



## Thriving in ~~SURVIVING~~ THE TRENCHES

**Kirsten Lewis, M.Ed.**  
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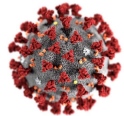
## INTERSTATE COMPACT



- ▶ Commissioners
  - Compact representative for the State
  - Deal with policy makers
  - Vote on rules
  - Commission action
- ▶ Deputy Compact Administrators & Compact Staff
  - Deal with transfer of criminal offenders between States
  - Communicate supervision expectations
  - Manage returns when supervision was unsuccessful
  - Communicate with various States / agencies

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## INTERSTATE COMPACT




- ▶ Commissioners
  - State shutdowns
  - No latitude in policies to adapt to necessary changes
  - Unprecedented actions required
- ▶ Deputy Compact Administrators & Compact Staff
  - Sudden and massive unemployment
  - Travel restrictions
  - Lack of resources previously available
  - States not accepting transfers
  - Probationers and/or their family members diagnosed with COVID-19
  - At-risk population
  - Jails not accepting detainees
  - Extradition / transports on hold
  - Staff working remotely

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## STRESS AND MEANING

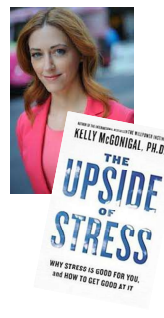
- ▶ Human beings have a tremendous capacity to find hope and meaning, even in times of tremendous difficulty
- ▶ “Suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.”  
- Viktor Frankl, 1959



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## REDEFINING STRESS

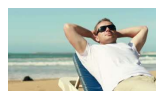
- ▶ Stress is what arises when something we care about is at stake
  - Includes thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions
- ▶ Stress and meaning are inextricably linked
  - We don't stress over things we don't care about
  - We can't create a meaningful life without experiencing some stress



(Kelly McGonigal, 2015 pp. xxi & xxii)

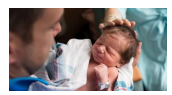
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### HAPPINESS



- ▶ Having needs and desires satisfied
- ▶ Related to more positive emotion than negative
- ▶ Associated with taking more than a giving
- ▶ Primary goal is feeling good in the present

### MEANING



- ▶ Connecting and contributing to something beyond self
- ▶ Related to more worrying, stress and anxiety
- ▶ Associated with giving more than taking
- ▶ Primary goal is making the world better for others

(Baumeister et. al., 2013; Huta & Ryan, 2010)

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## THE PARADOX OF STRESS

- ▶ Many people in high stress professions instinctively shut down the parts of themselves that respond to pain and suffering
  - Medical professionals, public safety workers, court staff, clinicians, etc.
- ▶ To protect themselves, they distance and desensitize
  - Seeing patients as procedures
  - Viewing people as cases



(Krasner et. al., 2009)

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## THE PARADOX OF STRESS

- ▶ Trying to defend against suffering through emotional distance can, paradoxically, increase burnout
  - Doesn't make the work less challenging
  - Removes the meaning
- ▶ Taking the time to see the value and purpose in your work can improve stress without reducing stress
  - Transforming it from draining to sustaining



(Krasner et. al., 2009)

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## TEND AND BEFRIEND RESPONSE

- ▶ **Tend** - Protecting offspring
  - Requires a willingness to act in the face of danger
  - Can overpower basic survival instinct to avoid harm
- ▶ **Befriend** - The tribe comes together to deal with stress or find solace
  - Strength in numbers
  - Increases courage, motivates caregiving, and strengthens social relationships



(McGonigal, 2015; Taylor, 2006)

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## TEND AND BEFRIEND RESPONSE

- ▶ A biological state engineered to reduce fear and increase hope
  - Social Caregiving System – Oxytocin**
    - Increases empathy, connection, trust
  - Reward System – Dopamine**
    - Increases motivation, dampens fear
  - Attunement System – Serotonin**
    - Enhances perception, intuition, self-control
- ▶ Helping others activates this biology



(McGonigal, 2015; Taylor, 2006)

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## HELPING THE "AT-RISK" HELP OTHERS

- ▶ Students at an urban high school were randomly assigned to volunteer for one hour a week at an elementary school
  - Helping kids with homework, sports, art, science, cooking
- ▶ After 10 weeks, the teens showed improvements in their cardiovascular health
  - Lower cholesterol
  - Reduced inflammation
  - Increased empathy
- ▶ Protective factors from a tend-and-befriend response



(Schreier et. al., 2013)

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## RESPONDING TO OTHER PEOPLE'S PAIN

A research study examined how people neurologically responded when watching a loved one in pain

1. Hold loved one's hand to provide comfort
  - Activated reward and caregiving systems in the brain
  - Dampened activity in the amygdala
2. Squeeze stress ball to manage stress
  - Decreased activity in the reward and caregiving systems in the brain
  - Had no effect on the amygdala



