Lisa Conradi: Whether you are an interviewer who leads a group of interviewers or you have multiple roles, whatever it might be, what are the ways in which you can create some of that self-care, those space, those boundaries?

Christina Rouse: Welcome. Now that we've laid the groundwork and built anticipation, it's time I introduced our very esteemed guest for this episode, Lisa Conrady.

Lisa Conradi: Hi, Christina. I'm so happy to be here. So, I'm the executive director here at the Chadwick Center and we're part of Radi Children's Hospital and we're a large children's advocacy center in Southern California.

So thrilled to be here, to be talking with you about resilience in and forensic

Christina Rouse: interviewers. Yeah, I know Lisa, you and I have so many off. Mike conversations about interviewing and the impact of the work. So I was excited you accepted my invitation to continue having this conversation. I know our listeners are gonna be very intrigued by what we have to say.

So before we dive into it, tell us a little bit more about your role at Chadwick and what you do

Lisa Conradi: there. Yeah. So I've been at the Chadwick Center for just about 16 years. I'm actually trained as a psychologist and did some trauma therapy. But for the last six or seven years, I've been more in the kind of management position and I've overseen all of our C a C center functions including support for our forensic interviewers.

Mm-hmm. And I stepped into the role of executive director just a couple years ago. So, Happy to be in the position I am to support this tremendous workforce who do this important work. Yeah.

Christina Rouse: That's great. And like you mentioned your CAC is huge. So I imagine you all deal with a lot of things that will be very similar to other CACs once we get into the topic.

Lisa Conradi: Yeah. We are the largest in San Diego County. Um, San Diego's a pretty large city, so we're one of the larger urban centers. And we have about, Anywhere from 80 to a hundred staff on site here at the Chadwick Center.

Christina Rouse: Wow. Okay. Yeah. We know the spectrum of C'S organizational structures or one, two.

Many. Yeah. So before we get into this conversation that I know will really dive into deeper in a minute, I wanted to kick us off with a quote and this quote's from Ivan Robertson. He's an organizational psychologist. He says, resilience represents a constellation of characteristics that protect individuals from the potential negative effect of stressors.

So Lisa, when you hear this explanation from Ivan about resilience, do you feel that this rings true for the profession of forensic interviewers?

Lisa Conradi: I do, and I think the word protect is for me, is one of the most important words because I think that it can protect, but I don't wanna assume that they're not affected by it.

Mm-hmm. So a lot of the challenge is how do you be fully present in this work where you're spending time hearing these stories? And I think our folks. Do a tremendous job. Being able to get in the room are incredibly resilient, to be able to be in that space where they can be fully present and do the work, and then leave the room and be able to kind of take that protection off to go about mm-hmm.

Into world and into their life. So I really love this, but I think that it's such a dynamic process, resilience, I find. Mm-hmm. And I think some days, Feel more resilient than others and how do you be fully present and also keep that kind of protected distance from some of the really tough things that our folks hear all the time.

As

Christina Rouse: a forensic interviewer, it was very much of putting on that coat of armor. Yeah. To be able to do the work, but at the same time, not having such a heavy coat that you're unable to build connection with. Right. The clients and families, and so there is this. Balance that interviewers need to have in order to stay sustained throughout the work.

So maybe there's some folks listening who don't really know what a forensic interviewer does and what their day-to-day job might be. So walk us through like what an interviewer might be exposed to through their role in a C A C.

Lisa Conradi: So, I think forensic interviewers have this kind of macro role and a micro role.

So the macro role is, they are the people who are designated to be present with. The stories that come in. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And the child abuse stories that come in. But, on a day-to-day role we support the investigation for child abuse. So at our C a C, referrals come in through our multidisciplinary team partners.

So that might be law enforcement, that might be child welfare services. And there's usually an active investigation either for child abuse, but our interviewers will do interviews if there's like a witness to homicide mm-hmm. or to other things that might not be within the family.

so their job is to sit down and have a conversation. With the child in a developmentally appropriate way. The conversation is videotaped and watched live at the same time by our multidisciplinary team partners who are in another room. And there's a very structured interview process that they use in order to talk to kids and kind of find out.

