

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

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

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

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

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

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

([01:45](#)):

So today we're going to continue our conversation about a meditation practice in our encounters with human beings. And today we thought we'd talk about some of the challenging effects of certain practice settings and share with you some resources that we came across recently that illustrate some of these unique challenges. And then talk about some strategies that we found helpful in managing these encounters. So the first thing, this was a few years ago now, but I came across a really interesting article. It was a meta review study actually, where they looked at a lot of different studies and they found that people who work in certain practice arenas encountered particular burdens related to chronic stress. And they specifically named child welfare and also palliative care, both domains that I have a lot of interest and curiosity about because from a practice perspective, just from my own experience, I had certainly felt that.

([02:53](#)):

And as I talked to other social workers, that was definitely the case. And while there was this awareness that these areas are particularly challenging to work in, there wasn't really much information about what you do about that and how to sustain yourself in that practice. They specifically talked in this article about these as marginalized practice areas, and their concept of that I thought was really interesting because they talked about it as sort of this phenomena of these very intense arenas where social workers particularly work that most people don't understand, have a window into really know what goes on there. And child welfare and end of life care or serious illness care are definitely two of those domains. So this is when you go to a cocktail party and people say, oh, what do you, you tell them and they're like, oh, I need to go get a canopy or talk to that person over there. And we kind of joke about it, but it's also real that we experience the fact that most people don't want to know very much about what it is that we do all day every day in our work lives in a very intense way.

Sara Remke ([04:18](#)):

Or maybe that's interesting. Do they not want to know or do they just kind of don't know what to say? I mean, I've definitely experienced when I say, oh, I'm an end of life doula, oh, and they move back from me. And sometimes I think it just lights something up in them that they have never sort of thought about or encountered, or they just immediately go into their imagination of how horrifying that must be. Where for me, that's a very rich, beautiful practice

Stacy Remke [\(04:49\)](#):

Right, and maybe it doesn't matter so much why or what they're reacting to, but we definitely experience that most of society is pretty unconscious about what goes on in these areas. And to be frank, a lot of people would prefer to keep it that way.

Sara Remke [\(05:05\)](#):

Yes, I think that's probably true

Stacy Remke [\(05:06\)](#):

Because they are very challenging. Yeah, they're hard.

Sara Remke [\(05:09\)](#):

Yeah. So not only does that become isolating for the practitioner, which is really important to address because you might not even realize that you're feeling isolated because of the work you do. Where do you get your support from?

Stacy Remke [\(05:24\)](#):

Yeah, and it reminds me, I know we've been having conversations lately about first responders and they're probably another group that falls into this category. And it reminds me of when I was a palliative care social worker and our team was experiencing a lot of stress and we thought, well, it'd be a good idea to have a consultant come in and talk with us, help us process our experience and get some support. And the person, we had several people in a way audition for the role I guess. But I remember one person came in and just got wide-eyed and shocked and said, I don't know how people do what you do. You're so special. And that was just not helpful, and you freak out the consultant. That's just not a helpful

[\(06:15\)](#):

Process at all anyway, so you kind of need somebody who can understand your world and your perspective within it. I'm reminded too of the, I remember after seeing a documentary about 911 and the firehouses and police stations who had lost so many first responders and they tried sending therapists or counselors in to talk to them and they didn't want to talk to them. And then they had the idea of doing some training and then sending in retired cops and firemen to sit around basically and process it with them. And those were the people that they talked to. So there's

Sara Remke [\(07:03\)](#):

Really interesting, what a great idea.

Stacy Remke [\(07:05\)](#):

Yeah, I mean, I think there's something real about when you're in the midst of something really challenging, it's too much. It feels like too much to explain it to somebody who doesn't understand that world. So it can be isolating.

Sara Remke ([07:20](#)):

I had like to bring something up that's parallel to this conversation, but I remember, I'm going to say 25 years ago when I kind of knew what you did, but not really. I knew you worked at the hospital and with kids, and one day you said to me, well, I've had 30 kids die this month. And I was just like, what?

