



Know the Warning Signs of Moral Injury and Vicarious Trauma

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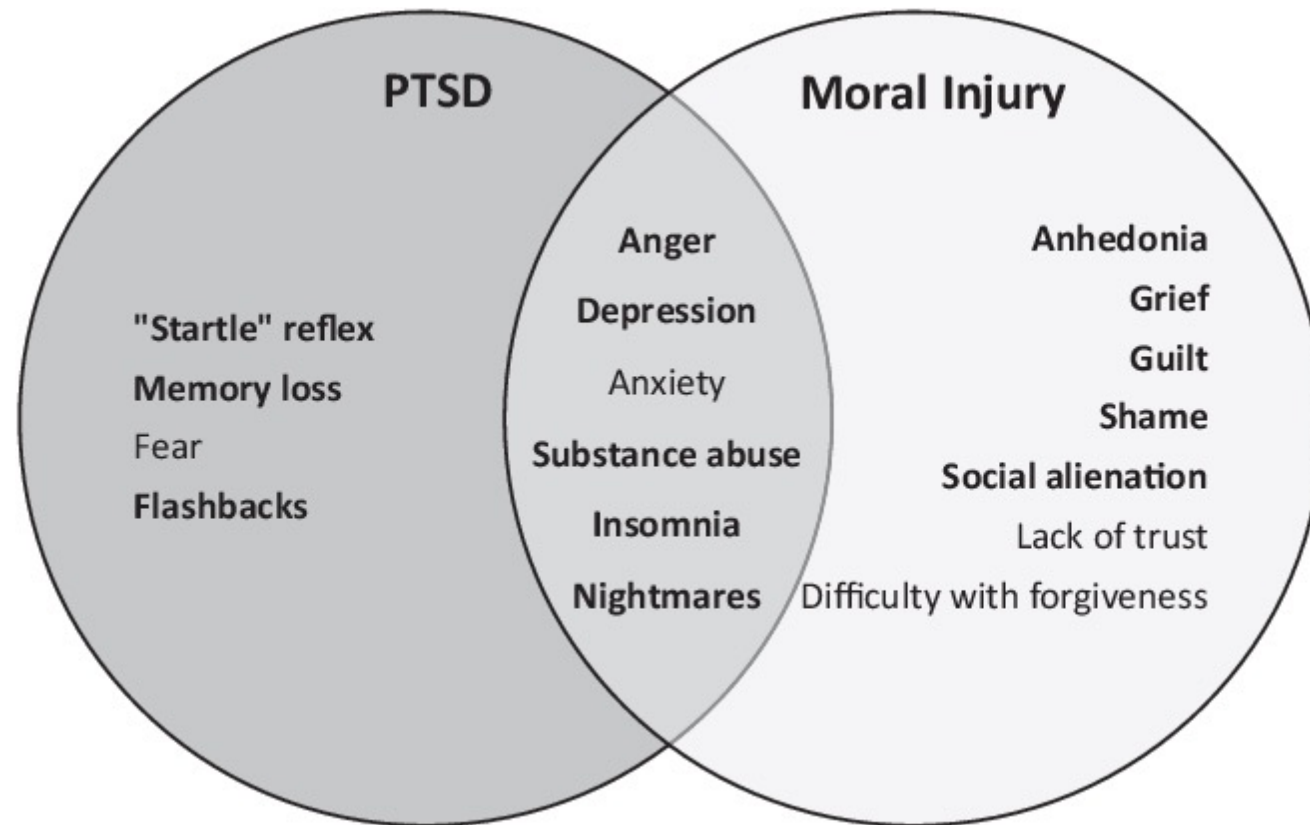
Learn More About Ashley

- ▶ Ashley Hutchinson works for Talk Therapy Center, a specialty trauma psychotherapy practice, in Riverside California, as a clinical therapist and as the Director of Marketing and Networking. Those who have received therapy from Ashley have stated her warmth, humor, and straight-to-the-point assertive therapeutic approach helped them find success in therapy. As an educator and presenter on mental health topics, Ashley has earned a reputation for being sought out by a diverse spectrum of people and entities such as by school districts, elected officials, local government agencies, hospitals, at large conferences, and national mental health organizations. Ashley is proud to report that along with being a Loma Linda University School of Behavioral Health alumna, she is also the recipient of the National Infantry Association's Shield of Sparta and the Yellow Rose of the State of Texas Awards for Women. These accolades were bestowed upon Ashley due to her dedication to military families. Ashley is the proud wife of a combat veteran, a mother to a beautiful daughter, the older sister of a teacher, and a Girl Scout volunteer.

