

CoramBAAF Conversations | Mental Health Awareness Week transcript

00:00:03 Ellyse Partington

Hi everyone. I'm Ellyse. I'm the digital marketing and engagement officer at CoramBAAF and I wanted to get Em and Hetty together today to talk about mental Health Awareness Week. And this is team is anxiety and it's the week is running from the 15th to the 21st of May.

00:00:23 Ellyse Partington

And we wanted to get together to just have a sort of general conversation about mental health and what that means to us, what it means in our work day-to-day life and that sort of thing. So if I pass over to 1st, if you'd like to introduce yourself, say your role and say a bit about mental health.

00:00:42 Emma Fincham

Thank you, Ellyse. So I'm Emma, Emma Fincham. I'm fostering consultant in the Policy Research and development team in CoramBAAF.

00:00:50 Emma Fincham

And when Elise suggested that the three of us have this conversation about mental health, I was very pleased to to be asked. I think having recently trained to be a mental health first dater, which I'll talk a bit more about. I think in a bit. But I think my sense is.

00:01:09 Emma Fincham

That we've come a long way when we think about supporting people's mental health in the workplace, but also our friends and family. But I still think we've probably got quite a long way to go around stigma and raising awareness and people.

00:01:22 Emma Fincham

Feeling confident and comfortable to be able to share how they're really feeling with the people around them that that hopefully will be able to offer some support or signpost towards some support if if that's appropriate.

00:01:38 Ellyse Partington

Thanks, Anne. Hetty, if you'd like to introduce.

00:01:40 Hedwig Verhagen

Yourself. Yes. Hello. My name is Hetty. I've got a number of different jobs. I'm associate lecturer at the University of Leeds. I'm also an independent therapeutic social worker. I work mainly with children.

00:01:57 Hedwig Verhagen

Got to live with kinship carers and their families.

00:02:02 Hedwig Verhagen

And I'm also an associate trainer, consultant for core and Bath for a little while, I was the training and consultancy manager at Coran. Barf. And when I did that, one of the favourite parts of my job was to run monthly. well-being sessions.

00:02:21 Hedwig Verhagen

For professionals.

00:02:24 Hedwig Verhagen

And I think you know, thinking about the mental Health Awareness Week.

00:02:31 Hedwig Verhagen

That running those sessions and having those conversations positions every month with with social workers and other professionals about their own well-being, not about the families they worked with. But you know how they experienced being in a job that they were in, what was helpful, what was not helpful, things that they they came across. I think that taught me a lot about.

00:02:52 Hedwig Verhagen

What it's like to be a social worker.

00:02:55 Hedwig Verhagen

And then as a associate lecturer, I feel a really big responsibility for the the social work students who are going into this career, which I think is a marvellous career. It's not an easy career. So I feel this real responsibility for us to, yes.

00:03:14 Hedwig Verhagen

We I think we've come. We've come far like you said, Emma. I think we need to go further.

00:03:20 Hedwig Verhagen

I I'm still not convinced that that social workers necessarily.

00:03:26 Hedwig Verhagen

Easy on people's mental health.

00:03:31 Ellyse Partington

Thanks, Hetty. Not that you do much then.

00:03:33 Ellyse Partington

You're not very busy.

00:03:35 Hedwig Verhagen

I like to take it easy, yeah.

00:03:39 Ellyse Partington

I'm really glad I actually am really glad that you both agreed to do this because aside from you being lovely, lovely people and we can cover a lot of ground, you know, between the both of you, we can cover social workers, social work, professionals, carers, students, children and young people.

00:03:57 Ellyse Partington

So we can sort.

00:03:58 Ellyse Partington

Of speak.

00:04:00 Ellyse Partington

Very widely, but no pressure you.

00:04:02 Ellyse Partington

Know just whatever you'd like to share.

00:04:05 Ellyse Partington

So for me, I hear a lot of people saying that mental health is important and obviously it is. I do think mental health is important, but we've had conversations before where we sort of think that it's become the sort of mainstream that mental health is a a sort of trend that people jump on board and don't fully.

00:04:25 Ellyse Partington

Understand or explore that and by setting up this I want to know if we could go a bit deeper and talk a bit more about the day-to-day and what does it actually look like, whether that's in social work or not. You know, more generally personally and and what does that mean?

00:04:43 Ellyse Partington

If you're trying to do this, I wanted to start to just explore what you think of when someone says mental health. What's the first thing that sort of springs to your mind? So that was my experience, but I think, you know, we can go a bit deeper and sort of challenge stigma and make it more comfortable for people to talk about. And that's what hopefully we'll be doing today, so.

00:05:04 Ellyse Partington

What's the first thing that comes to your mind when someone says mental health?

00:05:07 Emma Fincham

Shall I go first?

00:05:10 Emma Fincham

So I think a few things come to mind. I think that I my feeling, thinking around mental health is that we all have times in our life and also sometimes it's about times in one day where our mental health will feel quite robust and solid and.

00:05:30 Emma Fincham

Fairly resilient, and then there'll be other times when there's a fragility and a sensitivity and there's there's strain and pressure on on our mental health and.

00:05:42 Emma Fincham

That I think that when those things become when when the pressure is such that it becomes too much, that starts to be impact on our enjoyment of life or our ability to engage in work or how we have relationships, whether that's with colleagues or friends or family and so on.

00:05:58 Emma Fincham

And I think that we have got better at we have definitely like we've all said, we've got better at talking about it. But I think you're right, at least I think we don't.

00:06:07 Emma Fincham

I think we we kind of talk about it in fairly general generic terms that we don't necessarily give people either equip people or support people necessarily to be able to say I'm feeling pretty rubbish at the moment and I'm not sure that I can do AB and C.

00:06:27 Emma Fincham

I think as well when when I think when people talk about mental health, I I know that I'm thinking a lot about COVID and lockdown and the impact on everybody's mental health around that. And I think about children and young people, particularly those that we are supporting through our work at core.

00:06:43 Emma Fincham

That, and I think that we are doing what we can to think about children and young people's mental health and also that of our carers and that of our social workers.

00:06:53 Emma Fincham

But I wonder.

00:06:55 Emma Fincham

I wonder what more we might be able to do to support people with that, because I think again, I think we kind of talk about it on this level, but like you were saying, what, what does that look like in real terms where where does the foster carer go? Where does the social worker go? Where does a young person go when they're having a particular point in their day where they're really, really struggling and they're having to mask?

00:07:16 Emma Fincham

How they're feeling?

00:07:17 Emma Fincham

And then I suppose for me what I start to think about is if you're asking how you're feeling, your feelings and emotions just to get by, does that then have a knock on effect? Does that then have an impact negatively potentially later on on that day? Does that then lead to whether it's substance misuse or alcohol?

00:07:37 Emma Fincham

Disuse or or self harm or or feelings of negative feelings towards oneself.

00:07:43 Emma Fincham

Or you know.

00:07:43 Emma Fincham

It it can obviously manifest in in millions of different ways.

00:07:47 Emma Fincham

But it's it's. What does that look like if people are having to put on a facade and?

00:07:51 Emma Fincham

Mask how they're.

