

Stacy Remke ([00:07](#)):

Hello everyone. Welcome to the Practice Space where we'll explore ideas and skills to support us in our professional practice. I'm Stacy Remke, a clinical social worker, and currently a professor at the University of Minnesota's Graduate School of Social Work. Before coming to the university, my practice experience was in the field of pediatric palliative care where I dealt with complex themes like grief, loss, child welfare, and sustainability within the field. I have a great interest in exploring how social workers can find support and develop skills to sustain their important practice.

Sara Remke ([00:40](#)):

And I'm Sara Remke. I'm a practicing end of life doula and a meditation teacher. I have a particular interest in energy and boundaries. I also have a private practice where I work with individuals and professionals, often therapists and caregivers, where we explore these various concepts and how they intertwine with our work. How and what does our energy communicate? How do we discern our own energy versus someone else's energy? And how do we create and maintain these boundaries? I find these subjects absolutely fascinating. And I am the sister of Stacy Remke.

Stacy Remke ([01:21](#)):

Thanks for joining us in this space, the Practice Space. We would like to talk about the intersections between our meditation practice and our various clinical practices and how we've found these skills to be really helpful with promoting our wellbeing and also our engagement with our clients.

Stacy Remke ([01:45](#)):

So today we thought we'd talk a little bit about some of the challenges and practice that involve interacting with very intense energies in the work that we do. And specifically I think it's helpful to think about concepts of secondary trauma or vicarious trauma, and what that means is actually absorbing or being impacted by the suffering of other people. And sometimes that suffering is overt and obvious. People are crying, they're angry. Some injury has just occurred, some harm is obvious. Other times it's more subtle and it's something more I think of in the context of say, historical trauma. It's sort of an awareness or a suffering that people carry with them, and it might actually stem from generations of exposure to suffering or experiences of suffering. And so I think we want to have kind of a wide view of what vicarious trauma could look like in our practices.

([02:52](#)):

Yes.

([02:54](#)):

And there's also, what about the vicarious trauma of, for instance, the George Floyd murder or the vicarious trauma of the war in Gaza, no matter what side you may fall on in your belief system, we all experience that to some degree, right? Our imaginations take us into those spaces very quickly. We start to wonder, what if that was me? What if it was my loved ones there? Maybe people actually know people that are directly impacted by those things. Just seeing people suffering and seeing people's rage. And on some level we do absorb that. I think. Immigration situation right now, we hear about migrants fleeing from untenable situations, whether that be war, climate change, violence in their communities, just searching for a better life. All of those things do impact us. And lots of times people say, well, what can I do about those large scale things out there?

([04:02](#)):

And especially I think about when we're dealing with vicarious trauma very directly and their clients, for example. And then there's also these big background situations unfolding. So there's kind of like a double whammy or multiple layer impact. Yes. So one of the things we can do about it is work to clear our own space. Correct. You want to say a little bit more about what that involves?

[\(04:31\)](#):

Well, from where I come from in this work, as my teachers always say, there's never nothing you can do. And clearing your own space actually helps to create a spaciousness for whoever it is that you're working with. And as we touched on last time, that idea of neutrality. Neutrality doesn't mean that you don't have an opinion. Neutrality means you're not trying to force or push your beliefs, your agenda on anyone else. You're saying hello to them.

[\(05:03\)](#):

You're saying hello to the situation exactly as the way it is. And that could mean a situation with a lot of pain, with a lot of complexity, with a lot of you don't know what to do, but as you begin to clear your own space, it makes a spaciousness for the other person or people for you to be able to relate in a different way. I also think of that distinction that's important to make. I think between clearing our space, differentiating our energies from others is not the same as not remembering, not caring. Those human reactions are still very much present. They're still very available to us. Exactly. I think of it as a lot of times, let's just say we're talking about a big global situation. When everyone just sort of piles on the fray, it can actually become more confusing. And so the more that we can clear our space, the more we can clear how is that in my own personal life, injustice or police brutality or murder, or how do I experience those things in my own life? As we clear those, we actually move out of that fray and make more room for the nuances of what's actually happening.

