

Moral Distress

Could it be more than burn-out?

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“I’m not the person I used to be”

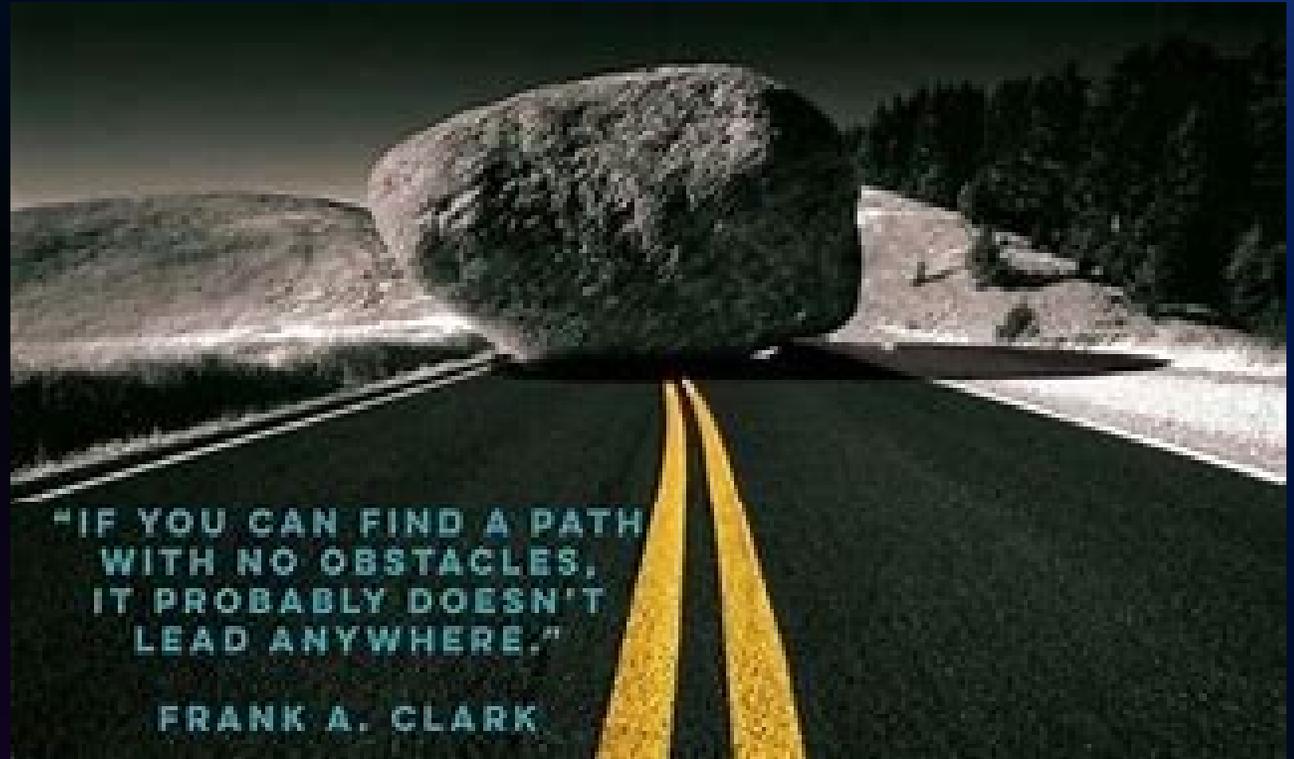
MORAL INJURY:

The enduring consequences of experiencing a morally injurious event (MIE) which threatens one's deeply held moral beliefs and expectations and challenges one's sense of self, safety and purpose. perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.

- Experiencing events that transgress moral code
- Acting, failing to act, or witnessing events contrary to moral code
- Feeling let down or betrayed by superiors, colleagues, or the public
- Witnessing gross injustice or systemic failure
- Exposure to human vulnerability, suffering and indignity

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Nursing
Healthcare professions
Academia
Community Crisis Response
Military
Government Services
Research
Journalism...



MORAL DISTRESS:

The personal responses resulting from experiencing obstacles that prohibit the individual from “doing the right thing.”



