

Burnout - consequences of Stress or Trauma?

Psychotherapy based on
the Constellation method

London,
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Agenda

What does “Burnout” mean?

“Burnout” or “Depression“?

“Burnout“ as a consequence of Symbiotic Trauma

Working with the “Constellation of the Intention“ in
Psychotherapy and Coaching

The Diagnosis of Burnout

Originally a diagnosis for Health Care professionals working with clients with multiple problems

Latterly also a diagnosis for politicians, athletes, researchers or business executives in general ...

Psychiatric Diagnosis: Not an illness but a consequence of life stress (**IDC 10, Z73.0**)



Stress factors in professional life

Too much work

Too little challenge, boredom

Inability to manage continuously
changing requirements



Dimensions of Burnout

(Herbert Freudenberger, Christina Maslach)

Overwhelming exhaustion due to a lack of emotional and physical resources in professional life

Feelings of cynicism and detachment from professional duties

Feelings of inefficiency and reduced capacity to perform



Steps towards Burnout

- Over idealistic enthusiasm
- Frustrating experiences
- Disillusion
- Apathy
- Psychosomatic illnesses
- Depression or aggression
- Risk of drug/alcohol addiction
- Suicidal tendencies



Typical symptoms of Burnout

- ▶ Feeling weak, powerless, tired, unmotivated and exhausted
- ▶ Feeling irritable, provoking quarrels
- ▶ Complaining about things, that didn't matter before
- ▶ Blaming others
- ▶ Feeling indifferent, distant, arrogant, cynical towards clients and customers
- ▶ Work is no longer focused but only issue-oriented
- ▶ Not feeling successful, taking refuge in daydreams



Perfectionism and a Drive to sacrifice oneself

“Hurry up!”

“Be perfect!”

“Try harder!”

“Be strong!”

“Work harder for others!”

“Don't care about yourself!”



Depressive Episodes (ICD 10, F32)

... depressed mood,
loss of interest,
joylessness,
reduced motivation,
energy and activity,
increased fatigue...



Depressive Episodes (ICD 10, F32)



Further symptoms:

1. Reduced concentration and awareness
2. Reduced self-esteem and self-confidence
3. Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
4. Pessimism
5. Suicidal tendencies, self harming behaviour
6. Sleep difficulties
7. Lack of appetite

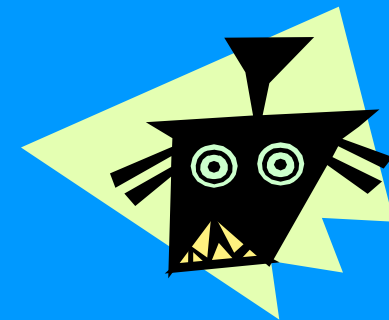
Explaining Burnout from the perspective of Work Psychology

- ▶ Seeing the unbridgeable gap between external requirements and the available capacity to cope
- ▶ Resulting in feeling overwhelmed, powerless and out of control.



A trauma is

“... a vital experience of discrepancy between threatening situational factors and the individual’s coping capacities, that is associated with feelings of helplessness and the lack of any protection, thus creating a permanent instability of the self concept and the perception of the world.”



(Fischer and Riedesser, 1999, S. 79)

Thesis:

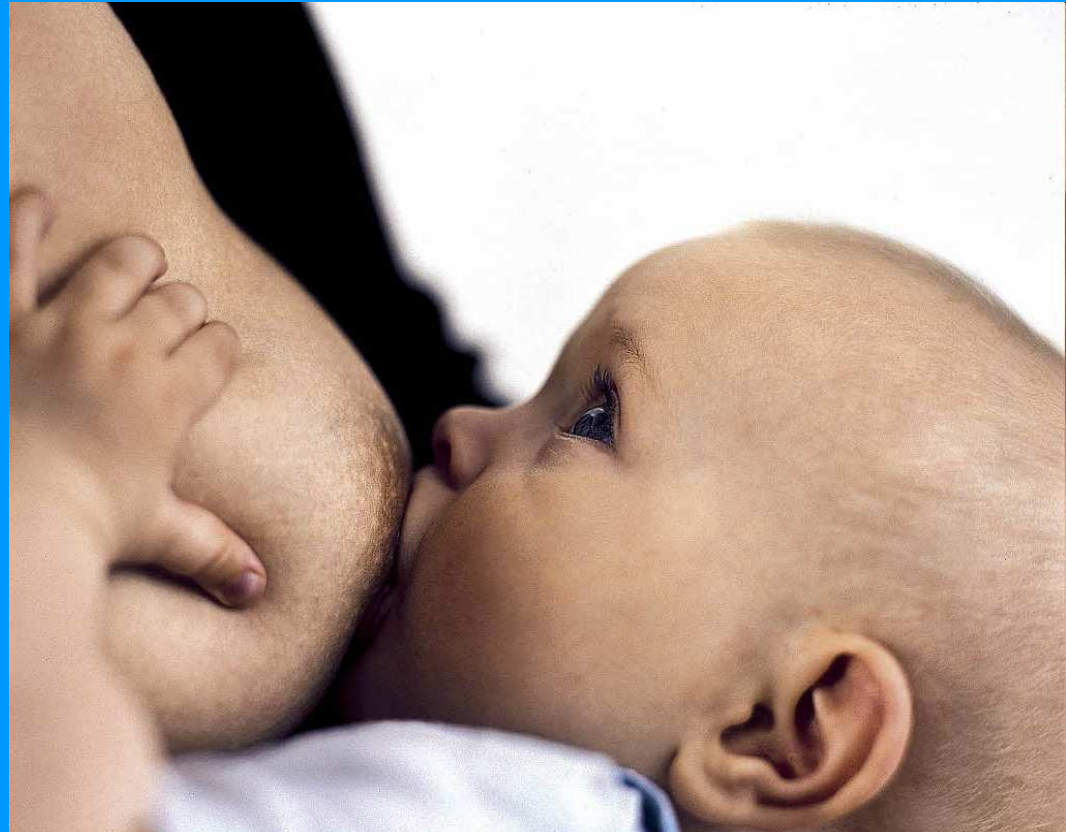
“Burnout“ is a consequence of a
“Symbiotic trauma“

Human development
takes place between
the polarities of
symbiotic needs and the
desire for autonomy.



Symbiotic Neccesities

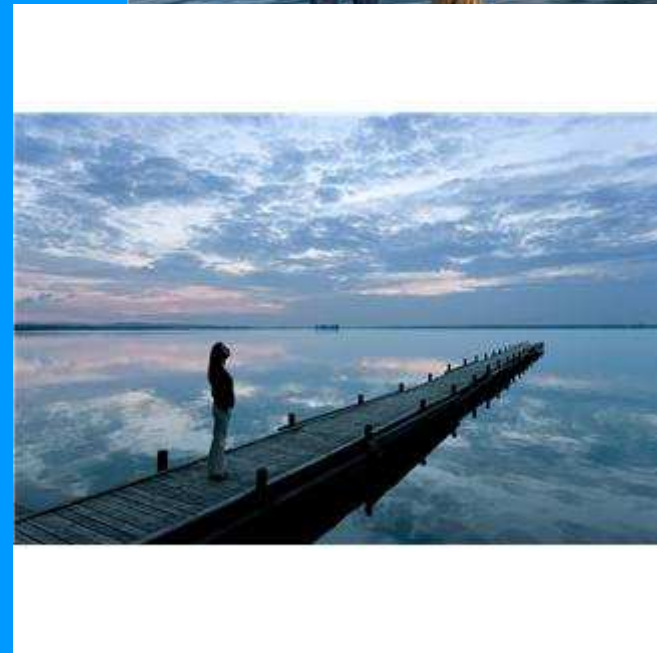
- ❖ Being nurtured
- ❖ Being kept warm
- ❖ Having body contact
- ❖ Being held
- ❖ Being seen
- ❖ Being understood
- ❖ Being supported
- ❖ Belonging to others
- ❖ Being welcomed



Desire for Autonomy

So that one can ...

- ❖ gain confidence in one's own perceptions, feelings and thoughts
- ❖ rely on one's own ability to act
- ❖ find inner self-support
- ❖ do things oneself
- ❖ act independently
- ❖ be free
- ❖ make one's own choices and decisions
- ❖ ...



What makes the healthy development of the human psyche possible?

Symbiotic needs for warmth, protection, holding, love and belonging are fulfilled by the child's mother and father.

Desire for autonomy is supported by both parents.



The most powerful emotional experience of every human being is the symbiotic relationship with their mother.



Symbiotically every child is doubly bonded to their mother:

passively: the emotional qualities of the mother are unconsciously imprinted on the child's psyche

actively: the child adapts to their mother and tries to support her needs



Children love their mothers however they are.

For a child, his relationship to his mother can become a symbiotic trauma.

The child is helpless and incapable of establishing a safe, holding relationship with his mother, who is traumatised (eg by loss of a baby, violence, wars, sexual abuse, not being loved by her parents).



Traumatised mothers can

Be emotionally unavailable

Disrespect boundaries

Carry heavy emotional burdens

Act unpredictably

Be extremely emotionally
needy

Be violent

Their psychic structure is split.



