

Self-Care & Building Resilience for Caregivers: Making Meaning & Silver Linings

Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S
kbuffington46@hotmail.com



Presentation Goal:

To help audience members with a compassionate and increased understanding about traumatic stress, vicarious and secondary trauma and explore perspectives and actions that promote resilience.



Presentation Objectives

Participants in this workshop will be able to:

1. Increase their understanding of key concepts related to trauma.
2. Define trauma, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue and explore impact issues.
3. Utilize tools and perspectives that will help them not only survive but thrive.



Presenter's Framework

Understanding trauma & opportunities to promote safety & resiliency of youth

Understanding impact of secondary exposure to trauma

Effectiveness, Hope,
Joy, Peace of Mind

Helpful perspectives

Self care strategies



Understanding trauma and opportunities to promote safety and resiliency of youth

A traumatic experience is an event that:

- Threatens someone's life, safety, or well-being,
- Causes an overwhelming emotional reaction,
- Can be experienced directly or indirectly



Examples of Potentially Traumatic Events

- Child maltreatment
- Witnessing violence
- Interpersonal victimization
- Terrorism/War
- Natural disasters
- Loss of loved ones
- Serious accidents
- Medical trauma
- Witnessing the suffering of others



Basic facts about trauma

- It is not a rare occurrence; most people have experienced one or more traumatic events in their lifetimes.
- Trauma in one generation in a family, can impact the life experiences of future generations...
- The impact of trauma is cumulative...
- The earlier the age the trauma occurs can cause increased risk of harming a person's development..
- Trauma can impact brain development, learning, relationships, physical health, self esteem, & spirituality..



Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

Findings

(Kaiser Permanente Health Plan & Centers for Disease Control)

People with 4 or more ACEs were:

- Nearly 2 times more likely to smoke cigarettes, or have heart disease, cancer, obesity
- 7 times more likely chronic alcoholism; engage in sex with > 50 partners.
- 11 times more likely to engage in IV drug use
- 19 times more likely to attempt suicide



This is not a hopeless situation....

Resiliency: the ability to bounce back after experiencing adversities



Resiliency (cont'd)

Dr. Ann Masten

“...Resilient children have been protected by the actions of adults, by good nurturing, by their assets, and by opportunities to succeed...”



Support system responses can either increase the harmful impact of trauma or promote healing & resilience...





Courtesy of Western Michigan University
Child Assessment Clinic



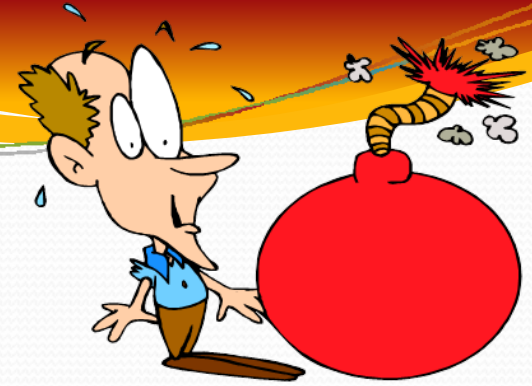
Courtesy of Western Michigan University Child Assessment Clinic

What can we do?

- Recognize the impact of trauma and help the child and family access supports and treatments that help address & heal the trauma. Consequences alone for the behavioral difficulties are about requiring accountability without the resources to achieve it.
- Help youth to succeed with their educations. Saving a child & his/her education is about saving a child's life!!!



What can we do?



Understand and respond to the concept of Alarm Mode
After repeated or severe trauma people may:

- Develop very sensitive alarm triggers
- They might not be able to shut off their alarm switch
- Alarm reactions are about automatic reactions, not thought out and using executive functions or reasoning
- Alarm reactions that save our lives in true emergencies can defeat us when we use them in ordinary /non-threatening situations



Traumatic reminders can cause an alarm reaction...

Any person, place, thing, situation, site, sound, smell, taste, etc... that reminds the person of the traumatic events they have encountered and sets off alarm reaction...