What they've experienced. Mm-hmm. What they've seen, what's happened, and then that information is gathered for the multidisciplinary team to be used as part of the case. So I think that's maybe the more specific thing. Yeah. But you know, the way I think about what. Our interviewers do is that in many ways, they are the first people who have sat with the child in a really thoughtful, developmentally appropriate way and been with them to ask about their experience and done it in a non-judgmental way.

Done it in a way where child can feel comfortable telling this person And you know, better than anybody, but, interviewing really emerged out of this desire not to question kids multiple times. So let's take one really good person with really great skills and the ability to connect with kids and have them sit with them and find out what happens so the child doesn't have to tell their story over and over again.

Christina Rouse: Yeah. I think there's two buckets of the task at hand for interviewers. There's the physical element of. Being the one interviewing the child, like being physically present in that room, hearing the information. All of those things are the physical tasks working with the team. But then there's this emotional task that interviewers have as well.

And I know we're gonna dive into it when we get into the exposure to secondary traumatic stress, but a lot of times, Outsiders who aren't interviewers, or even sometimes some of our M D T partners will say, oh, forensic interviewers, they just talk to kids. And a lot of times they put that word in there, just talk to kids.

And it kind of minimizes the role, the whole role of an interviewer that they have outside of just being physically present in that interview room.

Lisa Conradi: When I think what's interesting is, I heard a quote once and I apologize, I can't remember who said it, but to witness somebody's experience is one of the most profound ways to provide healing and support to them.

so it's funny to me that this language of just talk when in fact I really see interviewers as the witnesses to a child's experience, and they're the first to do that. so it really is they come in with this very concrete task to support the investigation and ask the right questions in the right way.

And that comes with its own level of. Stress because this is gonna need to stand up in court. There's all of that, but there's also being the witness to somebody else's pain and to trauma that most people, if they heard as many stories as our interviewers hear, would cause a lot of distress or mm-hmm.

People don't wanna talk about it, and they do it every day. you mentioned the types of abuse that comes into CACs. It's not just the physical abuse, it's not just the horrific neglect cases. It's the things that most people don't wanna have the conversations about. Right? The child sexual abuse, the witnessing to domestic violence, the potential homicide of family members, right?

Christina Rouse: And it's not just elaborating on the narrative of what happened, it's getting. Some rhymes, really nitty gritty details that people shouldn't be hearing, And being in that position is going to impact the person. Right. You mentioned this already, it's not a matter of, if they get impacted or when we know now, based off of a lot of the research and just experiences with interviewers that the job.

Will impact you?

Lisa Conradi: I would say that must, Because I think to be somebody who chooses this line of work, if you were somebody who didn't care about children and families who didn't care about healing, you aren't gonna enter into working in a C A C.

that's the one thing we all have in common, so, You are predisposed to be somebody who cares about the safety and wellbeing of children and families, and you are the one who is hearing about the cracks and the abuse and the horrible things that can happen within children and families.

So by being somebody who cares, you are also. Somebody who is going to be vulnerable to being affected by it.

Christina Rouse: Yeah. We mentioned this a little bit already, that just the role of a forensic interviewer is exposing themselves to be impacted by the work, but what are you seeing at your c a C from your interviewers, whether that's things that you've observed or things that they've been told you about how the

Lisa Conradi: job impacts them.

I think that the easy answer would be hearing the stories. Wears on you over time. Mm-hmm. And that is absolutely true. But what I also see is that how the organization responds and the amount of support around our interviewers can change that narrative.

Mm-hmm. So what I mean by that is an interviewer. this is necessary in some CACs, but if you're the executive director and the forensic interviewer and you've gotta keep the lights on and do the interviews that's gonna be really difficult because you're trying to wear multiple hats and meet multiple different kinds of needs.

and have to make sure that the organization's functioning But if Part of the conversations that we've had is how do we protect the role of forensic interviewer and make sure that they have all the support that they need, that they're not dealing with. And I can't say that this is always the case, but the system that we chart in is going down or the interviewing equipment, not catching a D V D for whatever. Hopefully we don't have that as much anymore, but all those kind of logistical stresses can feel 10 times worse because of what they're doing. So how can we protect them? and make sure they don't have to worry about all these kind of organizational stressors that come on.