[\(06:17\)](#):

And I think of in situations like practice situations where maybe or, and I think of this one in my practice when I was involved in a child protection situation and recognizing that we needed to change the parenting situation, at least for the time being, and there's tremendous suffering on the part of the child, the family, sometimes there would be children who'd suffered quite a bit of abuse. We'd come into the hospital for example, in the aftermath of that. And I think about those kind of situations too, where it's impossible not to be impacted by that. And what do we do with that experience after the fact? That's a really great example and a really hard example because so a child comes into you, they've been in a very harmful situation, and maybe our temptation is to jump in and rescue them.

[\(07:24\)](#):

That's not always the most helpful thing to that child. The more spaciousness that we can create in ourselves, it allows that child to find their own resilience and spaciousness within themselves. It may take a while, it may not come out in words, but if we can help them, it's like by us doing that for ourselves, it's sort of a modeling for how that child can do that for themselves, if that makes sense. And I think with parents too, where sometimes we were concerned or suspicious that they had committed some maltreatment and to be able to see them as whole people. And that spaciousness also allows us to recognize that people are impacted by energies and influences and experiences of their own. They're not just a terrible parent. There's a whole lot of things that go into that, and that allows us to be more compassionate, I think, in a ballistic way.

[\(08:27\)](#):

I mean, if you just keep in mind that there's always, always much more than going on. It's interesting that one of my students brought up and she came through a very difficult abusive situation. And then one day she said, but my mother was also, when she shined her light on you, it was amazing. And so

touched by that and the tension of that. She, so it wasn't easy to just hate her mother because her mother also in some way loved her. We're talking about extreme situations here, but isn't that a common human experience actually, that probably things are a mixed bag, right? Things we love about people, things we don't like so much. Yes, that's right. All the time. All the time. So it allows us to see people more as who they really are. And then people feel really seen and heard when we operate out of that more spacious place.

[\(09:24\)](#):

Absolutely. And I think you just hit a real key there. It's that when we are able to hold that tension, knowing that there's more going on than what we know, it gives more depth to the other person. And then they're not just put into a little box. They don't need to defend themselves or resist in quite the same way. They feel more understood, perhaps or seen to see. Right. And even if you need to do hard things, and I know we're going to talk about boundaries and subsequent podcasts, but think about the spaciousness creates a boundary that allows people to be who they really are, including ourselves. And sometimes we in our professional roles might need to say hard things, institute hard changes. But that doesn't mean we can't also see the whole people that we're dealing with and recognize our own wholeness. That's really interesting that you brought that up because do you think that what happens when we have to say something, not have to, but when we are going to say something that's very difficult and it's really hard for us to do that, that we close the part of ourself down, and in fact, that doesn't help us ultimately or the other person ultimately.

[\(10:51\)](#):

Yeah. I think of it sort of bracing myself when I've been in that situation or breath holding is often kind of a signal. I see that that's happening.

[\(11:05\)](#):

I think when you can hold those tensions, you're able to feel more compassionate and even have to say that hard thing. You can really understand where it's coming from and that can help you.

[\(11:19\)](#):

Well and I think compassionate toward the other is important, but also compassion toward ourselves. Think about, I'm not enjoying this role I'm in, or I appreciate what this person's dealing with, and at the same time, I can't support their behavior. So it allows us to simultaneously be compassionate to the other, our client, but also to ourselves. Yes, yes. So we talked a little bit about a very simple exercise that could help us create space in the moment for the other person and for ourselves. I wonder if you want to walk us through that. Yeah. So last time we talked a little bit about this egg shape of energy that surrounds our body.