00:07:52 Emma Fincham

Feeling in a work environment or a school environment or a caring environment? Then where does that come out elsewhere? If we've not created the right spaces to say it's OK to say I'm not doing great today or I'm?

00:08:06 Emma Fincham

Not doing great this week.

00:08:07 Emma Fincham

And I'm feeling whatever and I I need. I need someone to hear that and respond.

00:08:14 Ellyse Partington

And it's not a quick fix as well. It's not as if, like us talking now or anything that yeah, along those lines like it's not a quick fix that someone can just listen to something and then that's it, it's gone. It's not, it's a constant.

00:08:26 Ellyse Partington

Sort of struggle if that's the right.

00:08:28 Ellyse Partington

Word or, you know, day-to-day it's it's there and it's how you can manage it and how you can have.

00:08:33 Ellyse Partington

Those sort.

00:08:34 Ellyse Partington

Of things in place for you to know. OK, well, I need to do this because otherwise this will happen or sort of having the resources and the sort of support network around you so that you can actually manage that.

00:08:47 Ellyse Partington

So I suppose the good thing about mental health Awareness Week is sharing those resources like without without people will be left, right, centre giving out resources which we'll be doing as well.

00:08:58 Ellyse Partington

But you know, having those in.

00:09:01 Ellyse Partington

So, Hetty, what? What about for you? What comes to mind when someone says mental health?

00:09:07 Hedwig Verhagen

It's a really interesting question because the first thing that kind of came to mind is that in my, in my therapeutic work, I'm I'm always saying we're not. We're not a brain and a body. And you know, it's separate. We're one system, we're one, you know, one nervous system, we're.

00:09:29 Hedwig Verhagen

With one being so and. But it's so interesting how differently people feel about saying that they've got a physical health issue compared to a mental health issue. And I think also how we respond to that. I think if somebody, if I put myself in in, in the shoes of of a manager and somebody says, oh, you know, I've got.

00:09:50 Hedwig Verhagen

I've got a.

00:09:51 Hedwig Verhagen

Bad back and you know I'm prone to having problems with my back and my, you know, talk to them about, you know, how do we need to adjust your what you're doing to kind of support your back, but I'm probably.

00:10:05 Hedwig Verhagen

That really doesn't affect the way that I'm thinking about how, what, how they will practise. But if somebody comes and says, you know, I I experience anxiety, I'm prone to experience anxiety. What's the response to that going to be? I think we're much more likely to think that that says something about somebody as a person.

00:10:26 Hedwig Verhagen

As a professional, when that's not necessarily the case at all.

00:10:31 Hedwig Verhagen

And and I think that is the bit that we need to get through. We can say, ohh yeah, we can talk about mental health and we shouldn't.

00:10:40 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah, we should kind of be aware of stigma, but I think, yeah, I I think there is that kind of unconscious that those unconscious feelings of almost that, you know, some of these either mentally healthy and robust or they're fragile.

00:11:00 Hedwig Verhagen

While we don't think that when we talk about physical health problem we we see those kind of grey areas in between and that people have good days and bad days. But I don't think I thinking about mental health is kind of sophisticated enough yet for it to to be really effective and and I think it is.

00:11:20 Hedwig Verhagen

You know, social workers are really emotionally demanding job. If you think about, you know, for example, the the definition of compassion fatigue is is care.

00:11:29 Hedwig Verhagen

Being too much for too long. Well, you know, how do you apply that to a social work job? Well, that's basically what you do on a daily basis.

00:11:43 Hedwig Verhagen

So I think it is, it is so important in social work, but then there's also I think in social work, so much value being placed on somebody who can just.

00:11:53 Hedwig Verhagen

Get through life and keep going and and I think.

00:11:58 Hedwig Verhagen

Ironically, we may be as social workers, very empathetic and understanding of other people's mental health problems of, you know, the people that we work with. I don't know whether we apply that to ourselves and our colleagues in the same way. I think maybe there's a feeling, I mean, and and.

00:12:18 Hedwig Verhagen

Please correct me if I'm.

00:12:20 Hedwig Verhagen

Wrong, but I've got a feeling that that it might be quite difficult as a social worker to talk freely within your team about mental health challenge.

00:12:31 Emma Fincham

Yeah, no, I would agree with that. And I think it's interesting listening to you talking, Hetty, it was making me think I could remember.

00:12:39 Emma Fincham

I can remember having conversations as a social worker practitioner where people would say at the point that you stop caring at the stop or the point. You're not caring enough within your professional role. Then that's probably a good time to think about. You know, having a break, change of career and so on, but.

00:12:59 Emma Fincham

Exactly what you've just described around compassion fatigue. That's around caring too much, and for too long. So there's there's.

00:13:08 Emma Fincham

I think you're right. I think there isn't. There isn't an. There aren't natural pauses, are there? Because even if you finish working with a family or finish supporting a child or young person, you know that you will then be almost immediately likely to start working with another child or young person or family and that you want to get to know them and invest and and and.

00:13:29 Emma Fincham

Celebrate their strengths and understand what their challenges are and and and try and try and see. See what they might need from your role as a social worker and.

00:13:39 Emma Fincham

It it's that bit that you were also talking about where it's hard to I think you're right. I think it is hard for social workers to talk to other social workers.

00:13:49 Emma Fincham

Partly because of the stigma and what we're talking about that there, I don't know if it really is OK to say I, you know, I woke up this morning and I felt depressed or I woke up this morning and I felt anxious. I woke up this morning and I had no appetite. And that's not like me. I woke up this morning and realised.

00:14:05 Emma Fincham

I've been awake half the night. I you know, whatever it is.

00:14:10 Emma Fincham

And I think as well, if we're honest, we know that.

00:14:12 Emma Fincham

If you're in.

00:14:12 Emma Fincham

A team, if you're.

00:14:14 Emma Fincham

If you're indicating that you're not not doing OK and that you're struggling, you'll probably feel a sense of, Oh my goodness, is that going to impact my team members? What? What does that look like? Does that mean they need to absorb some of my work? If.

00:14:27 Emma Fincham

I need if I need a bit of time off.

00:14:29 Emma Fincham

So I think that for some.

00:14:31 Emma Fincham

The social workers, they will be very conscious that if they're.

00:14:36 Emma Fincham

Not feeling OK and that their mental health is feeling compromised or or it's not not where they would like it to be that they will be mindful of not only sharing that because of the things we've we've talked about around the stigma that's still attached and and perhaps not having the confidence particularly maybe if you're a fairly new social worker.

00:14:57 Emma Fincham

And I think also social workers will be really mindful of the potential impact on their team, their colleagues.

00:15:04 Emma Fincham

If if you need to take some time off because you need, you need you know to be signed off work because of your mental health. In the same way that people are signed off, work with physical health like Hetty, you were just talking about and that that just is something that's just what happens. It happens to people. People need time off work for health.

00:15:26 Emma Fincham

I think there'd be some potential worry and concern around what impact that might have on your colleagues who might then end up picking up some of your work.

00:15:34 Emma Fincham

Needing to kind of take on additional cases, supporting families and and there would be some probably real guilt and and concern around what that would look like and the impact of that and I suppose there's something around.

00:15:48 Emma Fincham

Us helping helping individuals and organisations to to know that and to to to be aware of that and to see what there might be around giving people the space that they sometimes need.