Because their focus is our families. Yeah,

Christina Rouse: I love that you mentioned these multiple hats that interviewers wear, cuz there's definitely pros and cons for interviewers wearing multiple hats. On the one side, I can see it as being a space for them to be a. Protected from doing an interview, cuz maybe they have another task on hand.

But you mentioned the con of that would be, it just invites them to be exposed to all of these other stressors that Right. Their forensic interviewer role might not have.

Lisa Conradi: I think you're right. I don't think there's a one size fits all model. Mm-hmm. I think there's definitely places where.

Forensic interviewers are also therapists and they might have both roles, and they do forensic interviewing to a point where they feel really present, but then they go to therapy and that's a completely different thing. So it kind of, Prevents this sort of burnout, which I mm-hmm.

I think is, fantastic. But then on the other side of it, that can also make you feel like you've been stretched in a lot of different directions. Mm-hmm. And how do you keep on top of one thing for us as another? So in some ways that's driven by organizational and business needs, but the, how is that interviewer best function?

Are they somebody who does best if they can Only do it part-time and then do these other activities to balance out their time because I don't think we were meant to hear story after story day after day, year after year without being affected by it.

Christina Rouse: Yeah. We're not robots. Last time you checked.

Right. And I think there are times where whether our organization or maybe even our M D T puts us in this position to be able to churn out. You know, High number of caseloads or a lot of interviews. Yeah. And then they seem sometimes surprised by when interviewers are like, Ooh, I need a break from this.

Like this. is a lot. And what I'm hopeful with our conversation as it evolves into some additional things that we'll get into would be for folks to realize that these are things people need to be thinking about as they either develop their programming. Or need to start having conversations in house with, because we want interviewers to be sustained In the centers for a long period of time.

Lisa Conradi: that experience just can't be overstated. Mm-hmm. I think there's something with having new folks who bring a, different energy and different perspective to the work, we're really fortunate that One of our interviewers has been here.

I'm not gonna get it fully right, but 25, 26, 27 years. Wow. So I would argue she's probably one of the most senior forensic interviewers in the country. Yep. And then another that's been here, I wanna say around 13, 14 years, two of them have been here for six years.

So we have four interviewers total. So our newest are six years. So I think that What that really does is we have folks in who have figured out how they can do this work, are incredibly passionate about it, and I think that goes a long way. If we're able to harness the passion for the work.

I will say a lot of my interviewers, it's not being in the room and hearing the stories, although some really bother them and there's some really bad cases that come through. But it really is all the other pieces and what happens with the child. So it's great if you can get disclosure.

Mm-hmm. But if it's a horrible disclosure and then you find out later that the alleged perpetrator no charges repressed, nothing happens with that. You're sitting there as an interviewer knowing that what happened and having spent that time with the child and. And it just feels like where's the justice in the world?

Yeah. When things like to happen. So I think there's definitely some distress that can happen, but the being present in the room isn't the worst part of it, if that makes

Christina Rouse: sense. Yeah. I can completely relate to that. And that example you just gave about, a non-disclosure case and that child potentially going back in the home.

Yeah. On the flip side, interviewers also experience cases where they have very rich, detailed disclosures. Yeah. And there's still nothing done on the system side. and the other thing with interviewers is we don't have control over anything that happens. Yeah. Once the interview is over, and I think without the explanation of what the job really is on the front end for interviewers.

To know this is what you're walking into. These are the things you're gonna be dealing with and seeing and hearing. If that's not provided, that's a tough thing to figure out. Middle, Middle job. Right.

Lisa Conradi: one of the things that I've been thinking a lot about is, I mean, you mentioned that they don't have Once the interview's over on what happens, Conversations we've been having is, in some ways it feels like they don't have control before the interview happens. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So, for example, we just updated our protocol and we're kind of rolling out. So, the goal is that we interview more kids cuz that's a strategic priority for us What that means is there might be kids coming in who we may not think need to be interviewed. Mm-hmm. But our partners are saying, this child needs to be interviewed. And

at the end of the day, the partner, after a thoughtful conversation, the partner's the one, you know, there's the investigating agencies.