[\(12:08\)](#):

And what happens is energies come into our space and they can create discomfort for us, especially if we're talking about different trauma situations. We pick up energy and it comes into our space. So how do we clear that out of our space? And one really simple way that I like is if everyone wants to just get comfortable and breathe deeply into your belly and just say hello to the edges of your aura or your space, that egg shape that surrounds you, just say hello to those edges. And for women, that's going to be three to five feet out from your body. And for men, that's going to be two to three feet out from your body in all directions above you, below you, in front of you, behind you, your left side and your right side. Just take a minute and really just breathe into that space.

[\(13:07\)](#):

And then what we want to do is we want to find what we're calling the center of our head. And if you were to go, say you're at the bridge of your nose and go back two inches towards the back of your head and imagine a line from the top of one ear across to the other, and where those two lines intersect in the center of your head, that's a very nice spacious place to find, even if you're having trouble finding it, just imagine that you're going there. You're not trying to see. You're just relaxing into that open, open space.

[\(13:51\)](#):

Breathe deeply into your belly. And now take, let's start with somebody easy, right? This is a practice meditation. Take somebody easy that you've had a conflict with, that could be a sibling, that could be a child, that could be your boss. And imagine that person out on a chair outside of your aura, outside of that three to five feet from your body. Let them sit on a chair and you're going to breathe your energy back in from them and let that come into the top of your head. And as you breathe out, you're going to send their energy back to them. You're going to do that very gently, and just imagine that going just over their right shoulder, you're not forcing that energy back at them. You're just giving it back to them for them to pick up if they want or not. Let's just take a couple of minutes and do that. Just breathe your in from wherever time and place it may have exchanged with them. Breathe it back into you, into the top of your head, and as you breathe out, just imagine their energy going back to them.

[\(15:09\)](#):

Breathe deeply into your belly, calling your energy back in through the top of your head and sending their energy back to them. It's really important when you send their energy back to them that you're not bombarding them. You're just offering that just above their shoulder. They can take it back if they want, but regardless what happens, you have moved it out of your system and then you can thank that person for being willing to work with you. You can thank your body for being willing to change. When you're ready, you can open your eyes. How did that feel? Did you do it? I did. Thanks. I think of sometimes I visualize a offering, my hands, offering the energy back to that person.

[\(16:21\)](#):

It still flows toward them, and I like that idea of sending it to their shoulder, but that kind of helps me maintain the attitude of offering instead of forcing just the little thing I do. I worked with this woman and we did that exercise, and she was doing it with her husband, and she said he was jumping around and I said, oh, she was just bombarding him with it, and he was dodging it like dodging bulls, like dodge ball, playing dodge ball. Well, I think of the reality that we do gather people's energy all day and we leave ours around everywhere. And it's almost like a nice, especially at the end of the day kind of thing to do. And again, as a practitioner, maybe you've seen a number of clients during the day and encountered a number of people in your personal life. You can have a row of chairs in front of you and you can send energy to all of those people.

[\(17:24\)](#):

That's right. And reclaim yours. And part of the goal here is that we're just running our own energy as uncluttered as possible by other peoples because we're not wired to run their energy and they're not wired to run ours. And so think about, okay, just at the end of the day, that could be a nice little cleansing ritual, probably helps sleep, it probably helps relaxation, things like that for sure. When you find yourself just cycling around some person who's driving you crazy, I guarantee you that exercise for three minutes and it's going to relieve something, it's going to alleviate something. And I always remind people that we exchange energies. This isn't the conscious thing. People aren't trying to put their energy into you to bother you. It's just a natural thing that happens when we're interacting with people. As we learn these tools, we can go, oh, I'm carrying around that person's sadness.

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I'm carrying around that person's anger. I'm carrying around that person's cry for help. Whatever it is that you may be carrying around, you have the tools to clear that out of your space, and that becomes your responsibility. It's not that the person did a bad thing to you that unconsciously you picked it up unconsciously. It's kind of a side effect of empathy in a way. Oh, absolutely. And I think of even the language that is used a lot, I'm going to sit with them and their feelings. I'm going to take on their feelings with them. That kind of language happens all the time. And I found myself since learning these skills to think of like, oh, I want to reframe that. I want to think more in terms of, I want to recognize I can sit with them in my own space. Yes. Or therapeutically.

