

**Stop It Now!**

UK & IRELAND

Helping prevent  
child sexual abuse

**THE  
LUCY FAITHFULL  
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children

**Supporting forensic staff –  
some ideas to promote and  
sustain staff wellbeing**

**Tom Squire**

The only UK-wide charity  
dedicated solely to tackling child  
sexual abuse

# The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is...

- A child protection charity operating across the whole of UK
- Specialising in prevention of child sexual abuse
- Named after Baroness Faithfull of Wolvercote – life peer and former Director of Social Services in Oxfordshire
- Set up the Stop It Now! helpline and campaign in 2002



# Overview



- Trauma, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, burn out
- Barriers to recognition of the issues
- What might help?
- Our experience at LFF and on the Stop It Now! helpline
- Disclaimer

## Potential consequences of trauma for victims:

- *Premature sexualisation*: confusion around the meaning and purpose of sex; associations with sexual anxiety, promiscuity, risk taking, risk aversion, arousal problems, flash backs
- *Stigma*: viewing the self and sex as shameful and 'dirty'. Carrying the guilt and responsibility that belongs to the person who abused

## Potential consequences of trauma for victims:

- *Betrayal*: difficulties in trust, especially in intimate relationships, and respect, especially in regard to authority figures
- *Powerlessness*: problems with efficacy and self esteem, depression, fatalism

# Potential consequences of engaging with abusive content for workers:

- *Sexualisation*: seeing things that only those who abuse used to see. Anxieties about arousal to images, or that prospect. Preoccupation with abuse, hyper-vigilance, arousal problems, flash backs
- *Stigma*: ‘How can you do that job?’ ‘Doesn’t it make you go mad?’

# Potential consequences of engaging with abusive content for workers:

- *Betrayal*: becoming nihilistic. Feeling disappointed in mankind as a man. Feeling disappointed in mankind as a woman
- *Powerlessness*: seeing no end to the work, seeing no outcome to the work, feeling impotent about volume, depravity

# Potential impact of working with traumatic material:

- Trauma
- Vicarious Trauma
- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout



# Trauma and Vicarious Trauma

- *Trauma*: exposure to actual or threatened death or serious injury or sexual violence
- *Vicarious Trauma [VT]*: The witnessing of, or learning about another's traumatic experience evoking an empathic response

# Compassion Fatigue and Burnout



- *Compassion Fatigue*: the cost of caring; fatigue from empathic engagement
- *Burnout*: the stress and demands of the work; lack of resources; emotional exhaustion; lack of a sense of accomplishment. It may attach to other issues, like PRINTERS & STAPLERS!

# Barriers to recognition of impact issues

- *Organisational*: time, costs, resources, commitment, especially when VT is intermittent
- *Martyrdom*: ‘If I don’t do this, who will?’; ‘What do my feelings matter when ... ?’
- *Suspicion of outsiders*: ‘Coming over here, suggesting things...’
- *A culture of stoicism and ‘ruggedness’*: particularly powerful in organisations traditionally characterised by a masculine ethos
- *Stigma*: a sense of personal failure, fears of how they will be perceived by colleagues, self-blame, etc

# So what might help?



# Stop It Now! helpline and staff support

- Check-in and check-out at the start of shifts
- Duty manager accessible at all times
- Team meetings and ongoing training
- 1:1 and peer supervision
- Slack channel – real time communication with colleagues and managers
- Feedback about work (internal and external)
- Celebrating successes
- Evaluation of service



# Solutions – individual level

- *Compassionate detachment*
- *Compassion satisfaction*
- *Vicarious resilience*
- *Vicarious transformation*
- *Tetris!*

# Compassionate detachment

- The ability to be present with a person while remaining separate from the outcomes of their predicament
- It's not indifference
- It allows us to carry on working and resist burnout
- The skill is to accept the limits of what one can do, and to do what one can do to the limit of our skill

# Compassion satisfaction

- This comes from knowing or believing that our work has positive impacts
- Occasionally we may need reminding of this, if formal or organisational feedback is not forthcoming
- We may need to consciously connect our work with its outcomes

