



Secondary Traumatic Stress & Empathic Strain 101

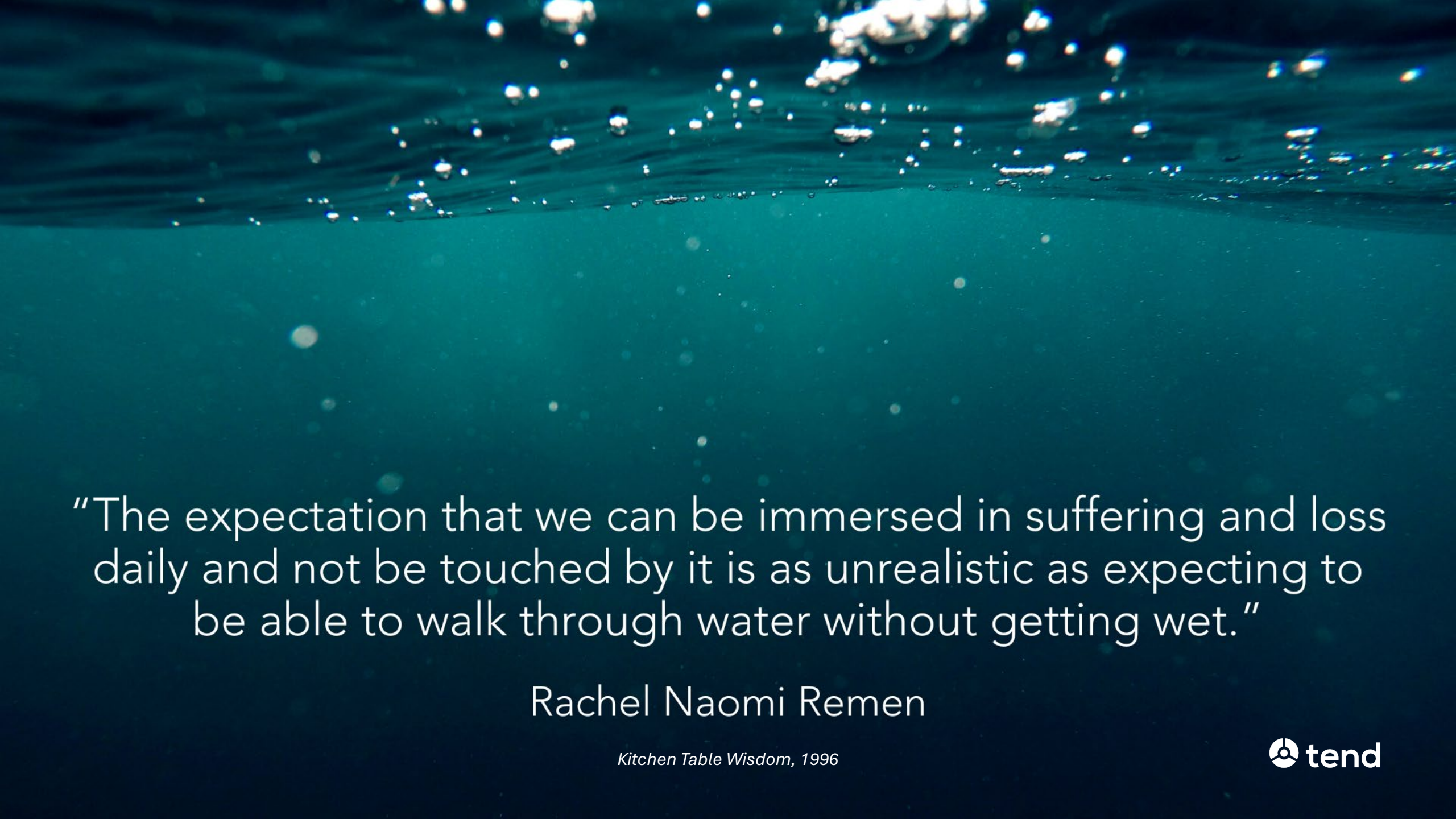
Understanding the hidden impacts of trauma-exposed work

Sample Content



Our Goals for Today...