Incorporate these adaptations of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice (NCTSN Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit)

1. Maximize the child's/family's sense of safety.
2. Assist children/families in reducing overwhelming emotion.
3. Help children/families make new meaning of their trauma history and current experiences.
4. Address the impact of trauma and subsequent changes in the child's and families behavior, development, and relationships.
5. Partner with other agencies and support systems.



Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Child Welfare Practice

6. Utilize comprehensive assessment of the child's/family's trauma experiences and their impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services.
7. Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child/family.
8. Provide support and guidance to child's family and caregivers.
9. Manage professional and personal stress.



Understanding impact of secondary exposure to trauma



Defining Vicarious Trauma

Figley, Charles R., “Compassion Fatigue: Toward a New Understanding of the Costs of Caring”, Secondary Traumatic Stress, B. Hudnall Stamm, Editor.

- “The work of helping traumatized people is gratifying...”
- “Being a helper, however, also brings risks: Caring peoples sometime experience pain as a direct result of their exposure to other’s traumatic material.”



Compassion Fatigue

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue:

Physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.



Defining Secondary Traumatic Stress or Vicarious Trauma : Figley, Charles

“Secondary Traumatic Stress is:

- The natural, consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing experience by a significant other.
- The stress from helping or wanting to help a traumatized, suffering person.
- (It is a term also sometimes used to describe the other stressors or adversities that one can experience after a primary trauma)



Vicarious Trauma Research Findings...

- Research indicates vicarious trauma is experienced by people in a variety of professional and personal roles such as police, firefighters, nurses, doctors, judges, attorneys, therapists, teachers, parents, siblings, spouses, friends, etc...
- Previous trauma history, coping resources, and support system access can impact risk of experiencing vicarious trauma...
- Employers & communities need to address vicarious trauma, it needs more than just individual coping skills...



Defining Secondary Traumatic Stress or Vicarious Trauma

- Can come on suddenly or over time after repeated exposure to the suffering of others.
- Symptoms of vicarious of trauma can be the same as victims of primary trauma such as depression, anxiety, alarm reactions, relationship problems, health problems, traumatic perspective, hopelessness, work absenteeism, etc...
- Vicarious trauma symptoms can be similar or full PTSD.



Understanding & Recognition

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (DSM-V): Criterion:

- **A:** Experiencing a traumatic event, directly or indirectly
- **B:** Intrusion symptoms: thoughts, memories, nightmares etc...
- **C:** Avoidance: of reminders, life, others
- **D:** Negative alterations in cognitions and mood: self blame,
- **E:** Alterations in arousal and reactivity
- **F:** Duration for more than one month
- **G:** Functional significance



Suggested Readings...

- Figley, Charles Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder In Those Who Treat The Traumatized (Routledge Psychosocial Stress Series), 1995.
- Vicarious Traumatization and Spirituality in Law Enforcement, By Lynn A. Tovar, Ed.D., FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, July 2011
- Vicarious Traumatization: Potential Hazards and Interventions for Disaster and Trauma Workers, Kathleen M. Palm, PhD;¹ Melissa A. Polusny, PhD;² Victoria M. Follette, PhD³

