



## **Metropolitan Public Defender**

*presents*

# ***Trauma Informed Self-Care for the Legal Community***

**Thursday, June 11, 2020**  
**12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.**

### **Presenter:**

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**Shari R. Pearlman,  
LCSW, JD**

Oregon Attorney  
Assistance Program

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**ZOOM webinar**

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# Trauma Informed Self-Care for Members for Members of the Legal Community

June 11, 2020, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Presented to

Metropolitan Public Defender

By Shari R. Pearlman, LCSW, JD

I OAAP intro

II Secondary trauma/vicarious trauma/Trauma Exposure/burnout defined

- a. Trauma is defined by The Center for Treatment of Anxiety and Mood disorders as a psychological, emotional response to an event or experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing.
- b. When we use our mirror neurons and our empathy to relate to and feel some of what others are feeling it can lead to a trauma response when what we are picking up from the others is pain/trauma.
- c. The difference between secondary trauma and vicarious trauma is that secondary trauma can happen suddenly, in one session, while vicarious trauma is a response to an accumulation of exposure to the pain of others (Figley, 1995). The symptoms of secondary trauma are nearly identical to those of vicarious trauma.
- d. Vicarious Resiliency- Ability to find strength and adopt coping strategies from learning/witnessing others navigate their challenges.

III Signs/Symptoms of Trauma Exposure Response/Secondary Trauma

- a. One will experience physical, emotional, cognitive reactions to trauma to protect ourselves.
- b. See handout/slide

IV Where does that leave us as we are working remotely?

- a. Grief/Loss of what once was
- b. Fight flight/ nowhere to go
- c. Difficulty separating work from home
- d. Anxiety about going back to work place
- e. Getting Unstuck (see handout)
- f. MPD- what you need more of
  1. Craving Connections
- g. MPD-what is working for you
  1. What is working- Time to focus, time for break

V. Revisiting Trauma Informed Lawyering- to protect you and your clients

- a. Safety-physical and emotional-
  1. Use non-threatening body language and soft gaze and voice and take breaks

- b. Trustworthiness and Transparency
- c. Empowerment, Voice and Choice for you
- d. Peer Support for you when needed
- e. Collaboration and Mutuality with your clients
- f. Awareness of Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues, to name a few

#### VI. Tending to ourselves- outside of work

- a. Nurturing, laughter, physical exertion/enjoyment, intellectual pursuits, connection

#### VII Create a safety team- in and outside of work

- a. Defined by friendships, family- by blood or chosen, trust, mentorship, love, safety, camaraderie

#### VIII Healing and Thriving –

- a. Using Mindfulness/Acceptance/Self Compassion/developing a felt sense (Peter Levine)
  - 1. Lends itself to a felt sense of who we are, what we think, how we feel in the moment and moment by moment
  - 2. Develop trusting in our gut
  - 3. Trauma does not create a broken system but one that is frozen- so awareness/leading to feelings and thought together will help us resolve trauma
- b. Seeking Counsel- different modes to deal with prior/current personal trauma and other challenges experiences and use your support systems as well
- c. People who are stress resistant have some shared developed traits and we all capable of strengthening them:
  - 1. Gaining a sense of Personal Control (enhanced sense of agency)
  - 2. Pursuit of Personally Meaningful tasks- actively not passively (choosing our focus)
  - 3. Healthy Lifestyle choices (exercise, sleep, eat, etc.)
  - 4. Social Support (building community)
  - 5. Developed sense of Zest and optimism – Berkeley Center for Positive Psychology
    - a. Zest is about approaching life with vitality, not doing things halfway or halfheartedly, and feeling alive. (Christopher Peterson, 2006). Use your senses, intuition and optimism to find positives
    - b. Cultivate zest/passion by taking care of your body, being social, practicing savoring, cultivate optimism, and get in nature.

VIII. In Trauma Stewardship author Laura van Dernoot Lipsky talks about using five directions as a way of working our way through the world to find wellbeing, wisdom, gain perspective and integrity regardless of how much control we actually have.