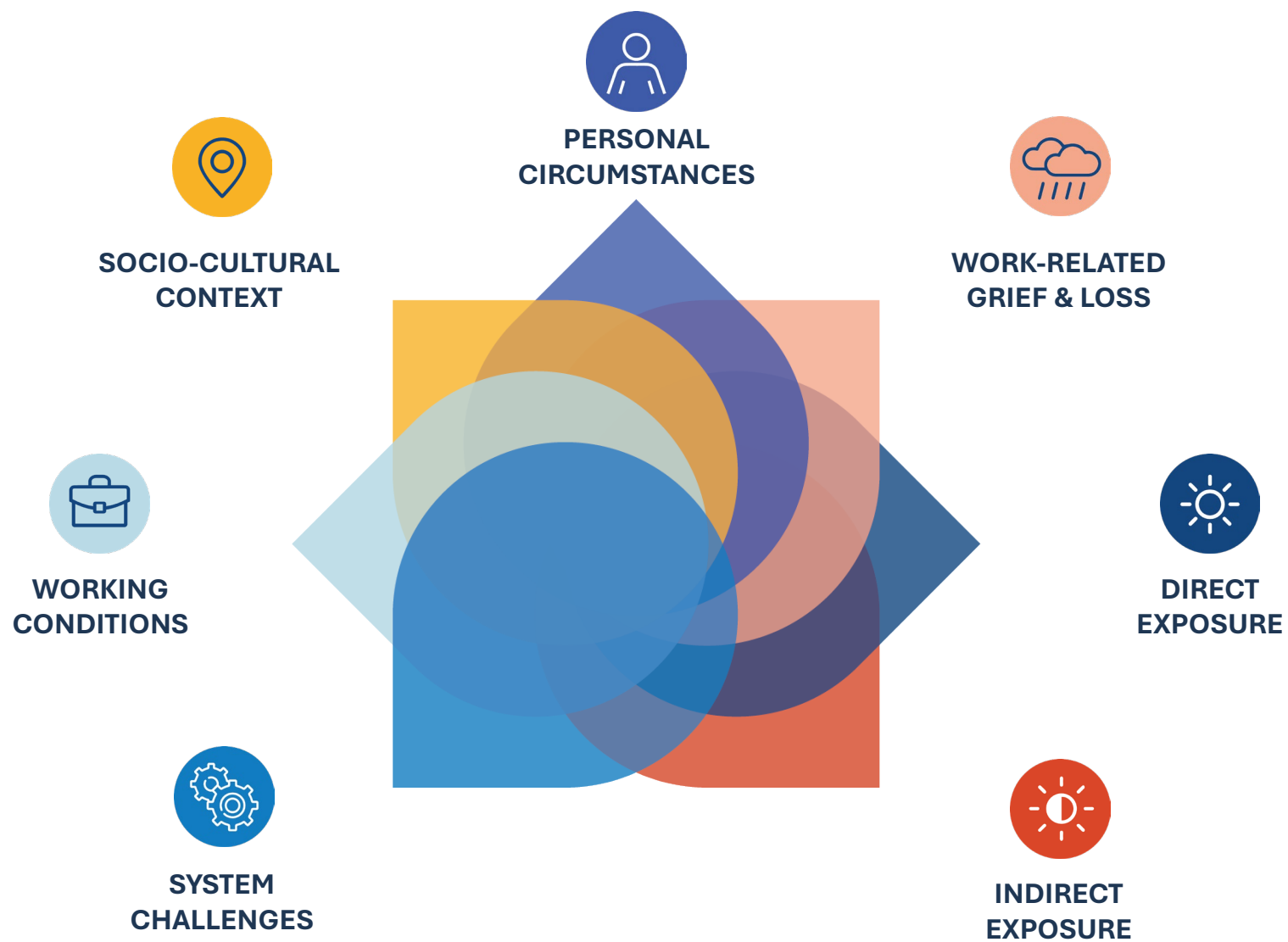
- How do we stay well when bearing witness to suffering?
- What is the impact of hearing, seeing, and reading about trauma daily?
- What are your personal risk factors for secondary traumatic stress and empathic strain?
- What strategies can we use to take stock, reduce trauma exposure, and reset?
- How do we make a plan?

An underwater photograph showing the surface of the water at the top. Sunlight filters through the water, creating a shimmering, dappled light effect on the surface and illuminating the water below. The water has a deep teal or blue-green hue. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."

Rachel Naomi Remen

Kitchen Table Wisdom, 1996



This tool was developed by F. Mathieu, TEND, L. A. Ross, UCLA, and the Secondary Traumatic Stress Consortium, a group of researchers, trainers, practitioners, and advocates with a common goal to advance the field of secondary traumatic stress towards health. Special thanks to R. Cuellar, A. Hendricks, M. Clarke, and G. Sprang of the National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network (NCSTN) for contributing the Socio-Cultural Context circle.

Empathic Strain (also know as *compassion fatigue*)

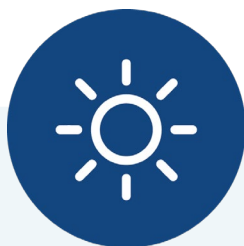
- A deep erosion of our empathy, of our ability to tolerate difficult stories or strong emotions in others.
- Evident in helpers' professional and personal life.
- Can also happen to caregivers (“caregiver fatigue”).



Secondary Traumatic Stress

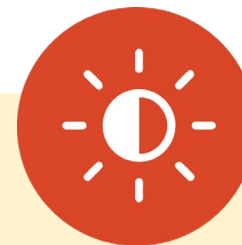


The stress placed on a person when that person is exposed to trauma descriptions, trauma images, or the reactions and responses of people who have experienced primary trauma.



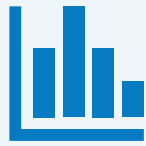
Primary or Direct Trauma

“My house was
broken into.”



Secondary or Indirect Trauma

“My friend’s house was broken
into, and she told me all the
details about what happened.
I subsequently became more
hypervigilant about safety in
my own home.”



Poll Question

What is the first sign that you are approaching the yellow zone?

- 1 Physical
- 2 Behavioural
- 3 Psychological or Emotional
- 4 Unsure

Self-Care Inventory

Use an "X" to indicate those things that you **often do**.

MEANING & VALUES

- ☐ I take time to self-reflect.
- ☐ I have a sense of purpose in life.
- ☐ I seek to make a contribution in life.
- ☐ I have hope.
- ☐ I am aware of the non-material aspects of life.
- ☐ I identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life.
- ☐ I connect with things larger than myself (e.g., nature, community, etc.)
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

WELL-BEING AT WORK

- ☐ I use my breaks to attend to my needs (e.g., eating lunch, stretching, etc.)
- ☐ When I can, I make quiet time to complete tasks.
- ☐ I identify projects or tasks that are exciting or rewarding.
- ☐ I communicate boundaries about my workload or availability.
- ☐ I make time to connect with trusted peers.
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

This exercise was adapted from Saakvitne, K. W., & Pearlman, L. A. (1996). *Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization*. W.W. Norton and Loehr, J., & Schwartz, T. (2003). *The power of full engagement: Managing energy, not time, is the key to high performance and personal renewal*. Free Press.