, dream, question, play, and reorient ourselves with our purposes and life values.

— Trauma-informed Margin —

- Our bodies are more like porous sponges than marble surfaces.
- Change our outlook from time management to energy management. Managing our energy is about BOTH/AND not EITHER/OR.
 - Renewal AND expenditure.
 - Taking care of yourself AND taking care of others

“Just as you'll eventually go broke if you make constant withdrawals from your bank account without offsetting deposits, you will also ultimately burn yourself out if you spend too much energy too continuously at work without sufficient renewal.”

Tony Schwartz, author and founder of The Energy Project

- It takes a village to run our lives.

Relationships: Am I making room for...

- Healthy, reciprocal friendships with peers? More face to face, less screen to screen?
- Connection with others in vulnerable and life-giving ways?
- Be creative in how I spend my free time, practicing hobbies and new ways to connect socially?
- Healthy boundaries?

Body care/Movement: Am I making room to...

- Make time for physical activity? (Do not sit longer than 1 hour at a time.)
- Get enough sleep?
- Be aware how stress affects my body?
- Make healthy eating choices?
- Develop practices for lowering anxiety through deep breathing, grounding, and physical relaxation strategies?

Emotional World: Am I making room to...

- Be honest about what I use to numb my pain and exhaustion?
- Talking about the situations that drain me emotionally?
- Be aware of my thought life and realize what I am spending my mental energy on?
- Create opportunities to process the emotional impacts of my kids and their outcomes?
- Reach out for help when I feel emotionally overwhelmed?
- Admit when I am feeling anxious?
- Have times of laughter and play? “The opposite of play is not work. The opposite of play is depression.” Dr. Stuart Brown

Spiritual (Beauty/Nature/Purpose): Am I making room to...

- Reject exhaustion as a way of life and productivity as my self-worth?
- Engage in nature by being outside or practicing hobbies that are outside?
- Do things that connect me to my faith?
- Include time for reflection, mediation, and solitude?
- Live in the reality of what I can control, what I can't control, and what I can influence?
- Meaningfully connected to others who share my spiritual values?
- Practicing gratitude as part of my spiritual practices?