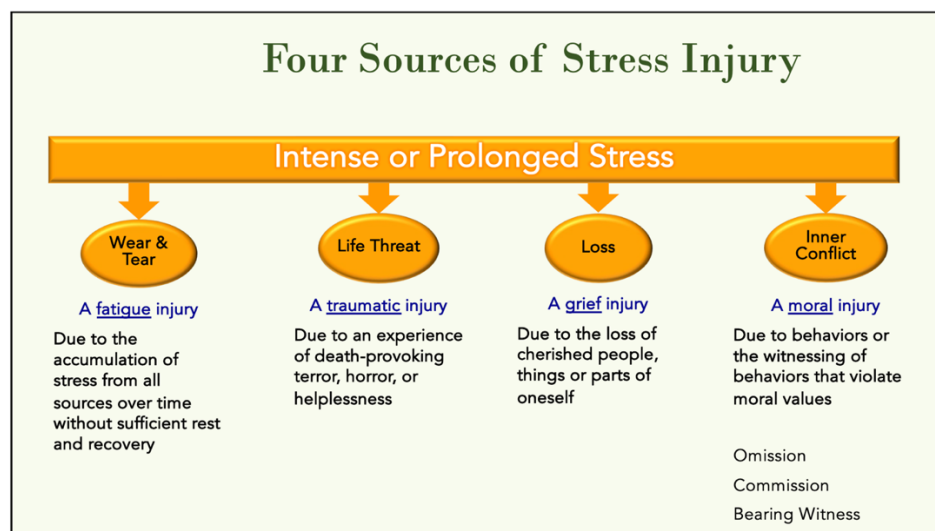


Peer Support Tool: Four Sources of Stress Injury

Got stress? Of course you do. We all do, whether it be from a hectic schedule, a difficult shift, or any one of a hundred daily bumps in the road. Stress can make us function at our best, but too much, or prolonged stress, or intensely difficult experiences can cause **stress injury**. The Wisdom and Wellbeing Peer Support Program is designed to help us help each other recover from stress injuries.

Stress injury is a “severe and persistent distress or loss of functioning caused by disruptions to the integrity of the brain, mind, or spirit after exposure to overwhelming stressors” (Department of the Navy, 2016, pp. 1-3; Westphal, 2020). *Under intense or prolonged stress, the brain, mind, and/or spirit suffer injury.* Coping demands exceed available resources. As a result, **a stress injury may result in behavior changes such as low concentration and attention, reduced problem-solving abilities, difficulty responding to social cues, making poor choices, lowered self-esteem, and strained relationships** (Gao, et al., 2014; Westphal, 2020).

The most important take away: often what we consider “bad behavior,” a character flaw, poor social intelligence, or lack of effort in our health worker colleagues is the result of a stress injury. We must proceed as we would with an injured patient or loved one, with care and compassion.



Health workers are especially likely to experience stress injuries. Below are just a few events or circumstances that might precipitate a stress injury in a colleague.

- Prolonged work struggles or failure
- Medical error
- Prolonged sleep deprivation
- Personal financial crisis
- Death of a patient
- Being victim of a crime
- Family illness or death

- Personal illness
- Isolation and loneliness
- Bullying
- High patient acuity and low staffing levels
- A global pandemic
- Community unrest, violence, or political upheaval
- Toxic work environment