And if they determine that an interview is needed, we do an interview. And that doesn't always feel very good. And so, yeah. supporting this thing that is bigger than. themselves, than our program. It's the broader investigation. And sometimes that may or may not feel like the right decision in a given moment with a given case.

So I think the managing of what is within their locus of control, mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Can be really. really challenging.

Christina Rouse: Very challenging. Yeah. So I know we talked about, hearing the stories and we've talked a little bit about the system and how that might be impactful. But what all of this is really encompassing is the exposure to secondary traumatic.

Stress. Yeah. And so I want us to talk about what we know about the impact of s t s on our interviewers and kind of what we're seeing happening in the field and what we can do about it. So one of the largest groups that I know you and I both use as a resource is the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

Mm-hmm. They do so much in the field of trauma informed care and secondary traumatic stress. And a lot of the research they've done among others, studies are showing that 50% of folks in the child welfare system industry are at high risk. Not just risk. high risk of, yeah. Secondary traumatic stress.

And so when you think about s t s and interviewers, we know SDS encompasses a lot of different things and realms in a spectrum. What are your thoughts around interviewers being impacted by sts?

Lisa Conradi: Well, I think that those numbers might even be higher for interviewers. And I think it's because of the constant dosage of exposure to trauma.

Mm-hmm. It's just one after the other. We talk about therapists, they might hear about it, but they might get several sessions where they get to see what happens with the child. They get to see healing happen. part of it, I think, for an interviewer and how. Interviewers specifically are impacted by s t s is they are there during the acute phase.

Mm-hmm. When it's a disclosure when it's coming out and they only hear what happened. Now they're part of the big team. Mm-hmm. On addressing it. But one of the things our interviewers have asked is there a way we can hear, you know, was this case successfully prosecuted? Because they don't get a connection to all the teamwork that might happen later.

They might get a little bit. But how can we make sure there's a feedback loop? So when I think about that, some of it is them just not knowing what happens. they don't get to hold the hope as actively as maybe some of our other folks might hold it they don't know what happens.

So I think that's part of it. But I also know there's been some particularly really tough cases. I don't think Covid has helped the situation at all. As things opened up, we heard more reports of more severe child abuse. And so I think that just even the content of the cases, take it home.

They are thinking about it. it's impacting their daily life in terms of mm-hmm. The ability to sleep, relationships, what is it? Healthy relationships if they have kids then, you know, it's very hard to interview, a child that's the age of their child and hear about what might have happened.

So I think all of these things come up for them and Really it, it can create the same experiences that a trauma itself can create in a person. Mm-hmm. I mean, that's really what secondary traumatic stress is, is having the same responses as somebody who's been directly exposed to the trauma.

Christina Rouse: Yeah. I found the most surprising part of that is how it impacts your outside of work day-to-day life. Yeah. That you don't necessarily see right away. Yeah. know, it's not an immediate reaction or response that you might have. It's a, like you said, accumulation. It's accumulation of the work.

Yeah. That over time, especially for forensic interviewers, it shifts their whole mindset and view of the world, basically. Yeah. Yeah. And how they wanna operate in it, how they want their kids to live in it. Right. And it's important for interviewers. To be able to have those open conversations about the impact in order to move through how it's impacting them.

Yeah.

Lisa Conradi: what happens is they become finally attuned to safety and risk in the community. Because they're coming in and they hear whatever story a child is presenting that day that is a violation of safety, that is somebody they trusted,

hurt them, whatever it might be, cuz that's, the majority of the cases that come in is somebody in the family, somebody in the extended family, or a trusted friend is the person who is hurting the child.

Mm-hmm. And the way that, that colors your view of the world, your sense of safety, of who you can trust and who you can't trust. Mm-hmm. can profoundly shift. And so to take that. And try to turn it off. ideally you turn it on, so you're tuned in when you're in the interview and then you're able to turn it off and go back and fully connect and be relational with the people you care about.

But we don't work that way, as you said. We're not robots. how can we support them in this transition and knowing that they're probably just generally gonna be more attuned to. Safety and risk in ways that a lot of other people aren't.