Stacy Remke ([07:43](#)):

Probably wasn't quite that many, but still

Sara Remke ([07:46](#)):

Okay. But it was a big number, 10, 12, whatever. And you sort of looked shocked that I didn't know that, and I sort of felt shocked that I didn't really know that. And so hard to know is that just because you assumed no one wanted to know about it? Or is that because I really didn't want to know about it and I don't have an answer to that question, but that isolation really, that's how I see that.

Stacy Remke ([08:13](#)):

And I think I probably imagined, I think I was probably so immersed in that world, it didn't occur to me to talk about it really to people outside of it, which is another problem.

Sara Remke ([08:25](#)):

This is what we want to bring up, that part of caring for yourself is finding the people that you can debrief with or the people that you can talk to. It doesn't have to be all about your work people. You do want to encourage people to intentionally find someone that they can just be able to say something about what they're doing to, yeah,

Stacy Remke ([08:50](#)):

A supportive community. And it probably would be a good idea to counter that tendency for these to become these marginalized practice arenas and try and cultivate connections, maybe like an affinity group of people that can hear you talk about what you need to with all due respect for confidentiality, et cetera. Of course, making some agreements about that, but that you can practice talking about it with people outside of it and just get some feedback from, I just want to say the larger universe.

Sara Remke ([09:25](#)):

Sometimes we imagine that nobody wants to hear that, and we isolate ourselves more. Just take small steps. Maybe just say, oh gosh, I lost a really hard client this month or something. It just take small steps and I'm dealing with a tough issue with this kid this month. And begin slowly and begin to find people that you can trust

Stacy Remke ([09:52](#)):

Or even do it very consciously. You could very intentionally invite a few people to sit down and have tea and discussion to share about what your work life is like, and maybe you do that together, offer that to one another, but to kind of intentionally ask for a support circle around our work.

Sara Remke ([10:15](#)):

And because we know what we know, we're not looking for people to make us feel better. We're not looking for people to fix us. We're not looking for people to say everything's going to be okay. We're just looking for people who can actually just listen to us sort of debrief.

Stacy Remke ([10:35](#)):

I often think about it as finding people who can tolerate listening to what we have to say, and I mean what we feel pressure to say to talk about. And I think that for each of us might be a very special circle of people and really important for sure.

Sara Remke ([10:56](#)):

So many of us have that need to go in and make everything be all right. And it would be good for all of us to understand that that's not really what we're asking for. That's not really what's going to help us. What's going to help is to just say hello to that situation.

Stacy Remke ([11:13](#)):

Yeah. This is maybe a great segue into, so one of the other components of this article that I thought was really interesting and that also resonated with a video that I watched recently was about how these marginalized practice arenas are also ones where we tend to experience a lot of stress. So that creates kind of a hyperactivation of our physiologic fight, flight, freeze response. Our system is kind of flooded with cortisol and other stress hormones, and if we don't consciously relieve those, allow our systems to decompress, if you will, or to pause that blood. It has a lot of wear and tear effects on our system.

Sara Remke ([12:10](#)):

And our bodies. So for people who don't really know what that means, so cortisol can feel, your body can feel hyper activated, Right?

Stacy Remke ([12:21](#)):

And I think when it happens over time, it can even be something you don't even notice. It becomes kind of your normal state. And that's I think, the real danger when you become so used to it that you don't even notice anymore that you're hyper activated.

Sara Remke ([12:47](#)):

I know a guy who'd spent some time in prison and talked about when you're just kind of always on hyper awareness and then he ended up having a lot of kidney problems

Stacy Remke ([12:57](#)):

And heart

Sara Remke ([12:57](#)):

The body. That's what you're saying, that when those hormones rush through the body, it takes its toll on the body. So we want to really encourage people to notice what that state is, to notice that that's what it is, and then to start to think about how can I turn that down in my brain

Stacy Remke ([13:19](#)):

Very consciously. And it's a very basic form of self-care. And the video that I saw recently, all the neuroscience is pointing to the importance of meditation skills for managing these things. And I know you and I have talked about that already and personally found that really true, that these were immensely helpful. So I just want to make that link here between not just as meditation a good idea, but there's actually growing support for developing some kind of practice that helps us manage not just the emotional and kind of psychological toll of working in these challenging arenas, but also on a very basic physical level. There's some real benefits to be gained.

