

Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference (WPPNT)

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WPPNT Reminders

How to join the Zoom webinar

- **Online:** <https://dhs.wi.zoomgov.com/j/1606358142>
- **Phone:** 669-254-5252
- Enter the Webinar ID: 160 635 8142#.
 - Press # again to join. (There is no participant ID)

Reminders for participants

- Join online or by phone by 11 a.m. Central and wait for the host to start the webinar. Your camera and audio/microphone are disabled.
- [Download or view the presentation materials](#). The evaluation survey opens at 11:59 a.m. the day of the presentation.
- Ask questions to the presenter(s) in the Zoom Q&A window. Each presenter will decide when to address questions. People who join by phone cannot ask questions.
- Use Zoom chat to communicate with the WPPNT coordinator or to share information related to the presentation.
- [Participate live to earn continuing education hours](#) (CEHs). Complete the evaluation survey within two weeks of the live presentation and confirmation of your CEH will be returned by email.
- A link to the video recording of the presentation is posted within four business days of the presentation.
- Presentation materials, evaluations, and video recordings are on the WPPNT webpage: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wppnt/2023.htm>



Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference

June 8, 2023, 11:00am-12:00pm

Becoming **Desensitized to Overdoses as Helping Professionals**

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Wisconsin Clinical Coordinator



Agenda

1. Explore the ways in which we become **informed** and **exposed** to overdoses related to substance use.
2. Describe the **impact** of overdose deaths, identify the concerns with becoming desensitized, and explore how it impacts professionals in this field.
3. List ways to help **support** grief and loss for helping professionals dealing with fatal overdoses among individuals and communities.



I Either...

Love someone

Am someone

Lost someone

*Whose life has been affected
by addiction*



What about those who have **helped** someone ?

Where this journey **began**

3 Graduates from
Residential

A Softball
Associate & High-
School Classmate's
Sibling

Clients: 5 **Years** & 5
Days

Span of Overdoses
at 3 WI **Clinics** as
Clinical Supervisor

Are we
concerned
about how it's
impacting
others?

How are people
coping with it?

Do we have
support in
place to help the
helpers?

Are other
people
struggling
with this?

Am I becoming
desensitized to
overdoses?

How can we
help?



Working with SUD **Populations**

- Professionals are more likely to work with SUD populations in some capacity.
 - Substance Use Counselors
 - Other Counselors (LPC, LMFT)
 - Medical
 - Law Enforcement
 - Social Workers
 - Educators & Researchers
 - Community Organizations
- The Ripple Effects of SUD