Christina Rouse: Yeah. Or even aware that they need to be. I think that's the other thing, interviewers, because of the things that children tell them, know things that a lot of laypeople don't even think about, When you think about some of these really severe cases, or even how some cases have evolved with the use of technology and online solicitation, yeah. it's like they don't know what they don't know. Right. And as an interviewer, there were days where I was like, I really wish I still lived in that world where Right.

I didn't know what I know. Yeah. Cuz it is tough to

Lisa Conradi: navigate. I'm just remembering. There was a time where I was working on a. A grant proposal and I had to go in and essentially I had to read all the forensic interviewing notes and code them in a way to gather some data to present in the proposal. I don't recommend anybody go in and read interviewing notes, which are our folks do, put do notes and I know not all interviewers do. And reading kind of 30 notes. about disclosures and horrible abuse, kind of one after the other. And I just had a moment where I was angry at the world and angry at all.

You know, People who hurt children in a way that, and I kind of saw people hurting children everywhere I went. then thought about, Oh, that's what interviewers are experiencing. These are their stories. This is their week, or this is their month. Mm-hmm. Or this cases that I read. So how do we help them be present, but also protect them from, because it was a not a pleasant space to be in.

Mm-hmm. You're not gonna stay in there if if you don't have all the supports in place to do that.

Christina Rouse: Yeah, and we see that so frequently. You are very blessed, I think, and some people would probably be very jealous that you have interviewers there that. your newest ones have been there six years?

Yeah. Most CACs have turnover rates of a year to three years on their interviewers. Yeah. And for lots of different reasons, right? I don't wanna say that it's just organizational or just the types of cases. Like a lot of it is the person as well. Some people can be forensic interviewers and some people can't be forensic interviewers.

So there's all these dynamics Yeah. That, are part of this recipe of. How do you stay in the work?

Lisa Conradi: absolutely. One of the things that we've done, and we implemented it, I would say, I dunno, somewhere 10 plus years ago now, and it's just really stuck, is we do have a just a monthly. I don't even wanna call it supervision.

It's not peer review, but it's a space for interviewers mm-hmm. To come. And it's facilitated by somebody who's just a little external. Who's part of our organization, but external to that program and is a really gifted. Clinician and facilitator of groups and very trusted by this group, but this is a sacred time where they get to have this kind of monthly, it's theirs and.

we've talked about maybe having it be every other week instead, and sometimes things just get a little busy, so it was hard to keep to that. But monthly it can absolutely happen and they get to come in and they get to, if it was a tough case and sometimes it is about the cases.

Mm-hmm. Okay. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So there was this homicide or this case in the news and they were all involved and that was really stressful. And they'll process through that. But they also talk about the organizational stuff that's frustrating to them. And that's what is always interesting to me is that, I think I said it earlier is it is much about the work, but that trickles into everything else.

And so how you are in the organization absolutely plays a part. And so how can we make sure that our organizations are to support this mm-hmm. you mentioned the locust of control as one of these big profound impacts on interviewers. Let's talk a little bit about just empathic strain, but on the flip side, also compassion satisfaction, cuz I think those two things go hand in hand.

Christina Rouse: So for me, when I think about empathic strain as an interviewer, it was the emotional exhaustion, right? That I was just constantly, again, you have to be on. Right. Every time you walk in that room. And that is very, very draining. absolutely. And I imagine, because it's part of. An investigation that is going to have to be defensible in court.

Lisa Conradi: There's how the questions are asked. people are watching. It's not a, as a therapist, I can have a conversation with a, child and make some mis, I don't wanna say mistakes, but I, my language may not be right the first time. Mm-hmm. And that's gonna be, maybe that'll be okay.

And part of the process is maybe figuring out the language and I get to do it with them. That's a different thing than. Oh no, how you asked this question was leading based on X, Y, and Z. So it's being fully present and also knowing the stakes attached to it. and I think we have to be careful because an investigation is so much more than a forensic interview.

Hopefully. Yes. Yeah. But there's some cases we've had where. The strength of the case was the disclosure during the forensic interview, and how do we protect that and make sure that it can be defended. But I think that, you know, you mentioned empathic strain of just really that constant presence, that constant focus being in the dungeon with somebody.

