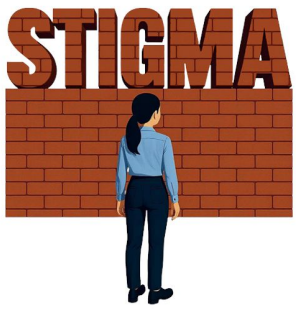
The Quarterly Trauma-Informed Newsletter of The Guidance Center

The Exchange

Vol. 9, Iss. 2
June 2025

The Healer's Hurdle: *Stigma Within the Behavioral Health Field*



The way we understand and treat mental health problems has advanced by leaps and bounds over the past century yet stigma surrounding mental health endures. Mental health stigma, defined as the "disgrace, social disapproval, or social discrediting of individuals with a mental health problem," is a leading cause of mental health treatment avoidance. That fear of being shamed or harshly judged for admitting they need support is even worse for those who work in the healthcare field. Seeking treatment for, or even talking about, mental health disorders among the mental health practitioner community is often considered taboo, which can lead to professional resignation, escalation in symptoms, and increase the risk for substance misuse and suicide among this population.

Healthcare professionals can get trapped in the mentality that it is their duty to help others so their own needs are secondary to that professional responsibility, leaving them vulnerable to burnout and compassion fatigue, two of the most common reasons for high mental health disorder rates among healthcare providers. Although exact data is difficult to get because of the reticence of healthcare professionals to disclose symptoms, studies suggest anxiety rates among healthcare providers range from 22.2% to 33%. One study of more than 1000 randomly sampled counseling psychologists found that 62% of respondents self-identified as depressed. Of those with depressive symptoms, 42% reported experiencing some form of suicidal ideation or behavior. The suicide rate amongst mental health professionals is alarming, with some studies suggesting that close to 30% have felt suicidal and nearly 4% have made a suicide attempt. Despite these startling statistics, too many professionals in the mental health field continue to be reluctant to seek care for themselves. According to a survey from the American Psychological Association (APA), nearly half of mental health professionals who experience a mental health disorder do not seek help. The same survey revealed that almost half of mental health clinicians experiencing suicidal ideation were not open to talking about their thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately, research has shown that those in the healing professions often view their own mental health problems as a sign of weakness, trying to remain resilient by covering up their symptoms and pushing their feelings aside to cope. Many mental health professionals also report having concerns regarding confidentiality and fears that disclosing their mental health disorder can negatively impact their careers and potentially impact their professional licensing.

Stigma is a major barrier to care for many individuals working in the mental health field but things are starting to shift. Increased mental health literacy, more open conversations, and greater access to resources have all contributed to a reduction in stigma. State licensing boards have adopted less restrictive criteria for assessing fitness for practice, which reduces fear associated with losing their license if a provider admits to struggling with conditions like depression or anxiety. More employers are promoting self-care by offering training, adding vacation days, and allowing flexible scheduling. Many managers find that promoting interaction between employees helps build trust among colleagues, and when an individual feels they can trust their coworkers, they are significantly more likely to be open with them when they are struggling. And with the surge in telehealth, accessing treatment outside of their own organization helps improve a mental health provider's access to treatment while reducing confidentiality concerns.

self-stigma *noun.*
[self - stig·*muh*]

1. A critical opinion of the self based on a publicly-held negative stereotype.
2. Discrimination against oneself due to a sense of shame or fear of judgement from others.
3. A common reason someone is reluctant to seek mental health treatment.

Sometimes dentists get tooth decay and cardiologists have heart attacks. Even with excellent self-care, working in the mental health field doesn't insulate an individual from having mental health problems and seeking treatment is not an indication of weakness or lack of fitness for duty. Dentists are not expected to perform their own root canals and cardiologists are not expected to perform their own bypass surgeries. Mental health workers do difficult work and extend considerable compassion and understanding to those they help; it's time to recognize they deserve that same consideration without fear of judgment or shame.

Article informed by https://tinyurl.com/mrv72dhp

CODE Lavender

Almost everyone knows when they hear "Code Blue" announced in a hospital, it means someone is experiencing a life-threatening medical emergency. But Code Blue isn't the only code in a hospital. There are actually many different colors to indicate the type of emergency, like Code Red for a fire and Code Black to signify a bomb threat. These emergency codes have become so integrated into healthcare that when a patient is experiencing an emergency, they are often said to be "coding."

In 2008, Cleveland Clinic launched a new code to help hospital staff recover from trauma they may experience at work. Code Lavender is a holistic rapid response program helping hospital workers in need of a calming influence after a stressful situation, such as a difficult diagnosis or the loss of a patient."The purpose of the Code Lavender is to give staff permission to feel bad, to acknowledge and express emotion when bad things happen to our patients, and provide support and resources to help when they feel overwhelmed," said Jessica Thomas, clinical director of the E.D. at USC-Verdugo Hills Hospital. Unlike other codes, a Code Lavender is not announced over the PA system but instead, a multidisciplinary team, which may consist of chaplains, nurses, and behavioral health professionals, is dispatched to offer support to the person in need. The response may include critical incident debriefing, spiritual support, brief therapeutic interventions, or other measures deemed appropriate to provide support and help with processing and coping with the traumatic event. The service is also available for patients and families.