Sara Remke ([14:06](#)):

So what are the things that might come out of your cortisol being hyper activated? You might start drinking too much, you might start eating too much

Stacy Remke ([14:17](#)):

Sort of self-soothing behaviors like that

Sara Remke ([14:19](#)):

You might in eat in front of the tv,

Stacy Remke ([14:23](#)):

Yup, Feel tired all the time,

Sara Remke ([14:25](#)):

Exhaustion,

Stacy Remke ([14:26](#)):

High blood pressure over time. People develop cardiac and other physiologic problems. We've come to understand it as weathering on the body, just this sort of people whose bodies feel older than they are kind of thing.

Sara Remke ([14:47](#)):

What a fantastic term. And that weathering and that also, I just heard something on NPR radio yesterday and they were talking about in prison, 50 year olds are considered geriatric because their bodies have accelerated that aging. So that's interesting. That's just what you're saying.

Stacy Remke ([15:04](#)):

And certainly in recent years when we've become more sensitized to the burdens of racism and certain groups within our community, that's very much an issue that gets talked about. It's one of the social disparities of health, for example. So just a lot of good reasons for paying attention. And I know you said, oh, we should encourage people to notice. And I'm thinking, yeah, but I got to a place where I didn't notice anymore. So how do we help people?

Sara Remke ([15:37](#)):

I was just going to ask you, how are people supposed to notice when their cortisol is running at a overly active, or what's the word you would use for that?

Stacy Remke ([15:48](#)):

It's kind of hyperactive, sort of fight, flight, freeze response, those sort of natural self-protective, physiological responses that are, they're very primitive in the sense that they're very ancient. There's a good Ted talk about a physician who talks about adverse childhood experiences, ACEs, and she talks about, it's all great to have those reactions when you want to get your heart pumping and run fast to get away from a bear. But what if there's no bear and your body's doing that? That's kind of the workload of your body.

Sara Remke ([16:31](#)):

And the way I would describe that in my meditation work is that you're constantly living in a state of survival to see that. You begin to feel that everything, every decision is about survival, and it just becomes really unconscious. So that's a great thing to be able to start to notice.

Stacy Remke ([16:53](#)):

And that's exactly it, the exact problem that we feel like we're essentially running for our lives all the time.

Sara Remke ([17:01](#)):

Yeah, it makes me think of when my son was born, I was sent to the hospital. It was an ice storm, and these two young doctors, well, what were they? Residents?

Stacy Remke ([17:14](#)):

Residents

Sara Remke ([17:14](#)):

Just all hyped up to go in and give me a cesarean. And the more mature doctor came in and said, relax everybody. This is going to be tomorrow morning. And I was so grateful. But that's what we're talking about. They're all hyped up. And it took a mature, more experienced doctor to say, wait a minute, everybody. Let's just chill out for a minute.

Stacy Remke ([17:38](#)):

And so maybe we all have that inside of ourselves somewhere that sort of more wiser self that we can invoke, call in to kind of help us remember some basic skills to help calm those systems. Right?

Sara Remke ([17:55](#)):

Yeah. I feel like for myself, I ask myself a lot, is this decision life or death? That's a place to start? Is this decision going to make me make or break me? And then you start to go, oh, no. Okay, it's not. And that's the beginning of being able to pay attention to that state.

Stacy Remke ([18:19](#)):

And I think of that too often. There's more options. There's more than we see when we're in that sort of pressured space. And so if we can calm down kind of step back. I know you talked about grounding as being a really good first step, and I wonder if you could just talk a little bit through what that might look like.

Sara Remke ([18:41](#)):

What grounding does is it helps us find our own resources. It brings us back into the body. It connects us deep into the earth. It's like an anchor and everything kind of settle down from that hyperactivity, let's say. It helps. It helps us just settle down for a minute. We breathe into our belly. We just take a few minutes to remind ourselves where we are. It helps us to become much more conscious of the situation, more conscious of ourselves, more conscious of what is the actual question here.

Stacy Remke ([19:27](#)):

And I think of literally, again, that wise self reminding myself those deep cleansing breaths and experience my feet on the ground and that connection to the earth soles of my shoes, to just really deeply go into that connection.