Mm-hmm. You know, And then trying to get out of it and then go back into it An hour later with somebody else,

Christina Rouse: Yeah. I had an, another interviewer always referred to it as the pressure cooker. And without that release valve, whether that's a supervisor or a good organizational structure to support your interviewers, without that release valve, the only other option of a pressure cooker is to explode or right for people really implode.

Yeah. And that's very detrimental.

Lisa Conradi: One of the things we talk about is laughter. And the humor. Mm-hmm. And I don't know how other folks, but we certainly have some dark humor. And if you were external to us and you walked in and you heard some of it, you might be horrified.

But, families aren't hearing this. This isn't about families in negative con, but you're either gonna laugh or you're gonna cry, these emotions are gonna come

out in some way. it's okay if it happens to be cracking a joke just to blow off some steam and to release that valve and the pressure cooker.

Mm-hmm. Right. it's going to happen one way or the other.

Christina Rouse: it. I think it's, gallow's humor is a tactic that extends to most all of the m d t partners and invest investigations. And can be very therapeutic. There is a line, I would say, with gallow's humor that once it starts becoming harmful to kind of keep it in check, but it is a release valve.

And so when you are working with interviewers at your C a C, Lisa, What are some things you notice in them where you can start going, oh, I think they need a release valve. They need something. What are some behaviors you've noticed? Whether it's things they've said or

Lisa Conradi: things they've, yeah, I mean some of our folks are really good at telling you when they need that.

I think that's something that we've tried to mirror, but I think we also see it when there's this Well, this is wrong over here and we need to fix this and we need to fix this. the stress starts to come into everything else that they're doing. so then the culture becomes one where we're talking about all the things that are stressing us out all the time.

Not in a productive way, but in a cyclic loop sort of way. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So when we're talking about these things, there has to be some sort of resolution. They can't just keep going around and around in a circle and building. Each other up, right? They have to have some sort of place that they release.

We also see folks starting to take more sick days. Having health concerns. so really trying to promote take that time care of yourself. What are things that we can do to make sure that You can be here for the families, and if you can't then it's okay.

Honestly, I think we're undergoing a really interesting generational shift where leaders, there was a. Time and a generation of white knuckle gripping. Mm-hmm. Never taking days off. Yep. Never acknowledging this. We've really tried to create a culture where, please take your vacation days.

Hey, your day ended a little bit early today. Go home, take a break. And having that be planned out, having that be supported, making sure they don't feel like

they're missing something if they take that time off. So. as an organization and as an organizational leader, I have to model that and I have to make sure that my team is doing that.

Like, let's take our time. if you want me here a month from now, then I need to be able to take this space right now. and we have to be conscious of that. We're not in a world anymore where it's just like knuckle grip it keep going right? Suck it up. We really have to listen to those cues and when things start to feel more stressful, we have to let some of that air out.

Christina Rouse: Yeah. And I think for individuals that might not be vocal because you have to be okay with one being vulnerable. Yeah. And then also having trust in whomever you're being vocal to, to help you work through that. So there are these underlying elements that are hopefully present in your, program. But for individuals that aren't vocal, I think what I see most of the time is just flat out disengagement all around. Yeah. And that's true for not only just interviewers, but also our team members, just kind of that flat affect of not caring or their complacency being really.

Vocal. Or even commentary around like, well it's, this is just what it is. It is what it is. So there might be things that people can see in behaviors for folks that maybe don't feel comfortable being vocal about it.

Lisa Conradi: Right. I think that disengagement is such an important part and I think as leaders it really is on us to.

Think about that and hopefully get in there before that happens. Cuz one of the things that I've found is once you get to disengagement, you can come back from it. But it's kind of like turning the whole bus around. So are there ways we can get in before that happens? so it, really requires being proactive on the front about.

Wellness. And we have an organizational health committee that's across our whole center and half or three quarters of the members are forensic, the team of forensic interviewers. this is their priority and I think that says a lot and is really one they might.