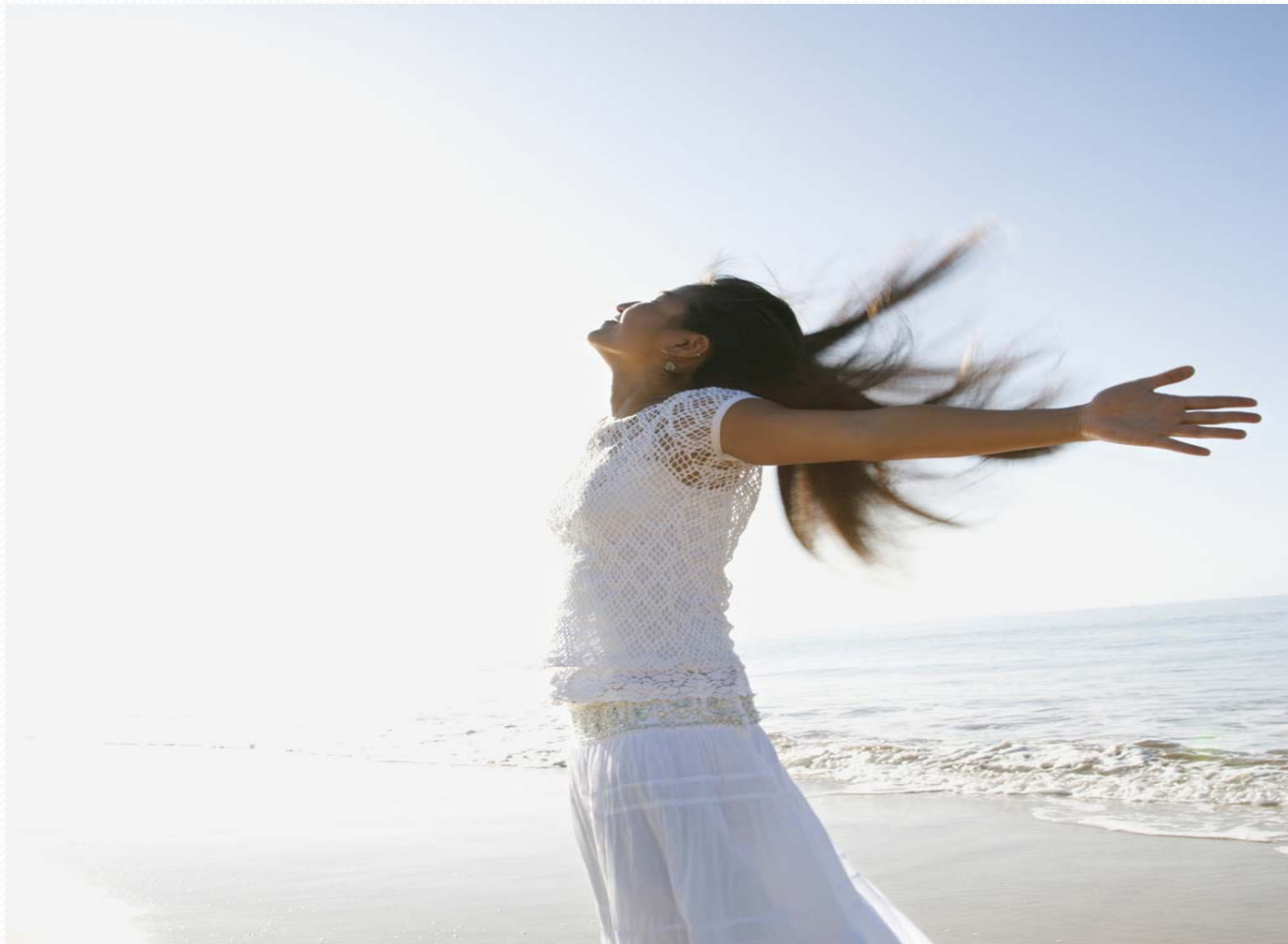


Suggested Readings...

- Helping a Family Member who Has PTSD, National Center for PTSD, Jan. 1, 2007.
- Secondary Trauma and Burnout in Attorneys: Effects of Work with Clients Who are Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse, Andrew P. Levin, MD, Columbia University, 2008.
- Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others, Laura van Dernoot.



Ways to help reduce vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue



Understanding & Recognition:

Warning Signs of Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

- Finding yourself sharing negative beliefs and hopelessness that are expressed by some of your trauma-exposed clients
- Having a skeptical or negative view of your clients, you give them negative labels
- Feeling defensive
- Dreading going to work
- Finding yourself having a hair trigger of overwhelming or negative emotions
- Finding yourself disconnecting from your own emotions
- Disconnecting from your friends and loved ones



Understanding & Recognition: Finding that you can totally relate to he and his friend's perspective...



Let 's start with...



Top 10
Things Not
to Do....