Cause: *External/Situational* such as prolonged work-related stress such as long hours, poor support or resources, low pay, dissatisfaction/boredom with the work, feeling unchallenged or unappreciated, conflict with colleagues or supervisors

Signs: Headache, Irritability, Apathy/Dissatisfaction

Impact: The situation resolves itself; The employee leaves; The employee stays and situation worsens



Cause: *Situational stress begins to become internalized* – Occurs when constraints prohibit a person from doing what they believe is *right*; leads to feelings of helplessness, fear, shame, and guilt



Signs: Anger, resentment, poor motivation, illness, helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety, depression

Impact: Employees will leave, become unproductive, or become physically or mentally ill; home and personal life become affected



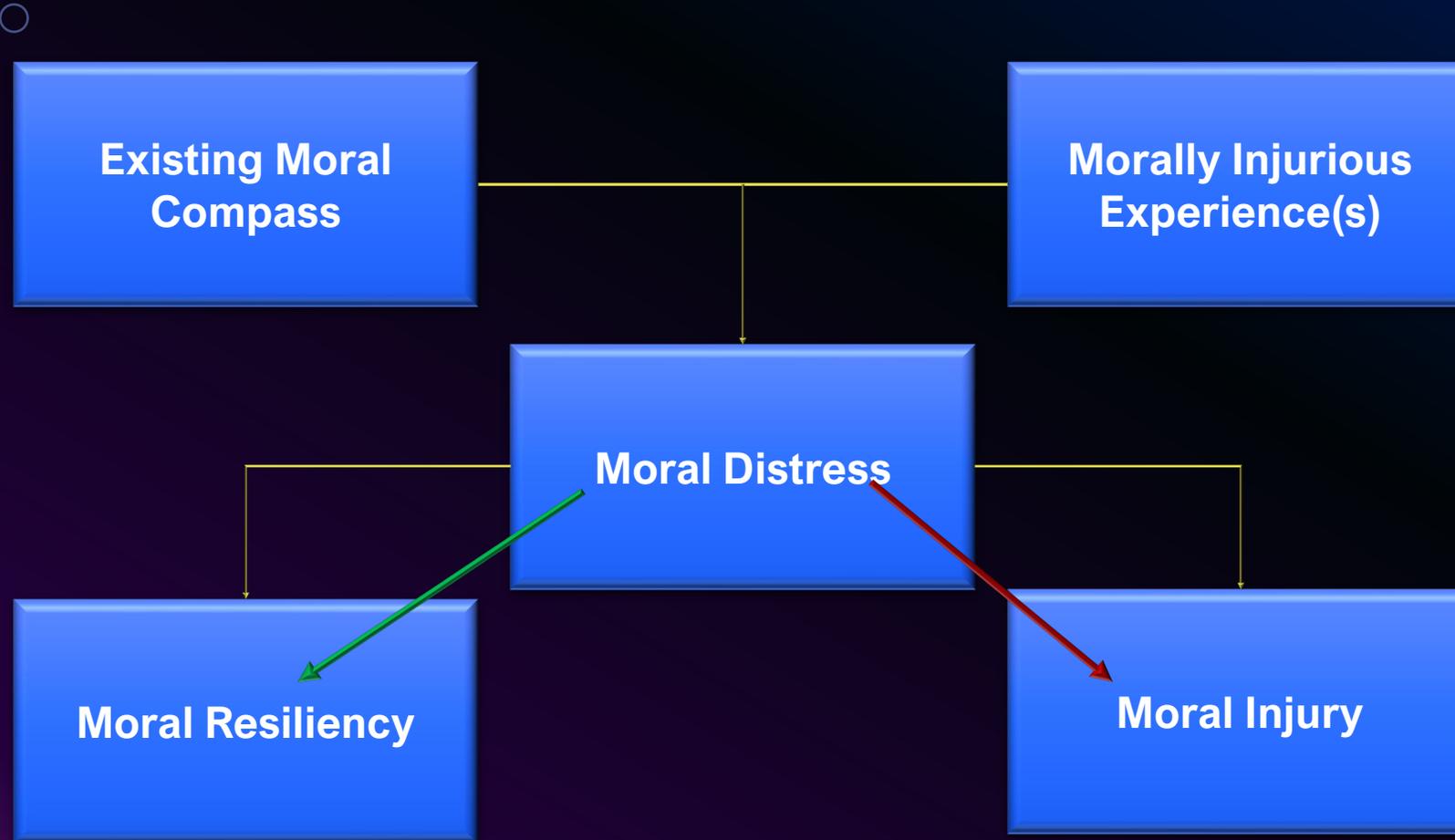
Cause: *Core changes/damage to self* – Experiencing a morally injurious event in which a person engages in, fails to prevent, witnesses or learns about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations

Signs: Self-doubt, poor self-perception, loss of meaning/purpose, inability to trust, feelings of depression, isolation, despair

Impact: Can result in pervasive change in self-concept, world view, relationships, and social functioning



WHAT CAUSES MORAL DISTRESS?



WHAT IS MORAL RESILIENCY?

Moral resilience is the capacity of a person to sustain, restore or deepen their integrity in response to moral complexity, confusion, distress, or setbacks.



INDIVIDUALS

ACKNOWLEDGE

ASSESS

ASK

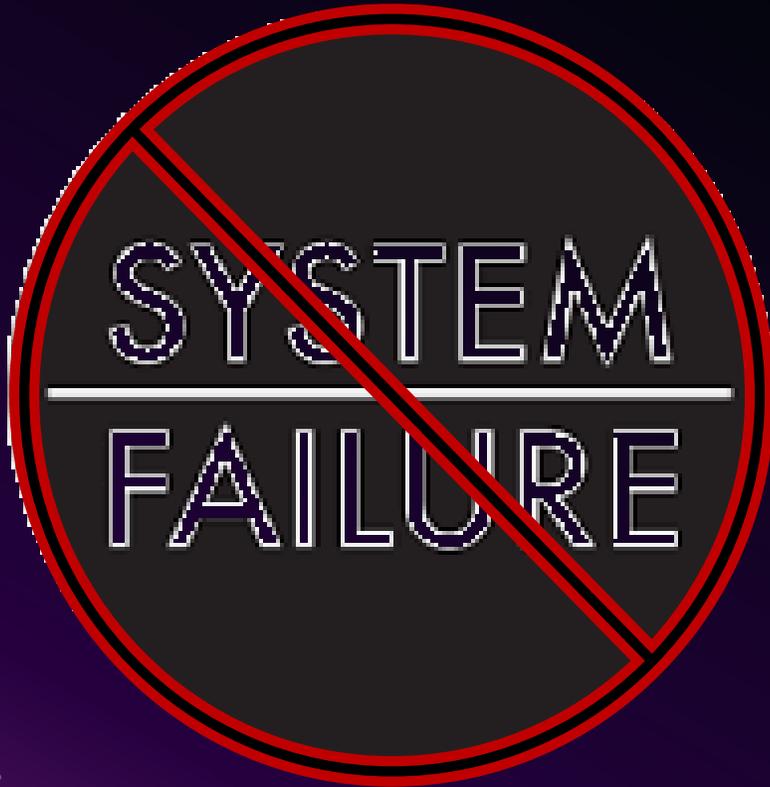
ASSIST

AFFIRM

ACT



SYSTEMS



- Review Moral Distress materials
- Survey employees routinely – act on results
- Raise awareness
- Establish line of communication
- Engage/establish workgroup (ethics, chaplains, behavioral health, leadership & front-line)
 - Measure Moral Distress
 - Identify local causes/themes
 - Implement strategies
 - Assess results
 - Disseminate/spread results

LEADERSHIP

- Make time to listen – open door policy
- Strategize solutions
- Provide support
- Appreciate
- Watch, pay attention
- Act and respond
- Check on staff
- Keep in mind...
 - Leaders may be just as affected
 - They may be caught in the middle
 - Check on them
 - Don't just go to them with the problem... bring a solution



RESOURCES



[Moral Distress](#)

[Moral Distress Toolkit](#)

[The moral distress model: An empirically informed guide for moral distress interventions - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

[Recognizing Addressing Moral Distress Quick Reference Guide \(aacn.org\)](#)

[Moral Injury Project](#)

Thank you!

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