Testifying in Madison



Survey Responses 2022

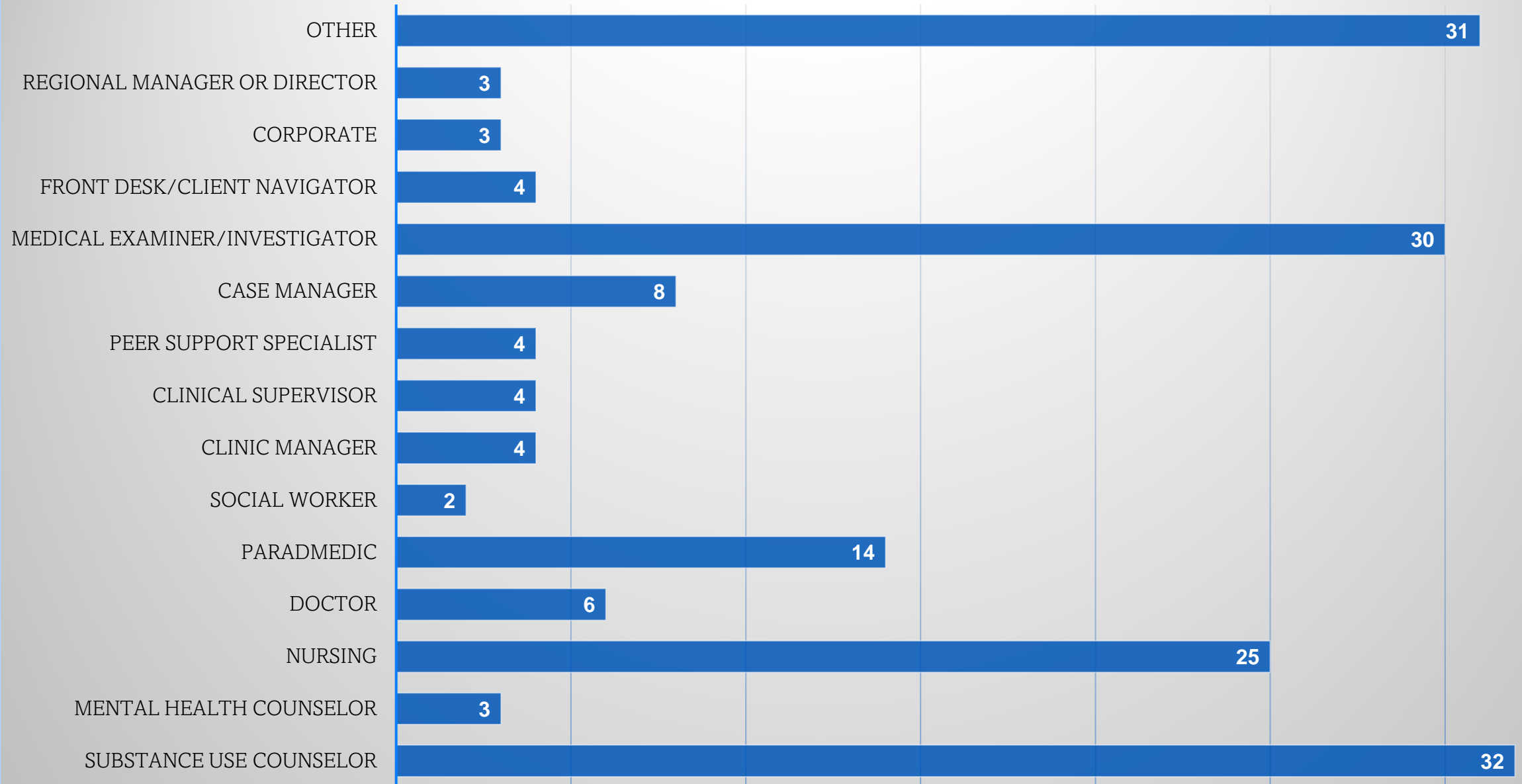
27 pages

worth of feedback from
survey participants about
coping, improvement,
and overall discussion on
the topic.

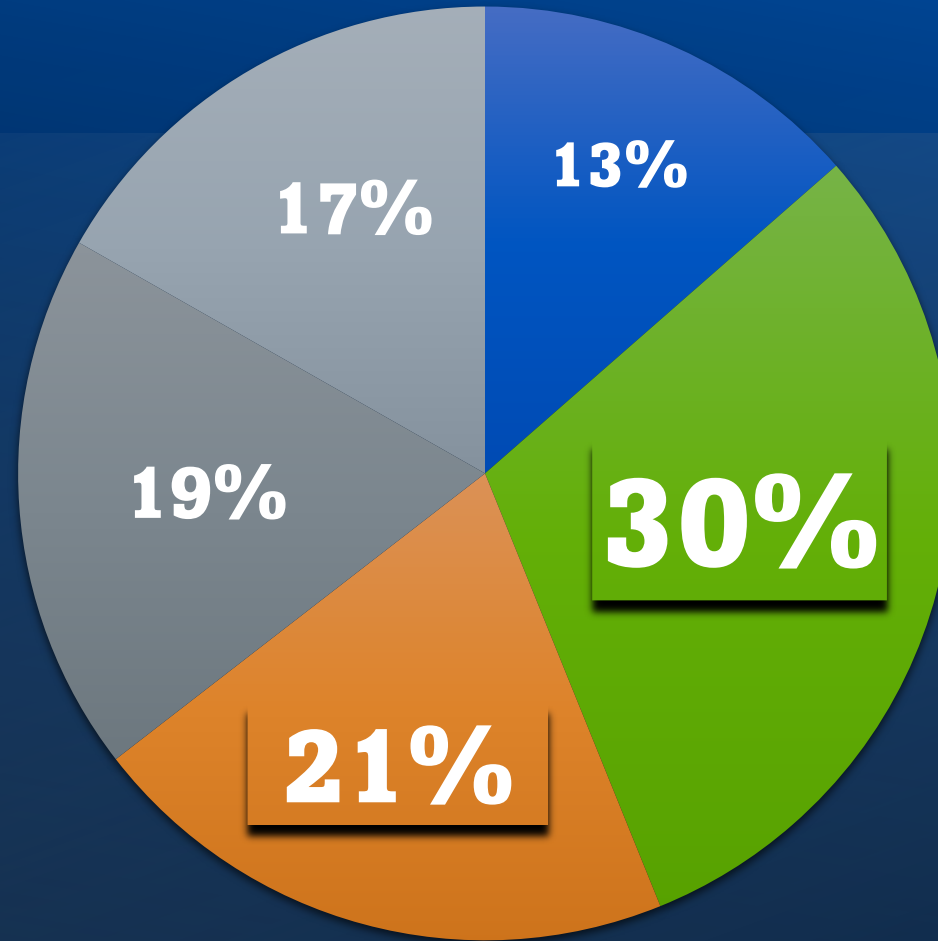
Becoming Desensitized to Overdoses Surveys

- Participants
 - Internal (CMS) = 87 people
 - External = 68 people
 - Total = **155** people
- 12 Questions

Question #11: What is your **profession**?



Question #12: How **long** have you been working in a **field** with substance use populations?