00:16:02 Emma Fincham

Which is to press pause.

00:16:04 Emma Fincham

So that you're not caring too much for.

00:16:05 Emma Fincham

Too long, I guess.

00:16:09 Ellyse Partington

So it sounds like there needs to be a lot more organisational sort of responsibility for their staff and set up sort of.

00:16:18 Ellyse Partington

Either systems or events or, you know sessions, just so that they feel that that supports there and petty off the back of that. I was wondering if you could talk a bit more about the well-being for members sessions that you ran and if like what you learned from that, was there anything that surprised you, anything that you found out, anything that reaffirmed?

00:16:39 Ellyse Partington

Sort of something you knew already and just a bit in general, how the response.

00:16:44 Ellyse Partington

Was to that.

00:16:46 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah, well, we started those sessions when we were still in lockdown. And what we what we were talking about within core and Bath and what I was, what I was also talking about with social work.

00:17:01 Hedwig Verhagen

And friends and colleagues outside. What's that?

00:17:06 Hedwig Verhagen

What was, what felt to be really missing was this opportunity for kind of kitchen conversation so.

00:17:12 Hedwig Verhagen

When you're all in the in the same office and then you go in the kitchen and you make yourself a cup of tea or coffee and and you might talk to somebody from a different team or somebody from your team, but you're you're kind of.

00:17:24 Hedwig Verhagen

Away from the desk and.

00:17:26 Hedwig Verhagen

Different conversations happen and with working online, people still have supervisions people still have team meetings. People might, you know, have have kind of chats with colleagues, but we felt that those.

00:17:40 Hedwig Verhagen

Meets that those you know, that kind of those kitchen conversations that they were missing. So I was thinking, well, if we have these monthly sessions and kind of have like a national kitchen where we can come together.

00:17:52 Hedwig Verhagen

And and we talk about our well-being, you know how you doing basically just people asking each other how are.

00:17:59 Hedwig Verhagen

You doing?

00:18:01 Hedwig Verhagen

And so we we picked every month.

00:18:03 Hedwig Verhagen

We had a a.

00:18:04 Hedwig Verhagen

Theme, so there'd be a little bit of delivering on the theme and then just people sharing their experiences.

00:18:12 Hedwig Verhagen

According to that same.

00:18:14 Hedwig Verhagen

And what was the right kind of reaffirmed for me is that that social workers really care about the work they really care about the families.

00:18:26 Hedwig Verhagen

They they really care about their colleagues.

00:18:31 Hedwig Verhagen

And that people felt that expectation of just being OK, you know, that responsibility of I am. I'm the person who is supporting. So I should be able to get through this without needing too much support myself. I think that was a really strong message.

00:18:52 Hedwig Verhagen

And it's interesting what you were saying before, at least about, you know, maybe organisations should take more responsibility for this. Maybe things should change within organisations, cause what people were sharing was the kind of the.

00:19:08 Hedwig Verhagen

The unspoken messages given by organisations about workloads, you know, the kind of official messages might be and and about looking after your mental health. The unspoken that the spoken messages may be fair, like I know we want to look after you and we've got an employee assistance programme that you can access and.

00:19:28 Hedwig Verhagen

You know, if there's any problems, raise it. But then there were those unspoken messages. Like, you know, sending emails at 10:00 at night. That kind of give that message of you should just work until the work is done, which is never, you know. You know, if we're obviously we're in our area.

00:19:48 Hedwig Verhagen

Or you should always be available. You know managers who say with the best intentions in the world. I'm going on holiday, but if there's a problem, please do ring me. That gives a message to the whole team that you should always be available. You can never switch off from work.

00:20:07 Hedwig Verhagen

And you know how many resources there are? You know, people having unmanageable caseloads because either there there aren't enough posts or there can't be enough people recruited. None of those things are things that people can fix individually.

00:20:24 Hedwig Verhagen

Said it does with just some of the themes that came.

00:20:27 Hedwig Verhagen

Out of that.

00:20:28 Ellyse Partington

And with people, the thing that's I'm curious about is with, like you said, people did share during those sessions. But did anything come out of it that was sort of?

00:20:39 Ellyse Partington

Personal like how willing were people to actually share sort of personally how they were feeling because a lot of people might not want to share and that's fine. Obviously I don't know how much I'd wanna share, you know, depending on what what you're going through, what point you are, you know. But maybe after that you when you're a bit more comfortable you're a bit.

00:21:00 Ellyse Partington

So they're away from situations you might want to share. So yeah, so I.

00:21:03 Ellyse Partington

Was thinking that.

00:21:06 Ellyse Partington

Was it useful for social workers to sort of come together, have a space where they can think ohh that person's going through something similar that I've been through and sort of setting up a space for them to do that, especially with things going online and maybe not seeing people in person they can't relate in that same way. So I was wondering if was there sort of setting up a session?

00:21:26 Ellyse Partington

Like that? Was it useful for social workers to then share what they go through personally and and so on.

00:21:34 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah, and and I think what was interesting is that often the people who would start to share with people who were comfortable saying I've had these, I've had these difficulties, you know, I was off work with, with stress. I was off work with depression.

00:21:54 Hedwig Verhagen

I was, you know, I've gone through this and this is what I've done to come back from it and and people. If I'm thinking about those people, they seem to be.

00:22:04 Hedwig Verhagen

More. Yeah, they were. They were more comfortable talking about their experiences and then had a real kind of desire to share what they've done. Yeah, help themselves. Because I think they were aware that they weren't the only one. And then because people were.

00:22:24 Hedwig Verhagen

Brave to to talk about that. Like you say in in, in a, in a group with strangers. But we try to make it really safe, you know, to say this is just about you.

00:22:33 Hedwig Verhagen

It's not recorded. We made agreements about confidentiality and and we have, you know, we had CEO's in there. We had different from people from different professional backgrounds, legal backgrounds, medical backgrounds, social workers.

00:22:50 Hedwig Verhagen

But people just came to these sessions.

00:22:52 Hedwig Verhagen

Just as people.

00:22:54 Hedwig Verhagen

You know people who are doing a job and who care about the.

00:22:56 Hedwig Verhagen

Job that they're.

00:22:56 Hedwig Verhagen

Doing and the people who are kind of brave enough to start sharing that they're really encouraged other people to say, well, I feel like that sometimes and.

00:23:06 Hedwig Verhagen

You know and and some things were really shocking. You know, just the kind of.

00:23:11 Hedwig Verhagen

The people, lots of people were talking about things like feeling really panicky and feeling really anxious, not being able to sleep because of worrying about cases, not being able to switch off.

00:23:23 Hedwig Verhagen

Just feeling the need to always work. So many people talked about having their laptop and the lap every night, you know? Well, there might have been well watching television with their family, but they're not quite there because you know, they're they're in the room, but they're still at work because they're still trying to finish an assessment.

00:23:41 Hedwig Verhagen

Still responding to emails that kind of that pressure of always being available.

00:23:48 Hedwig Verhagen

And then it becomes. Once you've done that for a while, it becomes quite scary to switch off.

00:23:56 Emma Fincham

It's interesting listening to you talking heads, it's just making me think about conversations I've had in previous jobs where.