# Vicarious resilience and transformation



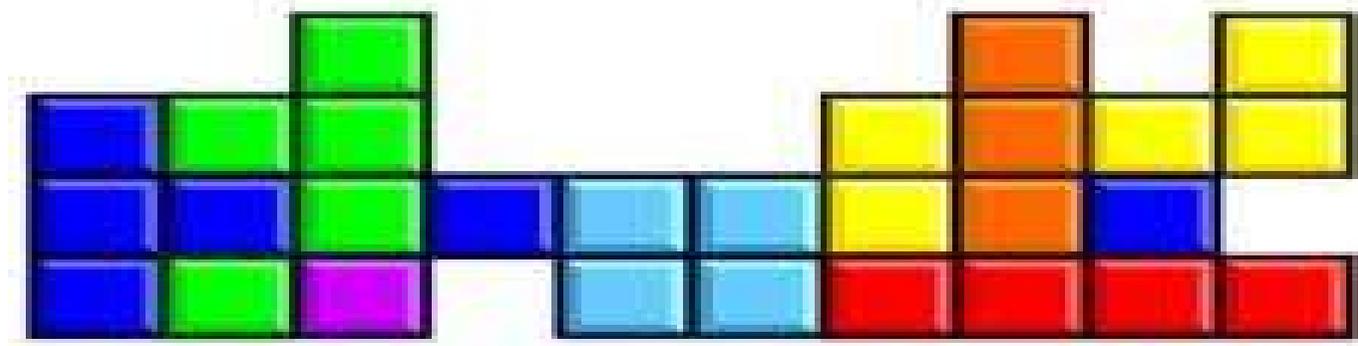
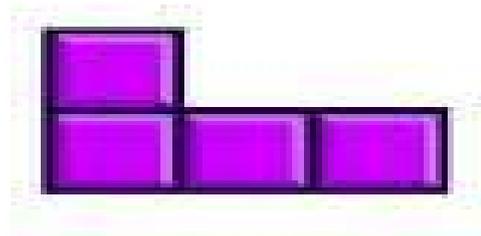
# Vicarious resilience and transformation

- Tapping into others' resilience and benefitting from it
- Mental judo: we can transform our potentially negative response into a positive one by considering the outcomes of our work (which may never be known)
- We have to connect with others who do the same work
- We have to construct a sense of hope and meaning in the work
- Many victims of crime 'bounce back', and so may we

# Solutions: Institutional

- 1. Leadership and mission*
- 2. Management and supervision*
- 3. Employee empowerment, and working environment*
- 4. Training and professional development*
- 5. Staff healthcare and wellbeing*