(Inagaki & Eisenberger, 2012)

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## UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION

- ▶ Compassion is a process that is in response to pain and suffering
  - To notice suffering
  - Be moved by suffering
  - Respond to suffering
- ▶ An embodied state that prepares for action
  - Requires physical energy
  - Requires emotional and physical strength
- ▶ Requires courage to stay with, instead of flee suffering



(McGonigal, 2016)

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## EMPATHETIC DISTRESS

- ▶ Occurs when the listener “catches” the emotion of the other person – experiences the suffering as their own
  - Can trigger a threat response
  - May generate a sudden need to “get away”
  - The motivation can turn into fixing the person’s distress in order to relieve one’s own discomfort
- ▶ Becomes a barrier to compassion and support if a person becomes stuck in empathetic distress
  - Enabling behavior
  - The need to “save” others
  - Snowplow parenting



(McGonigal, 2016)

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## STAGES OF COMPASSION

- ▶ The 1<sup>st</sup> stage of compassion is a stress response
  - Heart rate increases
  - Pupils dilate
  - Activates amygdala (threat)
  - Stimulates insula (empathetic distress)
- ▶ The greater the compassion, the stronger the stress response

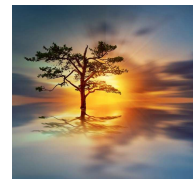


(McGonigal, 2016)

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## STAGES OF COMPASSION

- ▶ The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage immediately balances the stress response with a soothing, calming experience
  - Activates the vagus nerve (slows heart rate and breathing)
  - Sensations of feeling present, grounded and centered occur
- ▶ Centered, dual activation of both the SNS and PSN

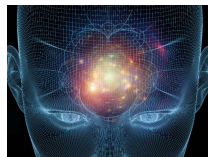


(McGonigal, 2016)

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## STAGES OF COMPASSION

- ▶ The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of compassion is a flood of hormones that motivates social connection
  - Oxytocin
  - Dopamine
- ▶ A biological state engineered to reduce fear and increase hope
  - Recognizing that offering presence is doing something
  - Counteracts feeling helpless and wanting to flee with feeling hopeful and empowered

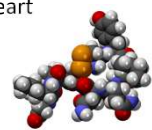


(McGonigal, 2016)

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## OXYTOCIN

- ▶ Oxytocin is a neuro-hormone released under stress that binds to receptors in the brain
  - Calms the SNS and brings the body back to homeostasis
  - Decreases amygdala activation (dampens fear and increases courage and bravery)
  - Stimulates neurogenesis in the hippocampus
- ▶ Oxytocin binds to receptors in the heart
  - Provides cardio-protection
  - Helps heart cells heal and regenerate after stress-induced damage
  - Reduces inflammation

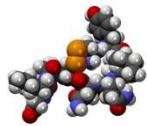


(Campbell, 2010; Leuner, Caponiti, Gould, 2012)

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## OXYTOCIN

- ▶ Increased concentrations of oxytocin under stress prompt affiliative behaviors (social connection)
  - Motivates the desire for human contact
  - Strengthens social bonds
  - Increases trust
  - Fosters helping behavior and altruism
  - Enhances empathy – reading and understanding other people
  - Heightens intuition
- ▶ Social connection, in turn, increases oxytocin production
  - Both provider and recipient benefit

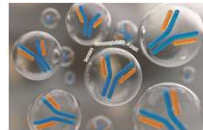


Campbell, 2010; Taylor, 2006

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## COMPASSION INFLUENCES IMMUNE SYSTEM

- ▶ One study asked participants to spend five minutes thinking about someone they care about
- ▶ Measured secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA)
  - First line of immune defense
  - Antibody that captures bacteria or viruses



- ▶ Participants showed a significant increase in sIgA
  - As high as 240%
  - Boost lasted 1 – 5 hours
  - Increase of energy

(McGonigal, 2016)

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## ENHANCING STRESS RESILIENCE

- ▶ Acknowledge both the positive and negative aspects of stress
  - It is not about being impervious to adversity or unruffled by challenges
- ▶ Trust your stress response as a resource to rely on rather than an enemy to vanquish
  - Listen and respect your body's signals
- ▶ Allow stress to awaken core human strengths that were already present
  - Courage, Connection, Growth



(McGonigal, 2015)

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## COMING TOGETHER

- ▶ When an agency has faced adversity together, the experience can leave the entire workforce stronger and more productive
  - Reminded of the privilege it is to serve the community
  - Increased appreciation of the agency and its mission
  - A healthy shift in priorities (people over paperwork)
  - Recognition of relationships formerly taken for granted
  - Increased empathy and compassion
  - Renewed passion and drive
  - Lasting knowledge that the agency can and will survive, learn, grow, and benefit when it comes together in challenging times



(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999)

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