00:24:03 Emma Fincham

If you described feeling stressed that there was then sometimes a kind of exploration from other people within the organisation about whether that stress was work.

00:24:13 Emma Fincham

Related or home related and I I recall those conversations and I'm just thinking that actually it's I think I.

00:24:21 Emma Fincham

Think we are.

00:24:22 Emma Fincham

Better at now understanding that that mental health, like most things in in life, are not linear and you can't just compartmentalise and it's not like I'm stressed when I'm at work and then when I get home it all disappears and everything's fine.

00:24:34 Emma Fincham

You know, I'm. I'm a completely different person. It doesn't work like that, does it? But I'm just thinking because of lockdown and because of now, many of us do lots of working at home. We're recording this. All of us individually at home that, that, that, that some of those.

00:24:51 Emma Fincham

Maybe artificial kind of.

00:24:55 Emma Fincham

Boundaries almost between work and home clearly now are very different. If you know don't really exist. So that whole like is your strength to do with work. Or is your stress to do with home life or those that all now is is often in one big kind of melting pot, isn't it? And I think actually probably always was. So I don't think this is just about as a response to.

00:25:15 Emma Fincham

To lock down and working at home and working in isolation.

00:25:18 Emma Fincham

So on. But I do think what it means is that like you just when you were talking heads, it was just making me think it is hard to work out is it cause is it the stress of the work? Is it cause I'm working at home? Is it because I haven't got the kitchen conversations and I'm not learning from my colleagues in the same way that you would have done pre COVID.

00:25:37 Emma Fincham

Is it that I can't switch off because my desk is in my bedroom? Is it that my laptop is? It's just too easy to send that one other e-mail cause that's just popped into my head and it I I think some of that, isn't it some of?

00:25:49 Emma Fincham

It is around how we look out for.

00:25:52 Emma Fincham

People noticing that maybe they're creeping into the the blurring is even more blurred than than perhaps than perhaps we would like it to be. I suppose it's it's around that, isn't it, noticing some of those signs for our colleagues and our friends and family and yeah.

00:26:09 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah, got one.

00:26:09 Hedwig Verhagen

Of the well-being sessions we looked at.

00:26:12 Hedwig Verhagen

Kind of messages from research about.

00:26:15 Hedwig Verhagen

You know what contributes to to well-being in the workplace and and one of those things that's really important is boundaries. You know, it's boundaries about this is work and this is not work.

00:26:27 Hedwig Verhagen

And they used this in this particular study. They used the phrase phrase of.

00:26:34 Hedwig Verhagen

You have to avoid the grey area where you're neither working nor not working, and it is that kind of the laptop on the lap at night when you might be wanting to spend time with, with people around you or even you know when you by yourself and you think, oh, this is my time, But I'll just do a little bit of work.

00:26:51 Hedwig Verhagen

And at the same time, I think what's happened with working at home, we're a lot more flexible. So you can you can go and pick a child up from school or you can, you know you can do, you can do non work thing in work time. But then we feel that we need to do more work in our non work time.

00:27:11 Hedwig Verhagen

And it all becomes one big blur that there's never any kind of clear boundaries of. This is when you switch off, and this is your time when you need to rest and recover. They'll be our system needs to rest and recover. Mm-hmm.

00:27:26 Ellyse Partington

Sounds to me a lot like people, and I know I've been a culprit in the past, but it needs sort of permission to sort of switch off. Just literally that narrative of sort of it's OK to close your laptop. It's fine to take time for yourself. You don't have to it.

00:27:42 Ellyse Partington

Can wait.

00:27:43 Ellyse Partington

Obviously you know there's guilt.

00:27:47 Ellyse Partington

And pressure and everything tied into that and it's a lot more complicated than that and it, but maybe it is just a bit of practise of giving yourself permission to sort of just switch off and just say this is my time now. I've done what I need to do.

00:27:59 Ellyse Partington

This is it, this is.

00:28:01 Ellyse Partington

How we're gonna go from?

00:28:04 Ellyse Partington

So M you recently trained to become a mental health first aid, but Aida, Congrats.

00:28:10 Emma Fincham

Thank you.

00:28:11 Ellyse Partington

Would you mind sharing a bit about what that was like, just so people know what it is, what it's about a bit about why you feel that's important, why you wanted to do it and.

00:28:22 Ellyse Partington

Why do you think it's important for organisations to have a mental health first aid?

00:28:26 Emma Fincham

OK, so I first I think I first heard about mental health first aid when in one of my previous jobs when some foster carers that I was working with went on some mental health first aid training, and I remember them doing the training and then being so effusive and saying, Oh my goodness, this training is amazing.

00:28:47 Emma Fincham

I've learned loads. I feel like I'm part of a.

00:28:49 Emma Fincham

Sort of community of people.

00:28:51 Emma Fincham

Well, and and you know you need to make sure that all foster carers can do this training. It's absolutely vital. It's it's really, really important. So I kind of that that energy and enthusiasm definitely rubbed off. I definitely paid attention. It was hard not to. They were very, very yeah, very expressive in their positive kind of feedback.

00:29:12 Emma Fincham

Which was great, of course, and I suppose it it made me think, OK, if I get the opportunity to be able to do that in within a within a role, then then I'll definitely kind of look out for it. So. So I guess that was the starting point and I think some of those conversations with those carers were.

00:29:27 Emma Fincham

It just, it might not be that the the child or young person that they were caring for had particularly poor mental health at that given time, but it helped them feel like they were getting some more tools in their toolbox. It felt it they they felt like they had some more language that they could use some more skills, some more understanding.

00:29:47 Emma Fincham

Some more, maybe signs to look out for, and I think it helped them think about their own family help. It may help them think about themselves, their family, the children, young people. They were caring for and kind of foster carer peers and.

00:30:02 Emma Fincham

Weeks. So I remember those conversations then within this role there was, you know, some information came around. Would people be interested in doing mental health first, aiding first aid, of course. And one of the one of the team, Louise, said she was doing it and and wondered whether I might be interested.

00:30:23 Emma Fincham

And so I thought, yeah, OK. So.

00:30:26 Emma Fincham

She and I joined, joined that cohort and the training takes place over four days. It's not full days. They feel like full days because you're because of the amount of information that you're retaining and the kind of the group exercises and so on. And there's a workbook that you kind of work through together.

00:30:46 Emma Fincham

We did it with people from different organisations. I think that helps, doesn't it cause you get all from all different sectors, so not within children's kind of social work care sector, just all different sectors. So that was fascinating as well because people come with all those different rich experiences.

00:31:02 Emma Fincham

What was amazing was how much a bit like you were talking hitting. How once that trust and comfort is created, all of us were then sharing our own. I think without exception, probably pretty much all of us shared our own personal stories. Times where our mental health has not been as robust or we might describe it as poor mental health.

00:31:23 Emma Fincham

Episodes or times in our lives that were, you know, difficult, tricky. And so those were shared naturally throughout the course.

00:31:32 Emma Fincham

I learned those from from the training one of my real takeaways was that they talk about a stress container and that as individuals we as as humans, as individuals, we all have, you know, varying degrees of of stress. That kind of impact on us all the time. And that for some of us, our containers.