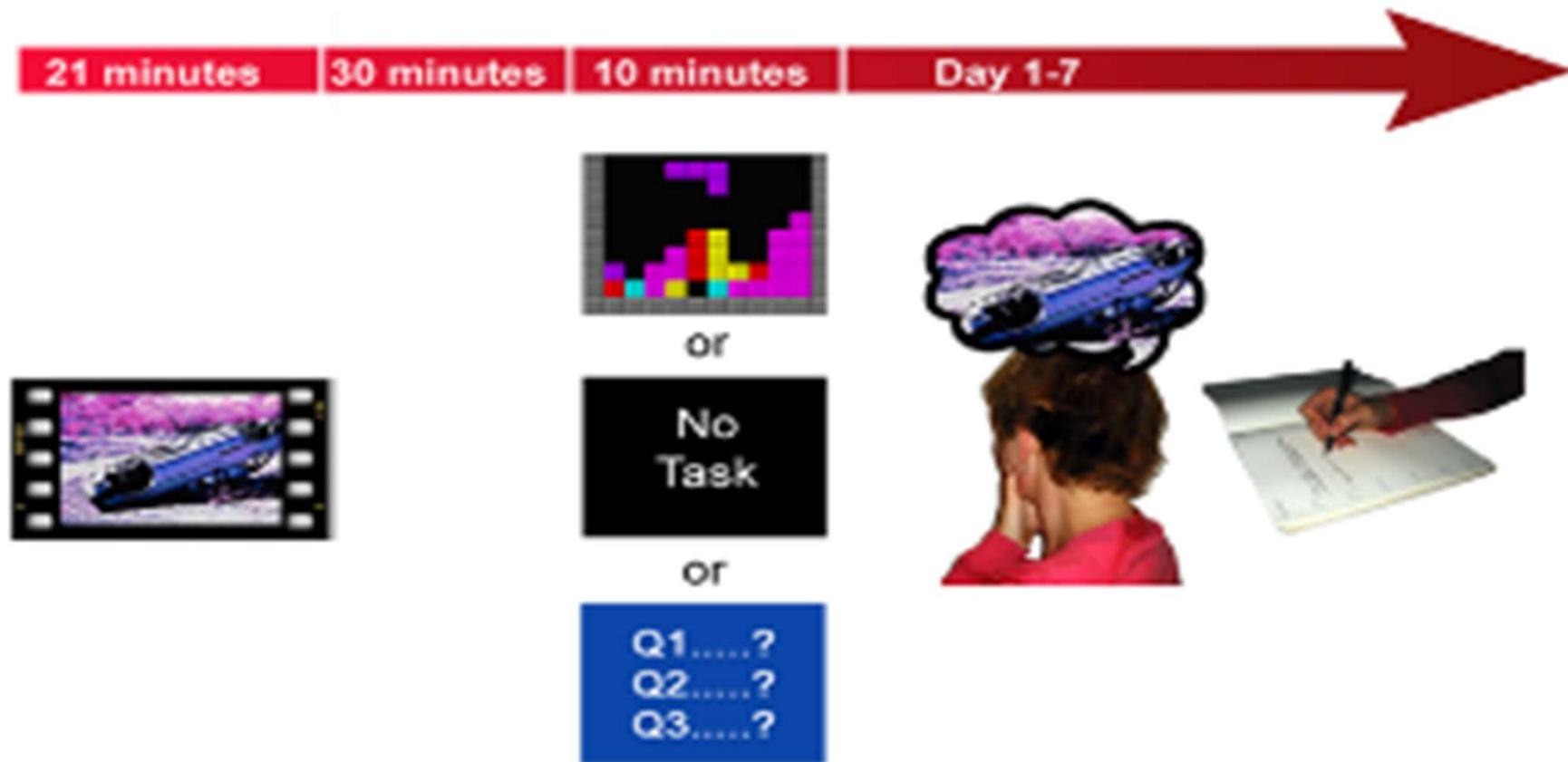
# Tetris!