- 1. North- Creating Space for Inquiry (Reflection with self-empathy)
  - a. Asking why am I doing what I am doing?
  - b. Help us stay with being intentional

- c. Gaining and keeping awareness and clarity of purpose
  - d. Gaining purpose for today or maybe just in the moment
  - e. Reflect on whether mastering your own trauma or those of your family/people is part of the reason why you work. This can make you more at risk of effects of trauma exposure but also be very rewarding. Add reflections on ways to support healing.
  - f. Is this working for me?
2. East- Choosing Our Focus
    - a. Ask where am I putting my focus today/now? Recognize that we have choice/gain clarity
    - b. Focusing on what is in front of me or taking a step back (ex of focus on client who has died or the many who have lived or image of something outside of clients)
    - c. My experience is what I agree to attend to by William James- philosopher/psychologist
    - d. Develop a plan B- we have some say so in our lives, we can choose to stay or go
  3. South- Build in our Compassion and Community
    - a. Build your micro culture- your team of people that help you emphasize your values that may be different from the majority
    - b. Help you look at things from different perspectives outside of yourself
    - c. Keep you practicing compassion for yourself and others
  4. West Finding Balance- Engaging with our lives outside of work
    - a. Taking time off including sick days/hooky days/vacation
    - b. Incorporate something in your workday that is meaningful to you
    - c. Breathe/ground/meditate
    - d. Brief exercise/stretching
    - e. Shift from work to play by using music, exercise, etc.
    - f. Reflect on work day, find the good in it and shut it down with an eye for prep for the next day
  5. Our centered self
    - a. Create intention for today- small achievable goals are recommended here- i.e. I will eat a salad...small successes allow for us to build upon goals for larger successes, i.e. I will eat healthy all day.
    - b. Practice mindfulness moment
    - c. Designate a Rest day

RESOURCES:

Trauma Stewardship: An Every Day Guide to Caring for Ourselves While Caring for Others by  
 Laura van Dernoot Lipsky  
[www.Traumastewardship.com](http://www.Traumastewardship.com)

Berkeley Center for Positive Psychology  
<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/tag/positive+psychology>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Trauma Services  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

OAAP Thriving Today Blog  
<https://oap.org/thriving-today/>

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## Definitions for clarity

- Trauma Exposure Response
- Secondary Trauma
- Vicarious Trauma
- Burnout

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## Signs and Symptoms



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How are we doing?



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Getting Unstuck



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Recreating Connections



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Trauma Informed Lawyers



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Tending to ourselves



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Safety Team



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Healing/ Thriving



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Directions



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# GETTING UNSTUCK FROM IN THE UNCERTAIN PLACE

by [Shari R. Pearlman \(Gregory\)](#)



Living in the “place between no longer and not yet” (a phrase coined by [Victor Turner](#), anthropologist, writer) can make us feel stuck. We all find ourselves living with uncertainty, and the unknowns can create a level of anxiety within us that has us freeze and then at times feel stuck. The topic of getting unstuck is well vetted on the Internet, with many how-to videos and articles about how to get unstuck, whether it is finding ways to continue doing work we have been doing or seeking new and healthier ways to do things that we need to do to thrive. Ironically, when you are stuck, sheer abundance like all of those videos and articles can contribute to not knowing what to do next.

One of the healthiest things I listened to while reacquainting myself with this topic was a [five-minute video](#) by [Joan Borysenko, PhD](#) (therapist, speaker, author) who talked about using the stuck place as the place to be uncertain. It is a place to first process the frustration of not knowing what to do next, letting go of the fact that we need to propel forward, and then accepting the fact that we are just sitting in this space. I believe this gives us freedom to be stuck and a purpose to being stuck. Namely, we need to process the fact that we cannot currently move ourselves in our work or personal projects. In accepting that this is part of the process, we can relax enough to gradually become unstuck. Like many things in life, if we break the process down to attainable steps, we will find ourselves on our way.

**Step 1:** We can name the place of being stuck as the place of uncertainty. By naming it, it becomes a more neutral place, an acceptable place, or even a helpful place.

**Step 2:** During times of uncertainty and definitely during this time of the pandemic, we might feel grief for the way life was before and the way we more smoothly and maybe more effectively were able to do our work or projects or self-improvement efforts. We are grieving the times of what was, times when we had more clarity on what will come next. We need time to process and to appreciate that there has been change, and that change not only causes general uncertainty, but it could also change the way we might respond to things, sometimes leaving us without a known road map and that the way we move and do things may look different from before.

**Step 3:** When we feel stuck, we can use self-compassion to lower expectations of ourselves and redefine success, at least temporarily. Kristen Neff, therapist and author of [Self-Compassion](#), on her website, [self-compassion.org](#), notes that having compassion for ourselves is just like having compassion for others. We first recognize suffering, empathize with it, and then react with care and concern. In a recent [New York Times article](#), life coach [Elizabeth Grace Saunders](#) thinks of our states of mind as being helpful or unhelpful. She also notes that for most people, we can be stymied by not knowing all the steps it would take to finish or succeed. Here is an illustration of shifting from an unhelpful mindset to a helpful one:

- **Unhelpful mindset:** “If I don’t know the perfect way to accomplish this project or if I’m not sure how it will all work out at the onset, I won’t even start.”
- **Helpful mindset:** “Part of starting can be learning. I can make the first step of beginning to read more, talk to an expert, or spend focused time thinking about my approach. I don’t need to know the entire road map to begin learning and taking next steps.”
- **Action:** Decide on a first step. That could include spending a certain amount of time reading about the topic, reviewing your old notes, or talking to a colleague.