00:31:52 Emma Fincham

Might be really big and robust and kind of you know can take withstand quite a lot and that for others of us, those containers might be much smaller and the container changes shape. Of course, over time as well, it doesn't stay static, but they were saying that once your container gets pulled up when once it.

00:32:09 Emma Fincham

From all of your you know from from whatever's going on, and there's too much going.

00:32:14 Emma Fincham

On and then you're at that kind of tipping over stage. They describe that then as this, that you will manifest you will you will present with certain.

00:32:25 Emma Fincham

Characteristics or traits or behaviours, both your mental feeling side of things, emotional side of things, but also physical traits or things that you might do and that as individuals if we can pay attention to those it's not easy, but if we can pay attention to it and notice what's going on for us when we know we're at our stress Max.

00:32:45 Emma Fincham

And our containers overflowing and then those traits or those patterns that we might start?

00:32:51 Emma Fincham

To do is is.

00:32:52 Emma Fincham

What they describe within the course as your stress signature and once you know that about yourself and you might know that about someone.

00:32:58 Emma Fincham

In your family or your colleague.

00:33:00 Emma Fincham

Or a foster family that you're supporting, or a social worker that you're mentoring or whatever.

00:33:05 Emma Fincham

Once you start to see that.

00:33:07 Emma Fincham

A. You can have those conversations because you can say when I start doing this thing.

00:33:12 Emma Fincham

Then you probably know that I'm a bit maxed out and I might need a bit of support or I might need to press pause or I might not be able to chair that meeting, or I might not be able to do whatever. So you can have those conversations. You can know it about yourself and you can hopefully help other people.

00:33:27 Emma Fincham

You feel more able to talk about what to look out for, what sort of things like. So for me, for example, I I know that if.

00:33:36 Emma Fincham

Messed up, almost overthinking what might be going on for somebody and might be worrying about it and it might be that I'm almost imagining what might be happening for them. That's if I'm doing that a lot. That's probably a sign that I'm actually. It's a bit of projection going on and it's actually me I'm worrying about what I'm putting it on other people, and that's probably a good.

00:33:57 Emma Fincham

Good time for me to pause and go. Do I need to stop for a minute? I don't know whether either of you know what you're.

00:34:03 Emma Fincham

What your stress signature is a way of describing it, but what your stress signatures are.

00:34:09 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah, well, I've I've talked quite a lot in, in my therapeutic social work practise. I talk quite a lot with people about compassion, fatigue and burnout and and things like that. And and I always give this example for for you know, how I know that I'm edging near that because I think when you do.

00:34:31 Hedwig Verhagen

When you do emotionally demanding work, whether that's professional work or whether it's caring or parenting, I think there's always that risk of of.

00:34:39 Hedwig Verhagen

You know you.

00:34:40 Hedwig Verhagen

Of edging closer that or ending up in in a state of compassion fatigue or burnout. And for me it's just when I start to see pain everywhere where where that's my my first lens. How I.

00:34:53 Hedwig Verhagen

See the world.

00:34:55 Hedwig Verhagen

The first time when I really noticed it very clearly and I was like ohh this is like this, this should be the alarm bell is when it was stuck in a.

00:35:03 Hedwig Verhagen

A traffic jam on the motorway and there were just four lanes of stationary cars and I looked around me and just people in all the cars and my first thought was.

00:35:15 Hedwig Verhagen

Each one of these people has their own pain, you know, rather than thinking, oh, I wonder what they listening to on the radio or, you know, I wonder if they're closed off as well. They just want to get home. I just, I I just had this really intense experience of each of these people has their own pain and their own struggle. And that was the first thing that I saw about.

00:35:38 Hedwig Verhagen

And and ever since then, that's kind of been my like, you know, I like, I like that term stress signature. I suppose. I just think of it as like a little alarm bell, you know, when I'm when I'm looking at at other people. And I'm first kind of imagining, you know, the the pain that might be.

00:35:58 Hedwig Verhagen

There I think.

00:36:00 Hedwig Verhagen

That's not really how I want to be in the.

00:36:01 Hedwig Verhagen

World. That's not the.

00:36:02 Hedwig Verhagen

First thing that I want to be.

00:36:06 Hedwig Verhagen

Noticing in the world. And that's when I know.

00:36:10 Hedwig Verhagen

That I need to do.

00:36:11 Hedwig Verhagen

Something to to look after myself.

00:36:15 Ellyse Partington

I think for me, but I think it's really interesting, Emma, how you said, how you can tell other people what your signs are. I've never thought about it like that before. Like, OK, I can pick up on how I'm feeling and those like around me probably know. But, you know, in like professional, like in at work or maybe a wider circle or friends like I've never thought before.

00:36:37 Ellyse Partington

To say ohh if you see me like this or if I'm a bit like this or like that. So that's I think that's really helpful. I mean mine not gonna.

00:36:45 Ellyse Partington

Make me out to.

00:36:46 Ellyse Partington

Be great but.

00:36:49 Ellyse Partington

I think there's two sort of emotional behavioural ones that sort of come out. So my one of them is that I'm very.

00:36:57 Ellyse Partington

Not with everyone.

00:36:58 Ellyse Partington

But with certain people I'm I'm very snappy and I'm just sort of when I'm sort of at my maximum. I'm very snappy. I just wanna get on with what I'm doing sort of in my own world and sort of can't really think outside of that for that time.

00:37:15 Ellyse Partington

Again, and then the other one is that I find I get a bit overwhelmed that I'm everything is a bigger deal than what it is, or on a usual day I can manage what I need to do for that day or that week or whatever's going on. I can, I can manage it and I think, well, why can't I do it today? And I'm like, ohh, OK, because I'm at that maximum.

00:37:37 Ellyse Partington

But one that I was thinking about that relates to what you said earlier about physical and mental.

00:37:43 Ellyse Partington

Little is that I find and I don't know if I'm no doctor and I don't know, but what I've found is that I get sort of eczema and a rash between my fingers. And I used to get it on and off and I thought, well, why haven't I got it constantly? And then I saw my stress patterns sort of when that happened.

00:38:03 Ellyse Partington

I get this rash on my hand and I think ohh well, that's a bit odd that that's a coincidence that it keeps happening, but when I noticed that that's when I know. OK, I need to take time for myself. I need to reevaluate what I'm doing. This is the final point.

00:38:21 Ellyse Partington

This is where I'm at.

00:38:23 Ellyse Partington

And then sort of take.

00:38:24 Ellyse Partington

A back step.

00:38:27 Emma Fincham

And I think.

00:38:28 Emma Fincham

Just just listen to you both talking it like it. It feels quite freeing. I don't know if it does for YouTube, but it feels quite freeing to be able to say. I know that I, you know, as you were talking then about the physical side, I know what happens to me is my jaw starts to feel painful because it's almost locking.

00:38:45 Emma Fincham

And it we don't have these conversations very often, do we? So it's like being able to have them in what this feels like a safe space. I know we're doing recording this so that other people.

00:38:54 Emma Fincham

Can hear it.

00:38:55 Emma Fincham

Of course, but it is just by us having a conversation. It is almost practising that, isn't it? But it's OK to have, you know, everybody will have their own version of what their stress.