[\(19:21\)](#):

And that's different than needing to take on their feelings, which is I think code for running it through our own energy fields. And I think, again, people aren't thinking about it quite like that, but I think it's really getting at that problematic view that empathy requires that we take on their feelings somehow. And it does not. And it also, I would argue it does not really serve that person because their feelings are actually there to help them. And if their energy is left in all these workers all over, it just makes them more and more dependent and they have less of their own resources. Right. Agreed. So the more that you can give someone back their energy and take back your own energy, it allows you to find more resources. But it also allows them to find their own resources, which may be very different from what you think they would be.

[\(20:17\)](#):

And I think even that sort of empowerment that comes from them experiencing themselves more directly, whether that's having clarity about their own situation or their own feelings, and if we can stay out of the way, we're likely to find those things. And I think, again, this sort of circling back to what we talked about in the beginning about our exposure to the suffering of other people, which takes a toll on us as if we don't figure out some strategies to kind of clear after. And again, it's recognizing what we just went through with that person perhaps, or what they're going through or what we just recognized in them. We don't forget about it. We don't stop caring. But on a very sort of essential level, we're clearing, separating, disengaging the energies in a way that frees us up as well. And it's a meditation strategy, and so it does help settle down, fight flight fright reactions, polyvagal hypersensitivity as well.

[\(21:34\)](#):

So to think about that, I think it's interesting, will you let me know how you think of this, but we sort of rush into rescue someone. Of course there's very difficult things happening. I'm not denying that. But when we rush in with the energy of rescuing, first of all, we can be sort of avoiding whatever's happening within us, which I think is really important to attend to whatever's happening in you, but it's also you take away the agency of that other person to find their own tools wherever they may find them. And I think that's something that a lot of people don't really think about. They've already lived through something terrible. You're trying to help them in the aftermath of that terrible thing that's happened. So how can we help people to have all their own energy to find their own creativity on how to make their way through something?

[\(22:35\)](#):

And it's important to believe people are capable of that. Yes. That we don't rush in and rescue them and undermine their own capabilities. Right? Yes, exactly. I mean, people are deeply, deeply creative when they're encouraged or supporting in finding their own way through that, whether that's through becoming an artist or a spoken word poet or a therapist or however it is that they make their way through that. Or even just being invited to sit in their own situation in such a way that resistance is

minimized, defensiveness is minimized, and they can perhaps see their own situation more clearly. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. It's a big topic. It is it, I'm sure we could go on, but maybe that's a good resting place for today. Yeah. I mean, I think for me, the key thing is to just remember that we are exchanging energies all day, and so to bring your own back to you, it helps you.

[\(23:42\)](#):

You're calmer because your energy is not out there. The other day you talked about when you find the center of the head you're no longer chasing, I think that's something similar. When you bring all your energy back to you, you're not going to be, it's your work 24 7 because you're okay, my work is over. I bring my energy back to myself. I let it calm me down. And that could be a great little ritual. It doesn't have to be fancy or take much time at the end of the workday to just differentiate between the work life and personal life. It could be five minutes, three minutes, as much minutes as you have. Yeah, absolutely. Well, even just, I love how our teachers talk about you can allow the process to continue in the background. So you can do that very intentionally for a couple minutes and then kind of invite that process of reclaiming your own energy and sending others back to them with kindness. You can have that move to the background and continue on with your own day. Yes, exactly. Exactly. Love that.

Sara Remke [\(24:50\)](#):

Well, that does it for our practice session today. We hope you will practice these skills on your own. Let us know how it's going, and we'd love to hear from you. Thanks for listening.

Stacy Remke [\(25:02\)](#):

Thanks for joining us today. Bye.

Speaker 4 [\(25:03\)](#):

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