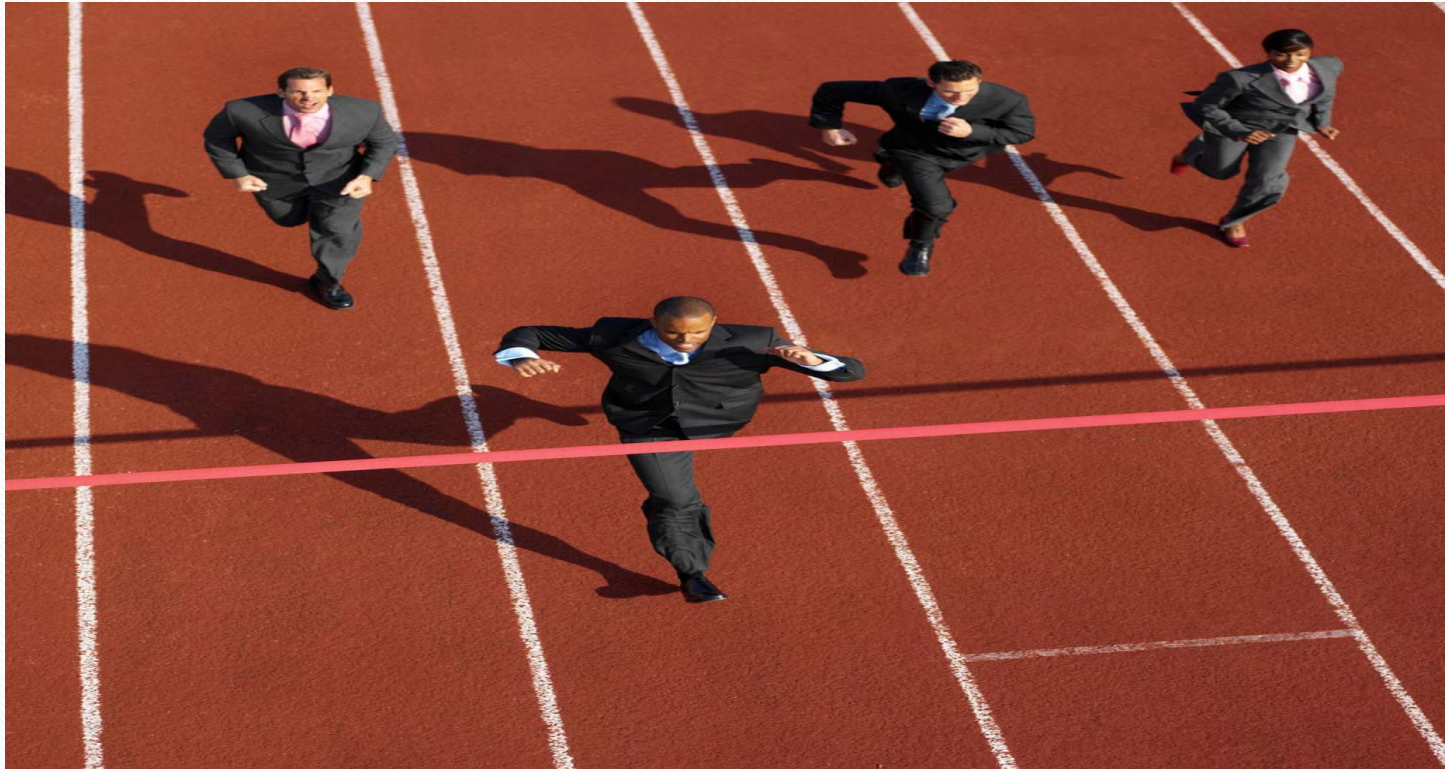
Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#10: Go out there without your horse or your friend....



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#9 Stay constantly on the run



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#8: Rely too heavily on these alternative therapies...



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#7: Avoid what needs to be addressed...



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#6: Re-hash and Second Guess...



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#5: Forget how to say...



"That's great, Bob, but I was just going to ask if you wanted anything from the deli next door."