00:39:07 Emma Fincham

Can can withstand and what they're stress signature looks like or what their alarm bell are like that as well, cause the alarm bell is you could really see it, can't you? And once once you've noticed it, it's probably really loud by.

00:39:19 Emma Fincham

Then isn't. It's probably really ringing.

00:39:21 Emma Fincham

And it's yeah, so just having these conversations is a is a great starting point because then you can look out.

00:39:27 Emma Fincham

For your work, colleagues, can't, can't you? And and people you're working with in other capacity. Sorry that you were gonna say.

00:39:35 Hedwig Verhagen

No and and and I I.

00:39:37 Hedwig Verhagen

I also love this idea of actually sharing that with other people, and wouldn't it be amazing that in the same way that?

00:39:44 Hedwig Verhagen

If a colleague would go like that and you'd go, oh, you know, is is your neck bothering you? Cause you know that they get sort of sore neck? Wouldn't it be amazing if somebody would be like a bit snappy or they would just see pain everywhere or there would be overthinking everything and you would you would be able to have that conversation and go. You know, I just wonder whether you're feeling a bit overwhelmed.

00:40:06 Hedwig Verhagen

I wonder you know.

00:40:08 Hedwig Verhagen

What's your mental health like at the moment? That would be fantastic if we could just have those conversations, wouldn't.

00:40:13 Hedwig Verhagen

That have some.

00:40:14 Ellyse Partington

I suppose.

00:40:16 Ellyse Partington

Go on. Sorry.

00:40:18 Hedwig Verhagen

No, go on.

00:40:19 Ellyse Partington

I was just gonna say, like, if you if you do share those signs, it's sort of the the foot in the door for someone to open up that conversation. You don't have to say ohh. I feel like this. Can we talk about it if you shared with that person that ohh this is my sign your if I'm if I'm acting like this or I'm doing this thing.

00:40:39 Ellyse Partington

And you like, I give you permission to approach me, to talk about it. And that's sort of the halfway step that it doesn't feel like this big thing to talk about. But that reminded me of a sort of funny story. And I won't go on too long. But in the last.

00:40:54 Ellyse Partington

Job I had.

00:40:56 Ellyse Partington

I would clench my jaw like you am, but it would be at night and I'd wake up in the morning and and and I still do it now, but but. And I'd have earache and I didn't know where it was coming from. So I went to a doctor's, went to and I.

00:41:12 Ellyse Partington

Thought ohh you.

00:41:13 Ellyse Partington

Know it's physical. I can book an appointment. I can do this. I.

00:41:16 Ellyse Partington

Can do that and then.

00:41:19 Ellyse Partington

I found out that I was grinding my teeth at.

00:41:21 Ellyse Partington

Night because of stress that would then give me earache.

00:41:25 Ellyse Partington

But then the.

00:41:25 Ellyse Partington

Funny part of it is, which is funny now and my manager came into work and said literally about a week later and said Ohh, I've got terrible earache. I thought no way and then I was like you need to check if you're grinding your teeth.

00:41:40 Ellyse Partington

The night and she was so we both had the same and we were both on the same project same.

00:41:45 Ellyse Partington

Job. Yeah, and both.

00:41:46 Ellyse Partington

Had the same symptoms, but obviously us talking. Now we know that the signs are different for everyone and the reactions are different.

00:41:54 Ellyse Partington

So we've been talking about it, people can think. Ohh I had that or I didn't have that. But yeah, me and my manager both had the same signs, same stress for the same project, but we both thought, well, actually now we're in this together, we know what's happening. We can talk about it and sort of do something about it.

00:42:12 Hedwig Verhagen

And stress and anxiety can have such.

00:42:15 Hedwig Verhagen

Impact on on kind of the physical system, you know your digestive system, your joints, your muscles.

00:42:23 Hedwig Verhagen

UM.

00:42:25 Hedwig Verhagen

That your immune system, all of that is really intricately connected with with your stress levels. So if you are regularly experiencing stress, if you're experiencing anxiety, all of those things can really be affected. So you know, people can.

00:42:41 Hedwig Verhagen

Have a.

00:42:42 Hedwig Verhagen

Bad backs or really painful joints or just catch every cold that's that's coming or.

00:42:48 Hedwig Verhagen

Having problem with with digestion and it could all be connected to to stress and anxiety and and it just shows what you know how significant it is and how important it is that we.

00:43:01 Hedwig Verhagen

We look after ourselves, but that organisations look after their employees as well because.

00:43:08 Hedwig Verhagen

You know, we we want to look after.

00:43:10 Hedwig Verhagen

Our individuals, but also just the workforce as a.

00:43:12 Hedwig Verhagen

Whole we need.

00:43:14 Hedwig Verhagen

Healthy. Well people to do the really important work that, that, that needs to be done.

00:43:21 Ellyse Partington

And avoid burnout.

00:43:23 Emma Fincham

Yeah. And some of that is like we're saying some of that is having the conversation, some of it is the noticing some of it is being able to and some of it is being able to say I can see or I think I can see that you might need to have a break or have a rest or have some time out. I'm just thinking about our social workers.

00:43:45 Emma Fincham

Supporting foster carers, supporting kinship carers, supporting a doctors and and.

00:43:50 Emma Fincham

Feeling confident and comfortable to have those conversations because it does feel it. Lots of social work conversations are are, are sensitive, difficult, challenging. Of course they are is is the nature of the work often. But I think this is yet another area where if social workers are able to kind of acknowledge that the.

00:44:09 Emma Fincham

Impact that, that poor mental health might have on being a worker in the same way it has an impact on being a parent or carer. And then what does that look like and what you know we're we're here and we're listening and we've got, you know, whether it's mental health first aid does, who you can have a conversation with and they.

00:44:26 Emma Fincham

Can spend some dedicated time listening and then signpost. Is it about? Is it about helping somebody make that phone call to an employer assistance, you know, counselling session. What what? What is it? What are? What are the steps? And I think lots of organisations are getting better at it. But like we're saying that there is a need for more mental health champions.

00:44:48 Emma Fincham

And it not just falling to the Champions, of course, but but more more ways, more mechanisms that people think. Yeah, I know that on my days or time.

00:44:58 Emma Fincham

You know, piece of time that I'm I need extra support. I know where to go. I know who to talk to. I know. Who who's gonna listen. And I know who's gonna respond and do something that will make me feel like it's been OK to share because because and it's that, isn't it? The the.

00:45:18 Emma Fincham

It's OK to share that it really is.

00:45:21 Hedwig Verhagen

And I suppose an acknowledgement that it's not a weakness, you know, often what we're talking about is the result of, you know, I'll say it again, that caring too long for for caring too much for too long. So it's not just something that happens to people who first come into the job. You know, it could be the people who are really experienced but who've just had so many experience they've.

00:45:46 Hedwig Verhagen

They've weathered so many storms and at some point I'm guessing that stress container can just become overflowing.

00:45:54 Hedwig Verhagen

And and and I think it's really important that we acknowledge that that's not a weakness that is just something that happens, you know, in the same way that if we keep putting pressure on a bone at some point it will snap. If we just keep loading pressure on on people's mental well-being, there is gonna be a point when their stress container is full.

00:46:15 Hedwig Verhagen

And I think you know, it is so important to to look after to look after all our colleagues.