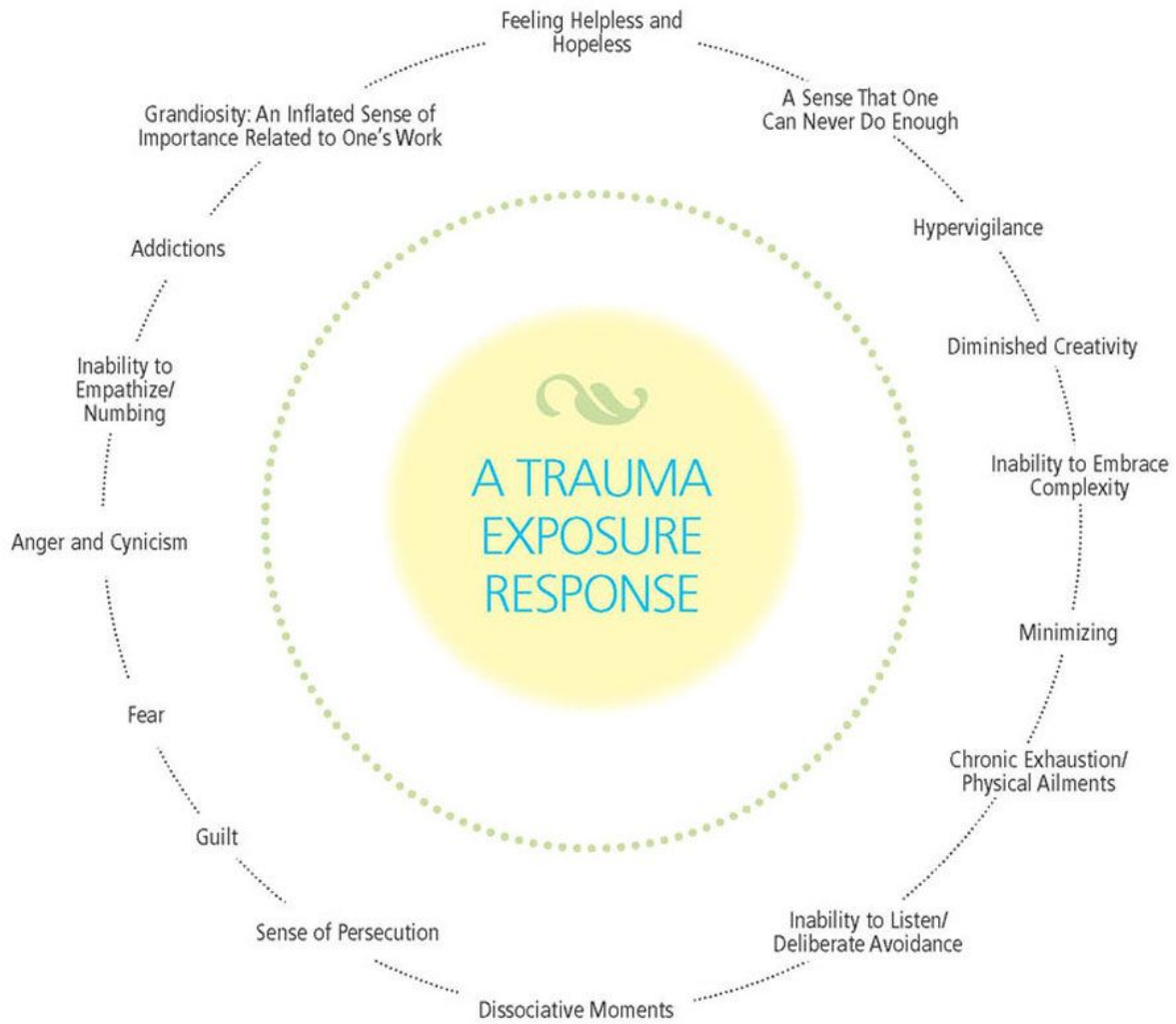
We can use a helpful mindset and self-talk around consistently making progress, as opposed to thinking that success is only defined by completing a project.

