

"A few years ago, at a Children's Justice Conference, I attended a break out session having something to do with investigations and incest. It was a packed audience and I recognized a few of my colleagues and sat with them. The prosecutor presenting was a fantastic speaker. She was poised, engaged, funny (at appropriate

times), and dare I say – theatric. She was in her calling as a prosecutor. As she progressed through the story of the case, she verbalized detail after explicit detail and while she did not have many visuals in her presentation, we almost didn't need them because her descriptions were so vivid.

Looking back now, I can't remember what I learned from the break out session. I can't remember what I was supposed to learn. What I **do** remember are the explicit, vivid details she repeated. And what I can recall are the visuals I created in my mind from those graphic details in which I remember to this day.

I can't help but question; to what end and what cost were the graphic details she shared necessary?"

Debriefing is a helpful and necessary process for those in the helping field. Debriefing can lead to feeling supported and building comradery with colleagues. It's also necessary for humans to have an outlet for the information we receive on a daily basis; to have our grief, sadness, confusion and joy acknowledged. The Compassion Fatigue Workbook suggests we take a look at our debriefing process to be mindful of what our intent is versus what the impact ultimately has.

Debriefing with an exorbitant amount of detail, can inadvertently perpetuate secondary trauma among colleagues and loved ones.

<u>The Compassion Fatigue Workbook</u> discusses the concept of **Low-Impact Debriefing**. This process has **4 steps**;

- 1. <u>Self-Awareness:</u> In this step you ask yourself what you hope to gain or feel as a result of the debrief. Do you want validation? Do you need more of a case consult? Do you need someone to hear and acknowledge your emotions? Do you need to yell and say bad words? Have an idea of what you *need* from the conversation before walking into it.
- 2. Fair Warning: Before launching into your story with a coworker, let them know what you plan to discuss. If it is necessary to share details of case, let the other person know the type and potential graphic details you plan to discuss. We don't know each other's histories and experiences and we could unintentionally trigger another person if they themselves are not prepared for the conversation.
- 3. <u>Consent:</u> Ask permission. Is this a good time? Is it ok to keep going? Can I talk to you about a hard thing that happened to me today?
- Debrief w/ Limited Disclosure: Details aren't always necessary when debriefing. You can generalize information, so the other person understands the basic situation without being graphic.
 - a. For example, you can say "the kiddo has really suffered from abuse and neglect at the hands of his mother", rather than repeating all the specifics you know. With this general description, the person hearing the information can validate the debriefers feelings of concern, sadness and anger while the confidentially of the case being debriefed is protected.