00:46:24 Ellyse Partington

And I think in that it's important to.

00:46:27 Ellyse Partington

Sort of recognise that there's difference between everyone, so that one method might work for someone and that one structure within an organisation might work for one person, but it won't for another. But you know, doing things and getting there one step at a time. Hopefully eventually we'll get there.

00:46:43 Hedwig Verhagen

I always remember that in my very first few months as a social worker, so I just grab.

00:46:48 Hedwig Verhagen

Waited, and then I had a case together with the child protection, social worker and people have said Ohh, you know would be really good to work with her because she's been doing it for 20 years and that's really quite unusual for somebody to be in frontline child protection for 20 years and.

00:47:06 Hedwig Verhagen

It was a really complex case and.

00:47:11 Hedwig Verhagen

I am always very reflective, probably too reflective and I share what I.

00:47:16 Hedwig Verhagen

Feel you know.

00:47:16 Hedwig Verhagen

What? What goes on inside of me and I I just I wanted to have a conversation with you with with her. And I was. I started to say ohh you know this situation and then that happened and I just feel and she cut me off and she said.

00:47:31 Hedwig Verhagen

Now you can't go around feeling you know you're new to this job, and I'm telling you now, if you're gonna feel stuff about every case that you deal with, you're not gonna survive in this job.

00:47:43 Hedwig Verhagen

And and it really puzzled me because.

00:47:45 Hedwig Verhagen

I kind of knew.

00:47:48 Hedwig Verhagen

I just had this knowing that that's not right. I'm pretty sure I should be feeling. I'm not gonna follow that advice, but at the same time I was, you know, I was also intimidated by it by it because, you know, people said she's this amazing person who's done this really tough job for 20 years.

00:48:08 Hedwig Verhagen

But then looking back, knowing what I know now, I'm thinking.

00:48:12

Oh gosh.

00:48:12 Hedwig Verhagen

God, she was really burnt out, you know, she had that kind of cynicism. She was protecting herself.

00:48:18 Hedwig Verhagen

Ohh from feeling no, that's the way that she was getting through and she was getting praised for being so resilient and so strong. And so you know, I remember somebody just describing her as bulletproof. Nobody should need to be bulletproof, you know, she she was entitled to have feelings.

00:48:41 Emma Fincham

And that, yeah, I mean it, it's.

00:48:43 Emma Fincham

It's interesting, isn't it?

00:48:44 Emma Fincham

Cause you kind of hope that we've maybe that maybe that.

00:48:50 Emma Fincham

What you've just?

00:48:51 Emma Fincham

Described wouldn't happen now, but I can still imagine it would happen in certain teams, particularly if we're honest. When you've got teams that are under huge pressure and work needs to be allocated.

00:49:02 Emma Fincham

Families need to be supported. Children and young people need to be visited and understood and listened to.

00:49:08 Emma Fincham

And you can kind of see can't you that that that.

00:49:12 Emma Fincham

Things like taking care of people's mental health.

00:49:15 Emma Fincham

Might end up slipping.

00:49:18 Emma Fincham

Because of all those pressures that you know that I've just kind of outlined, but I guess it's just keep bringing it up, keep bringing, keep talking. Keep saying you've told me you're fine. You've, you know, at least you've told me you're fine and you're OK. But I'm I'm wondering about that. And I'm I'm gonna probe a bit and I'm gonna, you know, have you got time to have a virtual copper?

00:49:38 Emma Fincham

Let's not talk about.

00:49:39 Emma Fincham

Work. Let's just chat it it.

00:49:42 Emma Fincham

I think all of us that you, you hear people saying that people need to take responsibility for their own mental health, and of course we do. But sometimes when we're right.

00:49:51 Emma Fincham

In the thick.

00:49:51 Emma Fincham

Of it, we probably need a bit of a helping hand from those around us, don't we? And I think I think it's OK to kind of take some responsibility for oneself.

00:50:02 Emma Fincham

But I also think we have a responsibility to look after one another like you've both.

00:50:06 Emma Fincham

Said and the and.

00:50:07 Emma Fincham

The more we do that, the more we do the checking out, the more.

00:50:10 Emma Fincham

We do the you've.

00:50:11 Emma Fincham

Told me you're fine, but that's not what I'm seeing. Or that's not what. Not that's not. You can't be fine. I know you were working at midnight and you're here again this morning and you're you're, you know.

00:50:21 Emma Fincham

There, there, there. There's stuff going on.

00:50:24 Emma Fincham

I guess it's just.

00:50:25 Emma Fincham

Us keep on. Keep on having these conversations in in.

00:50:28 Emma Fincham

The way we have.

00:50:29 Emma Fincham

Which feels really.

00:50:31 Emma Fincham

It it feels unusual, but it also feels healthy and I think I think the more we have them hope hopefully the the less unusual it.

00:50:38 Emma Fincham

Will feel and.

00:50:39 Emma Fincham

The healthier we will all feel as well.

00:50:45 Hedwig Verhagen

And and I think organisations need to, you know, I agree with everything that you've just said, Emma, that I would add to that, organisations also need to take responsibility because.

00:50:57 Hedwig Verhagen

You know, a lot of if if somebody experiences mental health difficulties as a result of a work culture, they individually can't change that for themselves. You know, it needs to have a change of that of that culture.

00:51:15 Hedwig Verhagen

And it could be something like.

00:51:18 Hedwig Verhagen

You know, having an awareness of the impact of of secondary trauma when when you're allocating work.

00:51:27 Hedwig Verhagen

So for example I I used to be practise manager in adoption support agency.

00:51:33 Hedwig Verhagen

There was a really high trauma content of, you know, a lot of our work, but then there was also work like running workshops or doing parents and child play groups or.

00:51:48 Hedwig Verhagen

Or speaking at a preparation group, or you know if you looked for it, there were also pieces of work that didn't have such a high trauma content. So how do you balance those things out? Because often when people become really experienced and really good at their job, what you start to do it as an organisation is you give them all the really.

00:52:10 Hedwig Verhagen

And you think ohh let's give that the Confucius stuff to people who are maybe newer. But if you do kind of trauma informed case allocation and work allocation, you'd think ohh no, this person that's really good at their job and has got really tough cases. They also need to spend time.

00:52:30 Hedwig Verhagen

Running the toddler group because they need a little bit of time away from the really heavy trauma stuff.

00:52:35 Hedwig Verhagen

Umm. And that that is organisational, isn't it?

00:52:42 Emma Fincham

And I think yeah. And I think you're right, it is organisational and it's like you said about running those sessions that you ran when you were doing those well-being sessions and.

00:52:52 Emma Fincham

That messaging is saying we know that this time is important for you. So as an organisation we're saying to you you can take that time out, you can take that hour, hour and a half, whatever that looks like that's within your working day. We are not expecting you to work the hour and a half later.

You may well feel that you may well feel well. I've gotta catch up now. I've gotta make up. I've gotta do.

00:53:13 Emma Fincham

You know, but as as much as possible, it is organisation saying.

00:53:18 Emma Fincham

We get it. You need that time. You need that space. That's really important. In addition to whatever other reflective supervision space that you have. And I suppose it's encouraging, isn't it? It when you were describing it hitting it was great that you were saying there were people from all different layers, you know, kind of within management structures and through the through those organisations and systems.