When surveyed at Cleveland Clinic, 99% of staff respondents who utilized Code Lavender said they were satisfied with the results and 98% said they'd recommend it to others. For patients, 93% were satisfied by the result and 90% said they'd recommend it. Other healthcare organizations have reported similar findings.

5 Tips for Making Summer Break Enjoyable for Kids with Complex Trauma

Making the transition to summer break can be challenging for all kids but for children with complex trauma histories, that adjustment can be especially difficult. Changes in routine, separation from friends, and decreased overall daily structure can elevate stress and anxiety. Here are 5 strategies that parents and caregivers can use to help children with complex trauma histories thrive this summer.

Maintain a Routine

Consistency is key for children with trauma histories, a disruption in their routine can elevate stress levels. When routine changes are necessary, create a new, predictable schedule for the child. Utilizing visual schedules or calendars can provide the child with a sense of structure and security.

Promote Physical Activity

Incorporate rhythmic, repetitive sensory activities that support nervous system regulation. Encourage activities like swimming, biking, swinging, dancing, or climbing, which can be both enjoyable and therapeutic for children.

Encourage OPen-Ended Play

Open-ended play stimulates the frontal lobe and fosters intellectual growth making it essential for cognitive and emotional development. Open-ended play also strengthens relationships, which is particularly beneficial for children with trauma histories.

Encourage Family Time

Spending quality time with safe family members is crucial for developing secure attachment and emotional regulation. Activities that emphasize healthy preverbal, verbal, facial, and gestural communication are vital for development and healing.

Create Safe Spaces

Designate specific areas where children can retreat if they start to feel overwhelmed. Having a safe space helps children regulate their emotions by providing them with a sense of security and control. These spaces should be quiet and filled with comforting items like soft cushions, blankets, or favorite toys.

Summer is definitely at the top of the list when it comes to favorite seasons for a lot of people but not everyone looks forward to the dog days ahead. So what makes us favor one season over another? Preference for a particular season is influenced by a number of factors, including biology, emotion, memory, social connections, occupation, and a host of other factors. And these factors are changeable over the lifespan. Maybe when you were a child you loved summer because you were off from school but now that you're a parent, you might be bigger fan of fall...when those kids go back to class.

Numerous studies have shown that there is a strong biological preference for summer because of the increase in sunlight. According to Dr. Deanna Arble, a circadian biologist, it's your eye that detects the increase in light during the summer months, "There are special cells in your eye (melanopsin-expressing cells) which register light for the purposes of entraining our bodies to the environmental day. Most blind people, for example, still have these cells so even though they cannot "see" the light, their brain and body know if it's morning, afternoon or night. It's these cells, when sufficiently stimulated by light, that improve our mood." Exposure to light also signals the suprachiasmatic nucleus (located in the anterior hypothalamus of the brain), which synchronizes your internal clock with the natural light-dark cycles. Production of seratonin (a hormone that's intrinsically linked to feelings of happiness, relaxation, and satisfaction) and Vitamin D (responsible for keeping bones, muscles, and immunity strong) also multiplies exponentially with exposure to sunlight.

During the laid-back summer months, people tend to have more opportunities to engage in recreation and spend time with friends and family. Physical activity is a natural mood booster and social connections are critical contributors to overall emotional health and wellbeing. This is also when a lot people take vacation, giving them a break from the daily grind, which is sure to improve just about anyone's mood.

So if summer is so great, why doesn't everyone look forward to the season? Again, blame the complex interactions of biology, psychology, and environment. For some people, the heat of summer is unpleasant. In order to regulate its temperature, the body is doing some pretty hard work behind the scenes during the hot weather and this can cause irritability, lethargy, and exhaustion. The heat can also make sleeping very uncomfortable, leading to insomnia and daytime fatigue. Additionally, heat can contribute to dehydration and electrolyte imbalance, impacting cognitive function and mood regulation. Individuals with mental health problems are especially prone to the negative consequences of poor sleep, dehydration, and increased bodily stress, all of which can exacerbate mood instability and affect emotional regulation.

For some people, having too much free time is not a good thing and can lead to heightened anxiety. The lack of structure often experienced in summer can make it difficult for individuals with attention difficulties to stay on task and even those without a formal attention deficit diagnosis may feel less motivated to accomplish goals, which can easily lead to critical self-talk and feelings of incompetence. For children who may not live in stable homes, the loss of structure and predictability that comes with school days can cause them to feel unsafe and anxious. And for some people, they might simply prefer skiing over swimming.

Regardless of the reasons why you prefer one season over another, staying active, hydrated, rested, and connected to others is good practice all year 'round. So try to enjoy the summer (even if it isn't necessarily your favorite) and remember that practicing good self-care is always in season!

Article informed by https://tinyurl.com/y4a99anu

Summer TRIVIA

1. Released in August 1982, who sang the hit song, "Vacation"?
2. When did the 4th of July become an official U.S. holiday?
3. Which 3 Zodiac signs occur during the summer?
4. What is the term for the scientific study of berries?
5. How many calories are in 1 cup of watermelon?
6. Where was the beach ball invented?
7. What is the birthstone for July?
8. Who terrorized beachgoers on Amity Island?
9. What does SPF stand for?
10. How long do seagulls live?

Trivia Answers
1. The Go-Gos
2. 1870
3. Cancer, Leo, Virgo
4. Batology
5. 40
6. California
7. Ruby
8. Jaws
9. Sun Protection Factor
10. 10-15 years