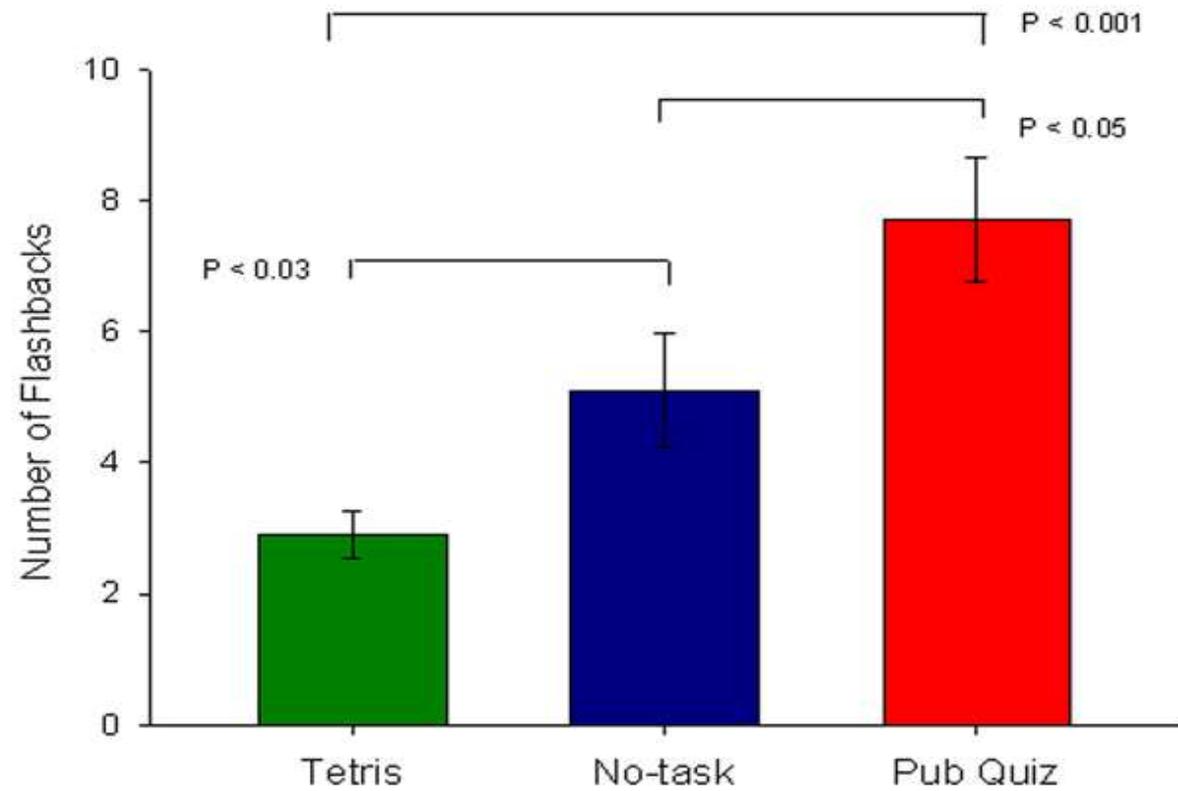
# Trauma and imagery

- People in law enforcement who are affected by or traumatised by abusive imagery report:
- Intrusive memories, or ‘flashbacks’, of the images themselves
- Preoccupation with the material, and its subject matter

# Tetris – a cognitive vaccine for flashbacks



Key outcome variable: flashback frequency in diary over 1-week for the three conditions



Holmes EA, James EL, Kilford EJ, Deerprouse C (2010) Key Steps in Developing a Cognitive Vaccine against Traumatic Flashbacks: Visuospatial Tetris versus Verbal Pub Quiz. PLOS ONE 5(11): e13706. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0013706>

## Diary compliance and recognition memory after 1-week

Measure	No-task (n = 20)		Tetris (n = 20)		Pub Quiz (n = 20)		ANOVA
	mean	sem	mean	sem	mean	sem	
Diary compliance	8.60	0.94	8.80	1.32	8.75	0.85	$F_{(2,57)} = 0.82$ (NS)
Recognition memory score	20.95	1.59	20.65	0.64	19.65	1.04	$F_{(2, 57)} = 0.34$ (NS)

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0013706.t005

Holmes EA, James EL, Kilford EJ, Deepröse C (2010) Key Steps in Developing a Cognitive Vaccine against Traumatic Flashbacks: Visuospatial Tetris versus Verbal Pub Quiz. PLOS ONE 5(11): e13706. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0013706>

# Tetris: summary

- There was no significant difference between the groups in terms of their recalling the factual content of the traumatic film: the Tetris players were just as likely to recall what happened, but they were less emotionally 'disturbed' by it
- Playing Tetris appears to dampen the intrusive, involuntary feature of flashback memories

# Finally some staff suggestions

- The work environment: a space away from desks for breaks; pleasant environment etc
- Debriefing, breaks, time-limits on exposure
- Peer support and sympathetic management who 'get it'
- Feedback from cases
- Consideration given to other disturbing content aside from IIOC

Let's keep an eye on the bigger picture...





**Child sexual abuse is  
preventable, not inevitable.**

**Thank you for your  
attention**

Tom Squire  
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