What is Moral Injury?

- ▶ Moral injury is defined as “damage done to one’s conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one’s own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct” (Syracuse University, 2020)
- ▶ Moral injury is often described as a “soul wound” in people working in helping professions such as educators, healthcare workers, first responders, and combat veterans. These “soul wounds” lead to various psychosocial stressors including depression, anxiety, complex grief, addiction, shame, and social isolation.
- ▶ Many symptoms of moral injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder overlap.

Is it PTSD, Moral Injury, or Both?



Major Differences Between Burnout and Moral Injury

- ▶ Burnout can be defined as “emotional exhaustion involving the development of negative self concepts and negative job attitudes due to various factors including excessive workloads, long hours, and commuting.” (British Journal of Medicine, 2019). Burnout implies that the helper is flawed, unable to keep up with day to day demands, or that the helper is not resilient.
- ▶ Moral injury differs from burnout because the helper experiencing the symptoms of moral injury often unfairly feels profound distress, intense emotions of shame, guilt or self-loathing about events within their workplace that is out of helper's control. (British Journal of Medicine, 2019).

Is Burnout Victim Shaming?

- ▶ Many professionals would argue that utilizing the word burnout to describe a helper's emotional pain shames and blames a helper into believing that the helper is the reason for their emotional distress. Burnout has a significant amount of stigma attached to the concept. When deep in the feelings of what a helper believes is burnout, the helper unfairly believes that they are defective, subpar at their job, and “should” be better at coping.
- ▶ Moral injury humanizes the helper and allows the helper to acknowledge stress, trauma, depression, and anxiety symptoms as being typical parts of the human experience when helpers are under extreme amounts of stress or attempting to manage dysfunction.

Shame Versus Guilt

- ▶ The average person likely believes that shame and guilt are merely synonyms of one another. Psychologically speaking, shame and guilt are vastly different experiences. Shame distorts the helper's thoughts with negative self beliefs that the helper is inherently bad or not good enough. Guilt can be seen as an indicator that the helper has gone against their own beliefs and that the person needs to apologize for their behavior.
- ▶ Burnout oftentimes leads to intense feelings of unfair shame that the helper may internalize to then believe that they are "terrible" at their job. This distorted thought comes from a negative core belief that the helper is a "terrible" person. Moral injury often leads to painful shame due to the helper having unrealistic perceptions about how much the helper can really "control" within their job.

Vicarious and Secondary Trauma

- ▶ Educators are especially vulnerable to vicarious and secondary trauma, even more so since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Vicarious trauma happens when a helper begins to experience trauma symptoms after being repeatedly exposed to other people's trauma or the story of other's trauma. The helper's schema, or world view, is changed after trauma symptoms begin to cumulatively build up over time.
- ▶ Secondary trauma happens when a helper finds themselves under immense emotional duress after hearing firsthand trauma experiences of others. The symptoms of secondary trauma within helpers often manifests into PTSD like symptoms.

Maladaptive Coping

- ▶ Maladaptive coping skills become the helper's go to strategy to regulate their emotions from traumatic or stressful situations because these unhealthy tools work quickly... until they don't.
- ▶ Instead of judging the maladaptive behavior as “bad stuff” helpers might engage in to manage emotional pain, look at maladaptive coping as a crumby spork you picked up a long the way that worked for eating lunch with, but now, you have been asked to build a skyscraper with that spork. What an image! Right?
- ▶ Maladaptive coping skills are often passed along generationally within our families of origin. How our families cope when we are children often feels safe and familiar for the traumatized helper as an adult.

