

Our Occupational Hazards

Understanding the Core Experiences of Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Traumatic Stress, & Vicarious Traumatization

- ❖ **Burnout:** Burnout is often thought of a high demand-low control workplace dynamic or a high demand-low resources dynamic that insidiously arises over time resulting in: (1) emotional exhaustion (2) depersonalization (3) perceived incompetence.
- ❖ **Compassion Fatigue (CF):** Although very similar to Burnout, CF can be thought of as a more relational-emotional process that may have a more rapid evolution. CF often arises out of our constant caring for those who suffer deeply of trauma, hopelessness, longing, and fear. There may be more diffuse boundaries in some therapeutic relationships, and so we inadvertently begin to feel the burden of caring. This can result in: (1) Losing our sense of self (2) less spark & joy (3) more irritability and (4) compromised relationships.
- ❖ **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS):** STS is essentially post-traumatic stress (PTS) but experienced by the therapist when treating a client with highly traumatic material being shared. Be on the lookout for symptom clusters of: (1) Re-experiencing (2) Avoidance (3) Negative Ideation/affect/behavior (4) Hyper-arousal.
- ❖ **Vicarious Traumatization (VT):** VT is the more cognitive and meaning-oriented experience of working with traumatized individuals or groups. A therapist with VT may begin to see his own children, for example, as inevitably at risk for the trauma that was described by a client recalling his own childhood. The therapist's meta-level view of the world may negatively shift in meaningful ways.