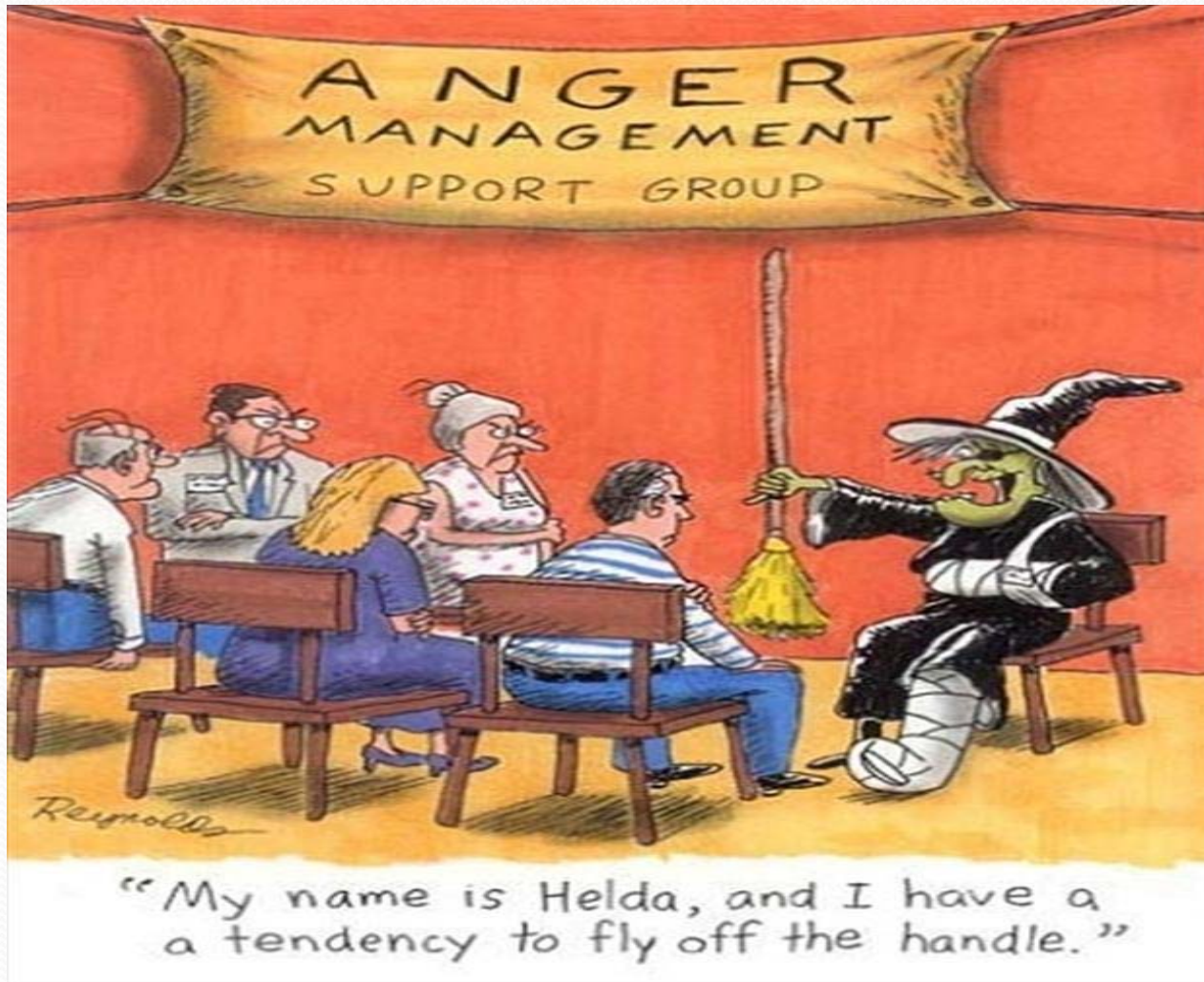
Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#4: Stockpile...



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#3: Carry a lot of this around...



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#2: Underestimate the need for...



Top Ten Things Not to Do...

#1: Cut back on time with family & friends...



Do these things...



Do Adopt Helpful Perspectives



A white rectangular sign with black, hand-painted text is attached to a dark, rusty metal surface. The sign is slightly curved and has some wear and tear, including small holes and frayed edges. The text is arranged in two lines. The top line reads "TAKE IT EASY BUDDY" and the bottom line reads "WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER". The background is a dark, textured metal surface with visible rust and a cylindrical pipe or bolt head on the right side.