Sara Remke ([19:50](#)):

And there's really natural ways too. Gardening is a fantastic way to ground yourself. Having your feet on the dirt, having your hands in the dirt exercise is a really great way to ground.

Stacy Remke ([20:02](#)):

I certainly spent a lot of years pursuing carbohydrates as a ground, which I would not necessarily recommend as the best way, but I recognize it happens a lot.

Sara Remke ([20:11](#)):

Oh yeah. I think you're not alone in that department. And the other thing that grounding really does, it not only helps us be centered and aware in ourselves, it reminds us that there's always so much more going on than we will ever know.

Stacy Remke ([20:29](#)):

Yes.

Sara Remke ([20:29](#)):

We're just not capable of knowing every thing, every energy, every person, every emotion that is happening at one time. We don't know the bigger picture, no matter how much we think we might, we don't know. And so somehow, if we can allow ourselves to just know that it takes some of the pressure off of us to have to fix everything.

Stacy Remke ([20:53](#)):

Absolutely. So as a basic exercise for grounding, and again, I do this many times a day, just remind myself to be nice and grounded in this moment, experience my feet on the ground. I draw up nice cleansing earth energy from the middle of the earth. I let it fill my whole body, take deep cleansing breaths.

Sara Remke ([21:25](#)):

I mean, let's just, I'll lead us through a grounding technique that I use all the time. Okay. Just close your eyes and just really breathe deeply into your belly. Just breathe deeply. Big inhale, big exhale. Inhale, exhale. And as you inhale, just bring back all the little pieces of yourself that you've left at any place, at any time throughout the day or week or year. Just let those pieces come back to yourself. Big exhale.

And then resting in the center of your head, you can just imagine a grounding cord. Let Mother Earth just send you a grounding cord all the way up to the base of your spine. And you can let that be three inches, six inches. It could be as wide as your hips, almost like a seat that you can sit on. Just really allow yourself to feel that connection to deep in the very center of the earth.

[\(22:36\)](#):

And then put your arms straight up over your head and just bring them down the sides of your body, all the way down above your head, down the sides, underneath your feet, and say hello to that egg shape aura that surrounds you. That's your own personal energetic body. Just say hello to that space. And while we're there, put a gauge out in front of you for your cortisol and just ask yourself, at what level is my cortisol running right now? You might get 80%, you might get 20%. There's no right answer. And if you feel like it's too high, just take your hand and turn that knob down. Keep breathing deeply into your belly.

[\(23:40\)](#):

Just let anything that's sort of jangling you or anything you're ready to let go of, let it just fall off down your grounding cord. Let it just get recycled in the center of the earth. Just reaffirm those edges of that bubble that surround you, that egg shape, and really allow yourself to feel that spaciousness that surrounds you. And then just drop your grounding cord. Let it just fall away down into the very center of the earth. It'll get recycled and resting in the center of your head. Invite a fresh grounding cord to come all the way up to meet you at the base of your first chakra, the base of your spine, whatever you want to call that. Let that be three inches, six inches as wide as your hips. Allow yourself to feel that growing relationship with the earth. Let it support you. Say hello to the top of your head. That's your crown to say hello to your crown. Thank your body for being willing to change. You can sit there as long as you want, or you can open your eyes. It's up to you. How did that feel?

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

Good.

Sara Remke [\(25:26\)](#):

It's amazing how quickly we can just calm ourselves.

Stacy Remke [\(25:30\)](#):

Exactly. When you talked about the gauge and you talked about the number, I was thinking too low, medium, just right, too high for this present moment. So that would be another way, because I'm thinking, well, 80% might be good for something if you were being chased by a bear

Sara Remke [\(25:50\)](#):

If you're in agency, for sure.

Stacy Remke [\(25:53\)](#):

Yeah. Anyway, you could play with that. However it makes sense.

Sara Remke [\(25:57\)](#):

Yeah.