The trauma of parents (trauma of existential threat, trauma of loss, bonding trauma) continue in their children as a symbiotic trauma.

For babies and small children
the lack of contact with their
mothers is as dangerous as the
lack of food.

It is life threatening and forces
the child to split their psyche.

A life experience becomes not only stressful but traumatic...

if we face a mortal risk, and are incapable of dealing with it with the help of our stress programs.

Our stress programs make the situation even worse.

Therefore we end up in a state of helplessness and agony and we have to stop the stress programs.



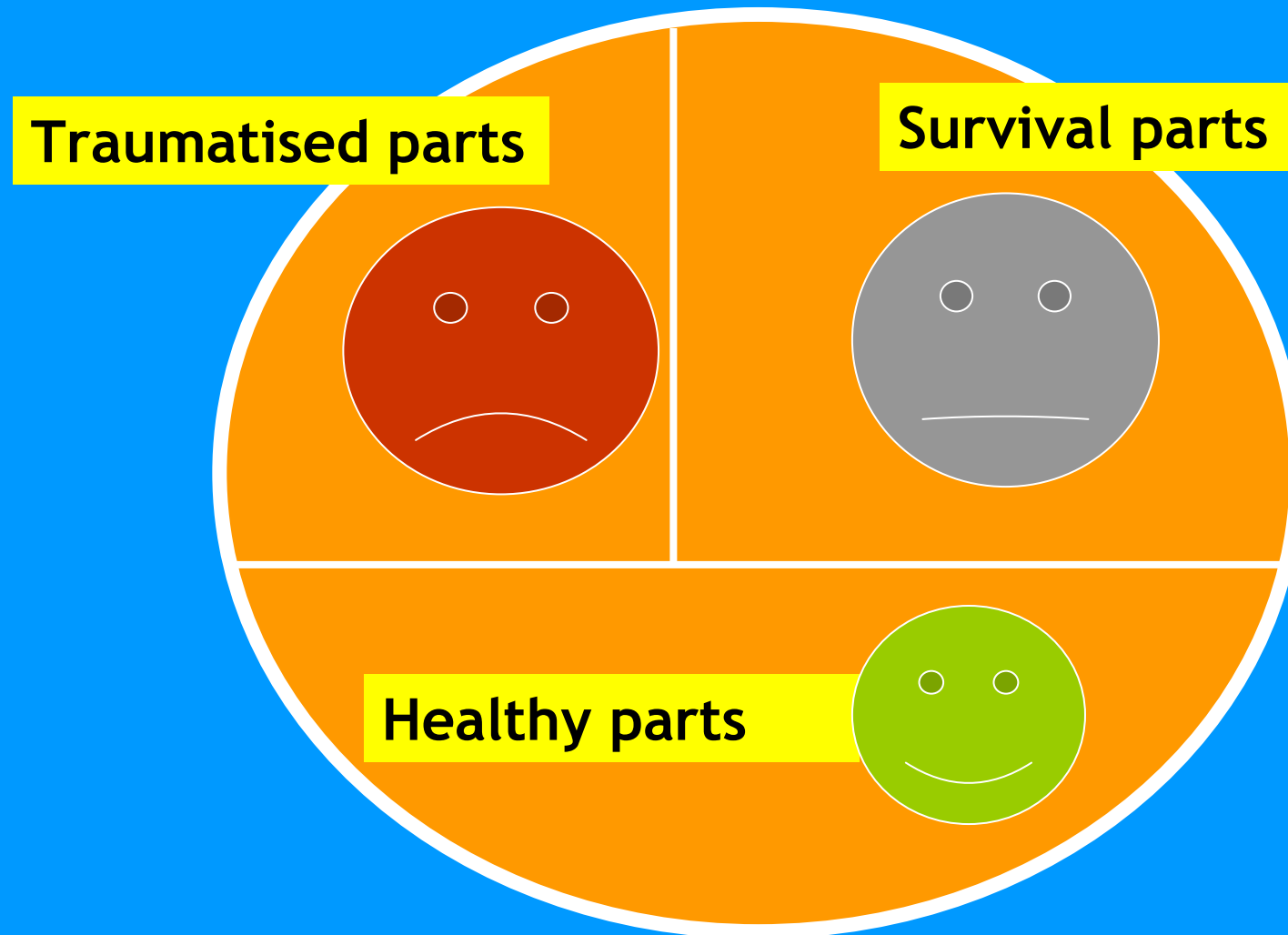
The Trauma-emergency mechanism consists of:

- ▶ immobilization
- ▶ Freezing
- ▶ Dissociating
- ▶ Splitting in the psychic structure

It helps us to survive.