**TAKE IT EASY BUDDY
WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER**

Courtesy of the Child Trauma
Assessment Clinic, Western Michigan
University

Understand Boundaries and Theories of Change



Who likes change?



What do we know about people changing?

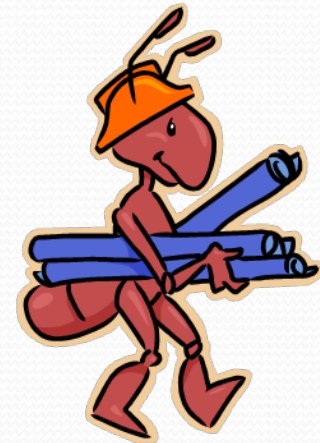
- People change because they want to
- People can want to change part of the way
- People change if they believe they can
- People change if they believe that what they are going to get is better than what they have.
- People can change best at their own pace and in doable sized steps...



Getting the ANTS out of our Heads

ANTS: Automatic Negative Thoughts

1. All or nothing thinking
2. Always thinking
3. Focusing on the negative
4. Negative fortune telling
5. Mind reading
6. Guilt Beatings
7. Labels
8. Blame





Circle of Concern

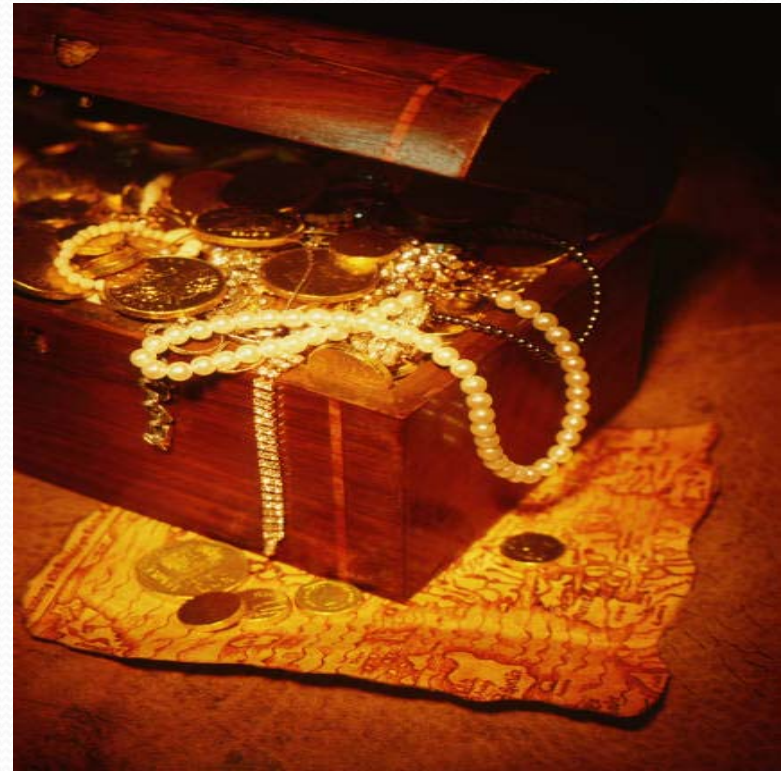
**Circle of
Influence**

Steven Covey: Seven Habits of Highly Effective People



Develop a trauma-informed perspective: Karen Saavatine, et. al. Risking Connections

- Respect
- Information
- Connection
- Hope



Celebrate...



Self Care Strategies





**Courtesy of the Child Trauma
Assessment Clinic, Western Michigan
University**

Self-Care Strategies:

- Take the time to reflect on how you are feeling and what you need.
- Take the time to reflect on how you are responding to others.
- Make sure there is where possible time to take breaks and support for the supporters.
- And don't be afraid to ask for ...



Help!?



**Courtesy of the Child Trauma
Assessment Clinic, Western Michigan
University**









We are just a moment of time in a youth's journey in life...

But if in that moment, if we really listen to them, seek to understand them, treat them as our competent vital partners, as experts in their own lives, and as equal teachers about their lives and needs, we have given them a beautiful gift, and if we are open, we can also receive and celebrate that gift...