The good news for most of us, in addition to processing and accepting, is that if we employ one or more of these unsticking strategies, we can start become unstuck:

1. Break any project or goal into small steps and pick one of the steps to start. Any action could encourage you to continue the project and give you feelings of satisfaction and success that you can then build upon.
2. Start in the middle/start anywhere. See #1. Whatever step you take can lead you to taking more.
3. Set a timer for 15 minutes and remind yourself that you can do anything for 15 minutes. This not only sets the bar lower to something achievable, but it also provides you a parameter to work in.
4. Don’t overthink it. Many of us tend to overanalyze. When Nike said, “Just Do It,” they had a good point. Just getting thoughts or a draft on a page will start a work project. Putting on your running shoes and stepping outside will get you on your way to running your first 5k.
5. Write a few words, take an action step, and then walk away. Sometimes when we are stuck, we need a break to gain clarity.
6. Visualize the goal to help motivate you to reach it. What will you feel like? What will you have accomplished?
7. Set small goals with smart rewards as incentive, like work for 15 minutes and then go outside in the sunshine for a break.

Despite the fact that feeling stuck is uncomfortable and often frustrating, it is an experience that most of us can relate to and, as a result, many of us have found solutions too, like I did when I perused the Internet for help.

Take care and if you are stuck, please call the OAAP and we can help.



### *Trauma Exposure Response*

A trauma exposure response may be defined as the transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet.

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## **How to manage trauma exposure responses:**

### Feeling Helpless/Hopeless-

1. use Gratitude/Appreciation
2. Find achievable goals within the larger system, remembering that each does their part we move the ball further

### A sense that One Can Never Do Enough-

1. Just stop doing
2. I do therefore, I am.
3. Being more in moment. There will always be a list, do what is in front of you.

Hypervigilance- Using exercise, restorative breathing, other relaxation tips, recognizing with pause that all is not unsafe despite the notion that there is less safety than before

### Diminished Creativity-

1. Take a step back from work
2. Have hard breaks between work and other activities
3. Brainstorm more with others

### Inability to Embrace Complexity-

1. Take more breaks
2. Employ help
3. Break down into smaller bites- i.e. issue by issue, element by element

### Minimizing-

1. Gaining perspective by comparing to others
2. Paradox, by seeing the big picture we are actually opening ourselves up to acceptance ability to deal-like ripping the band-aid off

### Chronic Exhaustion/Physical Ailments-

1. Deciding to take mini or longer breaks of sick time/vacation time as needed and appropriate

### Inability to Listen/Deliberate Avoidance-

1. Take breaks in the moment and for longer.
2. Ground/meditate

### Dissociative moments-

1. Grounding exercises
2. Create safe space/time for caring support during day, even if by text
3. Ask questions and get dialed back in if necessary

### Sense of Persecution

1. Self-compassion techniques
2. Talk it thru for perspective
3. Cognitive behavioral techniques

#### Guilt-

1. Process in writing or with a trusted person
2. Is the guilt yours to carry? Shared? Societal?
3. Self soothe/compassion

#### Fear-

1. Ground/breath
2. Seek support
3. Pause

#### Anger/Cynicism-

1. Take breaks
2. Honor feeling of anger- feelings are valid, also are warnings, reminders
3. Practice gratitude
4. Find the best parts to appreciate
5. Take a step back
6. Debrief

#### Inability to Empathize/ Numbing-

1. Remember it is protective
2. Seek counsel
3. Practice patience when needed
4. Don't feel but still do the next right thing

#### Addictions-

1. Seek support
2. Self-Compassion

#### Grandiosity: An inflated Sense of Importance Related to One's Work-

1. Honor your value
2. Remember we honor others but getting their help letting them carry part of the load/do their jobs
3. The work is important but with or without you the world will turn (Jerry Joseph)
4. I can only do my part, but I cannot fix it! or other thoughts could be helpful
5. I am not alone

## Biography

**Shari R. Pearlman, LCSW, JD** has worked at the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) over 20 years. Shari is a graduate of Wurzweiler School of Social Work (MSW 1987) and Rutgers School of Law (JD 1992,) and received her Certificate of Business Management from Portland State University (2003), and her license in clinical social work (2010). She is experienced in career and life transition counseling, mental health and trauma counseling, crisis intervention, alcohol and substance misuse counseling and relationship counseling. She worked in indigent criminal defense here in Portland for four years before joining the OAAP staff in 1999. Shari was the OAAP Liaison to the OSB Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, and served on the boards of the Oregon Women Lawyers, Queen's Bench and the OSB Diversity Section Executive Board. Shari has a passion for helping people and building community.

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