Examples of Maladaptive Coping

- ▶ Substance Abuse
- ▶ Poor Management of Daily Living Activities
- ▶ Social Isolation
- ▶ Process and Behavioral Addictions
 - ▶ Shopping
 - ▶ Gambling
 - ▶ Risky Sexual Behaviors
 - ▶ Video Game Abuse
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Disordered Eating
 - ▶ Self Injurious Behaviors
 - ▶ Love and Relationships

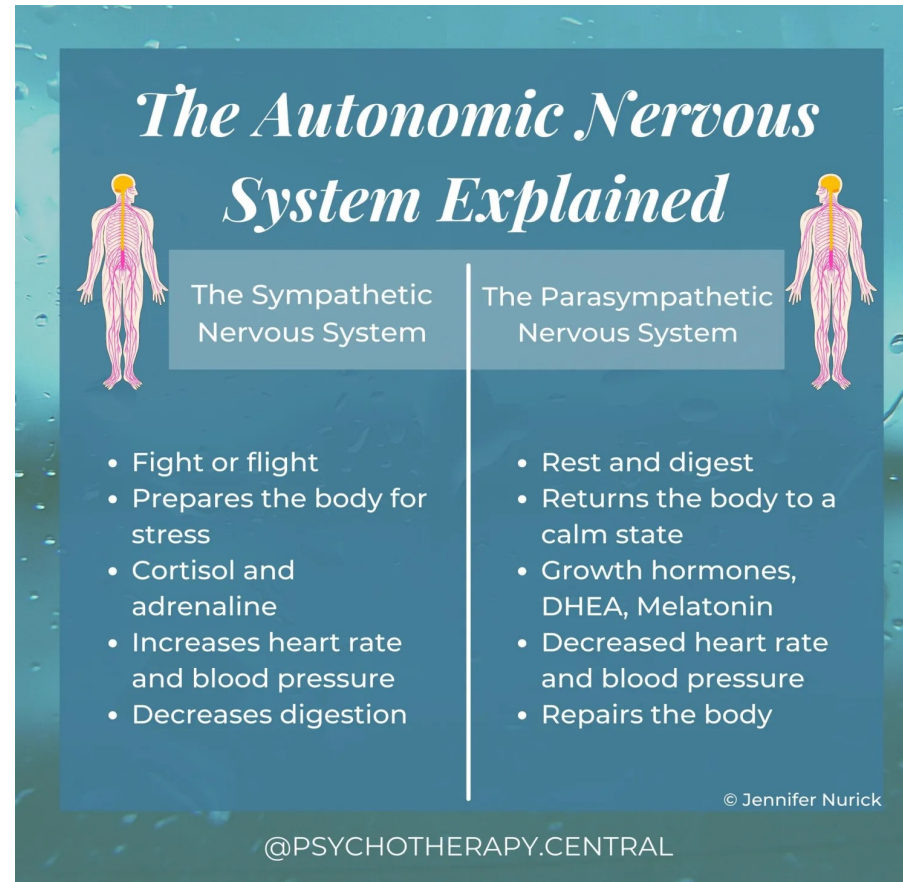
Adaptive Coping

- ▶ Each person is born with a proverbial toolbox. Some of us are born into families that provide helpers with many healthy, positive, and adaptive tools along the way in our youth.
- ▶ Some people were born into families with far less ability to provide helpers with positive coping skills.
- ▶ As adults, helpers have the option to pick up new, healthy, positive, and adaptive coping skills to aid the helper in managing the emotional pain, stress, and trauma.
- ▶ These skills are found through therapy, healthy social connection, and learning your own personal signs of moral injury before they become crippling.

Examples of Adaptive Coping

- ▶ Adaptive coping skills come in a variety of resilience building activities.
 - ▶ Going to therapy
 - ▶ Quality Sleep
 - ▶ 12 Step Meetings
 - ▶ Physical Activity
 - ▶ Planned Vacations
 - ▶ Increased Social Connection
 - ▶ Mindfulness
 - ▶ Engaging in pleasurable activities daily and not simply “living for the weekend”
 - ▶ Using assertive communication skills to create and maintain boundaries in your life

Autonomic Nervous System Responses



You Are Hardwired For Struggle

- ▶ Humans have an amazing ability to be resilient, adaptive, and bounce back from major stressors.
- ▶ Even on the toughest days, remember, you are a survivor! Acknowledge that you're struggling, remind yourself that you're allowed to be human, and be vulnerable with those around you when you're having a hard day.
- ▶ Connection is everything! Humans are pack creatures. We need others to heal, feel safe, and to feel loved.

Resources

- ▶ Calm App
- ▶ Headspace App
- ▶ Psychology Today
- ▶ Employee Assistance Programs
- ▶ Local National Alliance on Mental Illness Chapters
- ▶ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Chapters
- ▶ ResilientEducator.com
- ▶ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255
- ▶ National Council for Mental Wellbeing

How to Contact Ashley

Please feel free to reach out with any questions you might have on how to find additional resources or information on the topics of stress, trauma, and moral injury.

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