Splits in the personality and identity structure after a traumatic experience



Healthy psychic structures of a child

- ❖ Own life force
- ❖ Own will to live
- ❖ Healthy basic needs
- ❖ Joy of movement
- ❖ Joy of playing
- ❖ Joy of learning
- ❖ Openness, creativity
- ❖ ...



Characteristics of the traumatised part in a symbiotic trauma

- ❖ Desperation that there is no love from the parents
- ❖ Feeling abandoned and extremely lonely
- ❖ Terrified he will die
- ❖ Suppressed rage
- ❖ Suppressed mourning
- ❖ Extreme withdrawal
- ❖ Tendency to give up



Characteristics of survival strategies in symbiotic trauma

- ❖ Trying hard to get the love of the parents
- ❖ Idealisation of mother and father
- ❖ Identification with the survival strategies of the parents
- ❖ Wanting to rescue the parents
- ❖ Merging with the traumatised parts of parents or grandparents
- ❖ Denying one's own trauma



Consequences of a symbiotic trauma

- ❖ Living another person's identity
- ❖ Inability to distinguish between ones own feelings and those taken over from others
- ❖ Lifelong symbiotic entanglement with the parents
- ❖ Symbiotic entanglement in all other close relationships
- ❖ Psychic problems of all sorts (anxiety, hyperactivity, depression, addictions, psychosis ...)



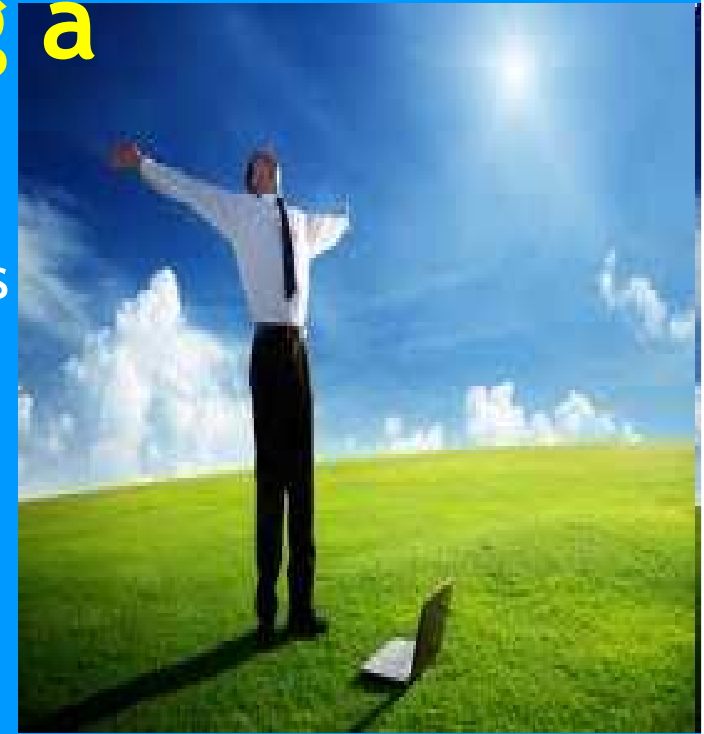
Repeating patterns in relationships

- ▶ Patterns of relation with respect to the parents will be repeated with respect to partners, own children, friends, colleagues, clients or customers.
- ▶ Symptoms of a symbiotic trauma can be observed in the professional life of a person (trauma feelings and surviving strategies).



Steps towards resolving a symbiotic trauma

- ❖ Learning to distinguish between realities and illusions
- ❖ Learning to distinguish between our feelings and those of others
- ❖ Finding the way back to one's own healthy needs
- ❖ Learning to say “No“
- ❖ Disentangling from symbiotic entangled relationships
- ❖ No longer trying to save others
- ❖ Being neither victim nor perpetrator
- ❖ Acknowledging one's own trauma
- ❖ Living healthy and constructive relationships



“Constellation of the Intention“



supports the development of healthy autonomy

reveals symbiotic illusions and reduces the risk of retraumatisation

helps to integrate psychic processes

creates real love beyond symbiotic entanglements

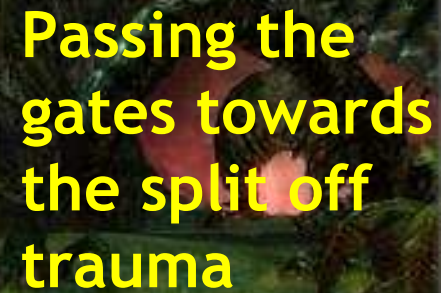
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The process of Change



Passing the
gates towards
the split off
trauma



Passing
through the
Gates of
Illusions



Using the gates
towards real
autonomy



Developing
healthy
parts

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