Appreciate this work more than maybe other groups do, but they also need and wanna be involved in it. that can kind of offset some of that moral distress. Mm-hmm. And, we talked about the locus of control. There's a lot in the world of an interviewer that they can't control but they can control sitting on that committee and giving feedback and trying to create a wellness. Culture within the

organization. that's a hundred percent within their control. so how can we equip all of our staff in a cac? But really, we're talking about interviewers today.

How can we equip them to really feel like there are things they can control? Because there are a lot of things they can't.

Christina Rouse: Yep. And I think for leaders, supervisors, eds really having that process in place from the start. And if it's not a process, an opportunity to be thoughtful and mindful about what that process could turn into, right?

Because like you said, there's been a shift in how people have been working and so people need to adapt policies and procedures to embrace that culture of support and safety and protection for forensic interviewers. And I think sometimes for these smaller centers, That process can seem very overwhelming to, how do I change policy and procedure because I'm really answering to my M D T and if I protect my interviewers, maybe that means kids aren't being served and how do I deal with, you know, they have their own moral distress around that.

Yeah, absolutely. Grading healthy boundaries. So let's give our listeners some practical ideas or some things that you've seen work well in the field.

Lisa Conradi: Well, I think the first one we've already kind of talked about it is being proactive and having a plan. So if you don't start talking about it at the beginning, you're going to end up having to be reactive to issues.

So what is your self-care plan for you as a leader? Mm-hmm. Maybe we start there. Yeah. Because it's really hard to lead others when you feel like your own tank is empty. So whether you are an interviewer, Who leads a group of interviewers or you have multiple roles, whatever it might be.

What are the ways in which you can create some of that, self-care, those space, those boundaries and when I say boundaries, I actually really suggest that. That leaders look and go, what is our zone control? Yeah. So what do I have control over? And now, and think about it in relation to your M D T.

Mm-hmm. Okay. What do I, as a leader or supervisor or as an interviewer, what is within my Z control and then what is in my zone of influence? Mm-hmm. So that's kind of the secondary and then what is outside my control. What might be outside my control is when a partner says, this absolutely needs to be an interview and we need to do it right away.

That's something that might just need to happen. So figuring out what falls where. Kind of take some of the, I'm constantly reacting out of it. Mm-hmm. You know, That's gonna come up in your work. So I think getting ahead of it and saying, I know that this could lead to secondary traumatic stress.

This can lead to compassion fatigue. So that's a big part of it. I think another thing I would suggest is all of our folks, Look, my experience is folks get in this work because it aligns with their purpose and their desire to support families. It's something they're really passionate about. there's a reason. We've had folks here at least for six years, They feel like this is what they're supposed to be doing. Yeah. At least right now this aligns. So how do we harness that? What is it about it that they really like and how, as a leader can you help tune in?

Now all of us have parts of our job that we really enjoy, and then parts of our job that we don't like very much. You can't have a job where a hundred percent is things that you love all the time. If that exists, somebody needs to tell me so that I can figure it out.

But how do we support them in highlighting the things that bring them joy, that bring them energy, that align with their purpose. I pull a lot of this some folks might be familiar with Brian Miller. He has this C cert model that was really creative for clinicians, but it's been expanded for child welfare.

And I know there's been some work in CACs on this work as well. and it really is tuning in paying attention because taking 20 vacations a year will not address secondary trauma. Right. it might feel good. It might sound good in theory, but. I think folks know the things that they go, oh, I really like that part.

I'm really excited there, so how can we tune into that every day? Because that will ultimately be what helps sustain you over time. As you're talking, Lisa, what's really resonating with me is that, We need to be talking to our interviewers about what they need, And figuring out who they are as an individual rather than creating policies that might not fit. What will help keep them sustained. And as you were talking about that passion for the work I mean, interviewers are hardcore Yeah. passion people. Yeah. And they love the work. And there's a book I recently read called Love and Work by Marcus Buckingham.

Christina Rouse: Mm-hmm. And he talks about these red threads that you can find throughout your day where you love it, Yeah. Where you get lost in the work and interviewers. What I feel is to be true is that when we're in the room

interacting with children and families, time dissipates and it goes, and we're just really there and that's what we're passionate about.

But you don't know that unless you ask. And I think supervisors need to, about asking what do you need from me as a leader Yeah. To help support you. There's not a one size fits all for this answer.