00:53:40 Emma Fincham

From all different levels attending cause that does.

00:53:44 Emma Fincham

I I think it's about you. You can kind of model, can't you? From if you think of it in hierarchical management terms, but you can also model across an organisation. Just just saying I'm going to this thing. It's really it's really useful. It's really helpful and and not not kind.

00:53:57 Emma Fincham

Of doing it under covertly.

00:54:00 Emma Fincham

I'm just creeping off to my well-being session and I'm hoping no one's gonna. I'm hoping no one's clocked, but that's what that is in my diary because now I have to reveal that I might not be feeling my mentally best self. And actually you, you might be feeling your mentally best self because you prioritise.

00:54:18 Emma Fincham

Going to that session, though, it's kind of reframing. It, isn't.

00:54:22 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah. And that's really what we saw that a lot of people came to these sessions with people who'd recognised the importance. Mm-hmm. And I did lots of thinking about how can we get people there who might not have recognised it? That's, you know, that's that's tricky, isn't it? But yeah, it's it's a really interesting point that you've just raised.

00:54:42 Hedwig Verhagen

I'm adult.

00:54:44 Hedwig Verhagen

Yeah, actually it should be something that you you wear as a badge of pride. Yes, I do these things. You know, I take my well-being seriously and that should be seen as as a as a real achievement. It's something that that people.

00:54:59 Hedwig Verhagen

Kind of look and.

00:54:59 Hedwig Verhagen

Think ohh. I'm gonna do that.

00:55:03 Ellyse Partington

Yeah. So not to take much more of your.

00:55:06 Ellyse Partington

Time but one last question.

00:55:11 Ellyse Partington

Just wondering if you know of any resources that are available, anything you've used, been recommended, anything you can share the social workers personally, professionally, carers, foster carers, kids, carers and doctors. Everyone it applies to everyone. If there's anything out there that you know about, obviously we've mentioned.

00:55:31 Ellyse Partington

Sessions, like well-being for Members, you know, the first aid of mental health training, all that sort of stuff. Is there anything else that you know about that you can share?

00:55:41 Hedwig Verhagen

Do you know something to start with Emma? Cause I need some thinking time on that.

00:55:45 Emma Fincham

Yeah. No, that's fine. So one of the things, well, a couple of the things that they talked to us about when we did the training was obviously most people, if not everybody will be aware of the Samaritans and that's an organisation that continues to provide expert support. So we were told that if somebody was.

00:56:04 Emma Fincham

As part of our training, if we were particularly worried about someone or we weren't able to to kind of have the conversation in the there and in the here and now in the moment, I think is what I mean, that we would signposting to the Samaritans. And so that I've got the card in front of me and it's, you know, the the telephone number is 116123. So we would we were told to kind of you know.

00:56:24 Emma Fincham

Try and remember that there's also a organisation that's a texting service, so it's called shout. I think probably lots of people are aware of that as well. I think lots of people benefited from using that during lockdown and it continues to be a service available.

00:56:38 Emma Fincham

My understanding is that the text support service, so I think you text, you know whatever it is that you're worrying about. The text number is 85258, so it's 85258 and and then somebody who's

trained who will have done similar to the mental health first aid training will be responding to that. And my understanding is that you then.

00:56:58 Emma Fincham

Kind of have a.

00:56:59 Emma Fincham

You know backwards and forwards text conversation.

00:57:01 Emma Fincham

So those are two things that kind of immediately come to mind. Lots of organisations now are training members and staff to become mental health first aiders, so it is probably a good thing to kind of look out for, but also to ask ask your organisation, ask your managers, ask the budget holders you know, is this training available? Can we think about it?

00:57:23 Emma Fincham

And we buy a few places for people. I think that's probably a kind of a good starting point. Those are the things off the top of my head. Well, they're off top of my head from the training, but I'm sure there's many, many sort of resources and places you can go to. But I would probably.

00:57:38 Emma Fincham

Need to go away and look them up.

00:57:42 Ellyse Partington

Like in along with this I any resources that we've got. You know we've got some books about supporting mental health have looked after and adopted children and even though that's not directly for the well-being there we go. Emma's got it in hand.

00:57:54 Ellyse Partington

That was being planned.

00:57:58 Ellyse Partington

That's one of our best sellers and obviously that is helping others with their mental health. So any resources that we can think of we can add afterwards once I'm sharing.

00:58:09 Hedwig Verhagen

And I think for for people individually to if we're thinking about social workers, particularly in this conversation, it's if you look at.

00:58:21 Hedwig Verhagen

You know the the professional framework of, you know, the the, the things that we sign up to in our profession. One of them is is to recognise if there's something going on for you personally that's affecting your practise and that you you do something about that. And and I when I used to read that.

00:58:43 Hedwig Verhagen

When I was.

00:58:44 Hedwig Verhagen

Social work students and you have to kind of look at how do.

00:58:47 Hedwig Verhagen

You evidence all of that, I felt.

00:58:49 Hedwig Verhagen

That that was quite restrictive. It was almost a.

00:58:52 Hedwig Verhagen

Little bit like.

00:58:53 Hedwig Verhagen

Well, if there's something wrong with you, you know, make sure that you're still a good social worker and and it almost felt a little bit scary, like ohh. I hope you know, I hope I never have to do that.

00:59:03 Hedwig Verhagen

Many years down the line and looking up those frameworks again, now with students.

00:59:09 Hedwig Verhagen

I see it as really liberating. I see it as. Do you know what? Looking after myself and standing up for what I need is part of my professional code? That is what being a good social worker looks like. So to say I need a little bit of time this afternoon.

00:59:30 Hedwig Verhagen

Or I you know, whatever I need, I need to not share those meetings. I maybe need somebody to come with me on this visit or I, you know, whatever it is that you might.

00:59:44 Hedwig Verhagen

Eat that is actually being a good social worker that is doing the things that you've signed up to do when when you became a registered social worker, and that also means that not taking a laptop out at night but doing something that helps you, whatever that looks like, it's different.

01:00:04 Hedwig Verhagen

For everybody. But doing that thing, it doesn't mean that you.

01:00:09 Hedwig Verhagen

You're not. You know, you're kind of prioritising yourself over your work, because I I know from the well-being sessions that people really struggle with that. They really struggle to put themselves forward and need before the needs of their families. But actually, if you go to that dance class, if you go for for a cup of coffee with a friend, you can just talk to them.

01:00:31 Hedwig Verhagen

If you meditate, if you go for a run, if you watch, you know whatever you will like to watch on television, that's relaxing. Whatever it is that works for you, you are actually being a good social worker because that's part of what being a good professional looks like.

01:00:49 Hedwig Verhagen

Look after yourself.

01:00:52 Emma Fincham

Really, really wise. Powerful words.

01:00:57 Ellyse Partington

However, we match that you know that.

01:01:03

I feel.

01:01:03 Hedwig Verhagen

Just chat with social work students.

01:01:08 Ellyse Partington

I feel a lot lighter after that.

01:01:11 Ellyse Partington

Ohh good. Thank you both for that. That was very insightful. I think it's gonna be really useful for everyone.