Stacy Remke ([25:57](#)):

We were talking earlier about the complexity of situations that we're in and the fact that everybody involved has their own role to play in it, and we don't have that control. And we had talked about understanding that people have their own reasons for doing what they do, and sometimes as helpers or would be helpers, we're stuck with other people's choices that we may not agree with. And anyway, we were just talking about saying hello, just wanting to expand on that a little bit. Again, that's something that we can do privately in our own minds, that wiser self reminding us by saying, hello. We're acknowledging that people are who they are, and they have their own agency and their own role to play in the situation, and we're just not in control of all these elements. So it's a deep respect, I think,

Sara Remke ([26:54](#)):

I think saying, hello, that technique has actually really changed my life. And what's happening when you say hello, is that you're not asking anyone to be any different from who they are in that exact moment. You're just saying hello to them. And when they feel that you're not asking them to be any different, they feel seen. If we're asking someone to be different, we're not seeing them for who they are. And so as you begin to just say hello without any kind of agenda, or say you're at that cocktail party and somebody, what you do, what you say hello to their discomfort, you say hello to their fear, our impulse would be to shy away and turn away and stop talking and go somewhere else. But if we just say, oh, hello, discomforts,

Stacy Remke ([27:53](#)):

Or just hello to Sue or Larry, or whoever they are,

Sara Remke ([27:57](#)):

It just lets moment.

Stacy Remke ([27:59](#)):

Yes. We don't even need to know what's behind their reaction, but we can just respect that it's right for them in that moment. And that does convey some sort of recognition that allows people to be more present on both sides of the interaction.

Sara Remke ([28:18](#)):

That's right.

Stacy Remke ([28:19](#)):

It's really cool. Yeah,

Sara Remke ([28:20](#)):

That's right. And it's very tricky to get to the place where you can just say it without having an agenda, but with practice, it can create a natural energetic boundary between yourself and the other person. And you realize that what they're saying is not who you are and what you're saying is not who they are. And then that gives you a place to actually meet in the middle.

Stacy Remke ([28:47](#)):

Yeah. I think of as a social worker, we always start with trying to get to know the person's situation and doing an assessment and blah, blah, blah. I shouldn't say blah, blah, blah. That's the beginning step towards a change effort. And I think of the, hello as part of that, appreciating that there's very good reasons why the person's in the situation that they're in. And it really has helped me in my practice to step back from judgment. I won't say I've freed myself of judgments, that's going to be a lifelong challenge, but I think it has helped me to remind myself again, kind of invoke that wiser self that I don't know everything about this person. I don't know why they're in this moment. I want to be respectful of the fact that they've arrived at this moment for reasons that makes sense to, and my job is to try and understand that. And so the hello could be a really powerful starting point for that process too.

Sara Remke ([29:51](#)):

That's a really good point, because people arrive at a situation not necessarily because of their own doing. And so when you say hello to that and you just release that kind of blame or shame or whatever, you just say, okay, so here you are. You're here today. This is where we are. Hello. Right. And then it gives you a place to move forward from.

Stacy Remke ([30:14](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Sara Remke ([30:15](#)):

Yeah. Because most people who are in terrible situations, they don't want to be there.

Stacy Remke ([30:22](#)):

And they're also judging themselves a lot already, whether they're aware of it or not. And that's part of the resistance and the barrier to change. So being able to appreciate that at least a cleaner starting point, I think.

Sara Remke ([30:39](#)):

Yeah. And it also, on some level, like you say, it's much more respectful. It helps you to not be judgmental. And of course, we all have our judgments, we all have our opinions, but the more that we can interact with people with less judgment, the better our relationships are going to be.

Stacy Remke ([30:59](#)):

Absolutely.

Sara Remke ([31:01](#)):

Yeah.

Stacy Remke ([31:02](#)):

Well, maybe that's a good place to pause for this conversation.

Sara Remke ([31:08](#)):

Yeah,

Stacy Remke ([31:08](#)):

Just want to thank everyone for joining us and listening in, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts. We'll post some links to the resources that we mentioned in our discussion today too, so you can check those out when you have time.

Sara Remke ([31:25](#)):

Great. Thanks Stacy.

Stacy Remke ([31:26](#)):

Thanks, Sara. See you later. Okay,

Sara Remke ([31:28](#)):

Bye.

Speaker 3 ([31:32](#)):

This podcast was supported in part by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division.