Lisa Conradi: exactly. Like what do you need from me? And sometimes folks don't even know where they get energy.

So we've had conversations of just check in with it over the next week. Mm-hmm. And we'll come back and what is the thing that you were doing that was really exciting? Cuz I think that focusing on looking for that. Can also be very powerful. Mm-hmm. Cuz you're looking at the things you enjoy versus the things that you're frustrated about.

Christina Rouse: So some concrete things I've heard folks say that they do to help build healthy boundaries for interviewers is reduce the number of interviews a day. Now I think you and I both agree we're not gonna solve that. Yeah. That answer, that's a longstanding answer, but it's something to consider. How do you feel about that as part of.

Addressing the exposure tots and impact of interview orders.

Lisa Conradi: I think that that could be an answer. I think it's a, as you kind of alluded to, it's a complicated answer because at every cac, there's the interview time in the room. Mm-hmm. But then, I've heard some CACs each interviewer does four a day because all they do is go in the room and do the interview and then leave.

Mm-hmm. like ours, there's a whole pre and a post. And they might do. Mm-hmm. So each interview is about three hours of time a day, so they might do two a day. Mm-hmm. So it really varies because I think it's thinking about what's on their plate. And our folks will say it's the documentation that takes up the most time and all the other supports that need to happen. So actually think that one of the concrete things is looking at what are the priorities for your organization and how can you maximize the role of the interviewer within that. And really look at what they need to do versus what they don't need to do.

so that might mean. Decreasing the amount of interviews a day to sustain them. Or it might mean taking off something else from their plate, right. That they do

and having advocacy pick that up or something. that way they can focus on being in the room, cuz that is where they are they're the most fed.

So it is back to that individualized, tailored response, thinking about what your organization needs as well.

Christina Rouse: And I would like for us not to lose sight of continuing development for interviewers. Yeah. As a way that feeds them. Absolutely. I think absolutely. Sometimes it can look like just a task at hand, but having been an interviewer, training, ongoing education, Those opportunities to learn and grow really fed my desire to keep wanting to do the work.

And so, yeah, we need to carve out the time for folks to

Lisa Conradi: do that. Absolutely. I think training is key. We've really focused on that recently and I also think, there's a way to have some sort of wellness s t s group that they can engage in. They also get a lot through peer review and supporting each other.

So what are ways to build connection and growth? Within the group of, in if you only have one interviewer at your c a c, there's regional resources maybe to have multiple interview. Mm-hmm. You know? Mm-hmm. connect with other CACs. But when people feel alone mm-hmm. that isolation can be so detrimental to their wellbeing.

And so how do we connect them to others who are doing the same work? Hmm. and we could talk for days about this topic because we know it's so important for interviewers and supervisors to have. So what would be one takeaway you could give the listeners, whether it's a resource or a tool that you found to be really impactful for your program?

I would say that there's a lot of great resources. You mentioned the National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a lot of stuff on secondary traumatic stress. The St. S Consortium is a great resource that talks a lot about you know, ways we can support. I would also suggest looking into the C cert model.

Just to really get a sense of how to support staff in finding what feeds them and gives them energy. you know, I also am a big fan of an organizational approach. Mm-hmm. So there's things like the secondary traumatic stress organizational assessment.

Yeah. Um, that's a free assessment. So leaders It might be a good idea for them to look into that. Um, That's outta the University of Kentucky. It's free. You just Google, s t s i o a and you can find it there. So I think that there's a lot of resources that are available mm-hmm. mm-hmm. for

Christina Rouse: folks. Yeah, I love it, and I think you hit it on the head. Interviewing can feel like being on an island, but as you just mentioned, there are so many resources and so many passionate people in the field that just wanna support other interviewers. You just have to ask.

Lisa Conradi: Exactly. Well, thank you so much, Lisa, for the conversation.

Christina Rouse: It's been great. If folks are curious about how you started your Sacred Peer Support group, what's the best way for people to get in touch with you?

Lisa Conradi: They could go ahead and email me. I'm at el conrad rch hsd.org. Great. Thanks so much. Thank you.