■ 0-12 Months ■ 1-5 Years ■ 6-10 Years ■ 11-20 Years ■ 21+ Years



How are we **exposed**?

Headlines



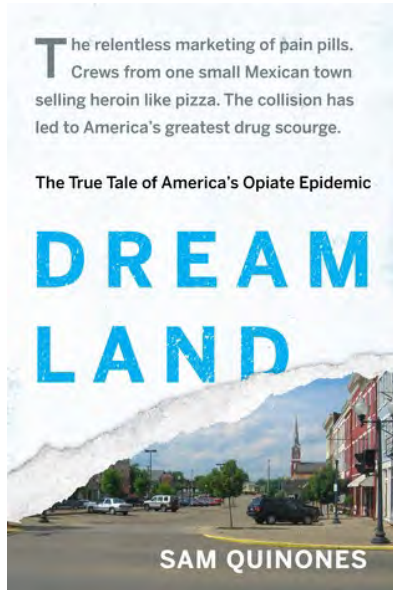
- “Have 100,000 Americans died from drug overdoses over the past year?”
- “Record-breaking number of people dying from drug overdose over past 2 years in San Francisco.”
- “U.S. drug overdose deaths reach another record high as deaths from fentanyl surge.”
- “Surge in opioid and fentanyl overdoses in Montana.”
- “Drug overdose deaths hit record high.”
- “Yearly drug overdose deaths top 100,000 for first time.”
- “Nearly 92,000 drug overdose deaths in 2020.”
- “Alcohol-Related Deaths Spiked During the Pandemic.”
- “Milwaukee County overdose deaths up 571% over 2 decades.”
- “Milwaukee County sees record 17 opioid overdose deaths in 3 days.”

Statistics & Numbers

- In 2016, the information regarding overdoses began to spread regarding it as the “opioid epidemic.”
- In 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency to combat the opioid crisis.
- Opioid overdoses accounted for more than **42,000** deaths in 2016, more than any previous year on record.
- **70,630** people died from drug overdose in 2019.
- **14,480** deaths attributed to overdosing on heroin (in 12-month period ending in June 2020).
- **48,006** deaths attributed to overdosing on synthetic opioids other than methadone (in 12-month period ending June 2020).

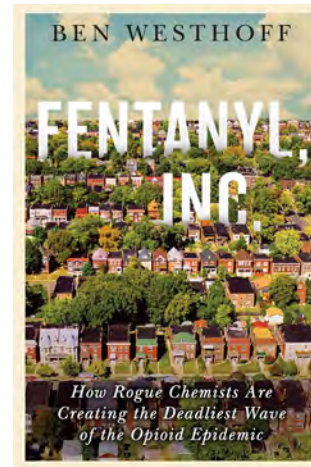


Publications, Journals, Textbooks, and Entertainment



2021 OVERDOSE EPIDEMIC REPORT

Physicians' actions to help end the nation's drug-related overdose and death epidemic—and what still needs to be done.



Counseling Today

A Publication of the American Counseling Association

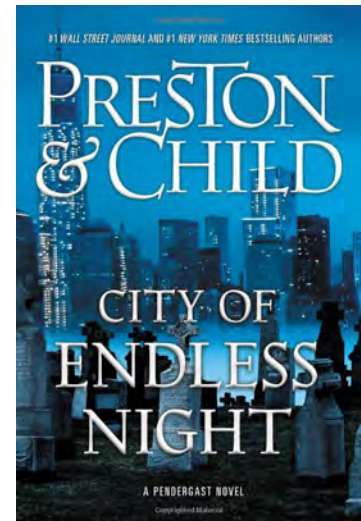
Cover Stories Features Knowledge Share Member Insights

COUNSELING TODAY, ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

CDC reports drug overdose deaths at 'epidemic' levels

By Bethany Bray

January 14, 2016



Training People on **Narcan**

Response to overdose

Preparing people to be directly exposed to overdose situations

People being trained

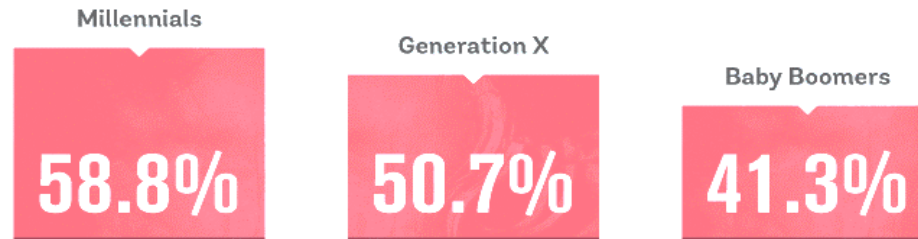
- Medical
- Law Enforcement/Security
- Treatment Providers
- Family Members and Loved Ones
- Schools
- Community Settings
- Bystanders



How are we doing **helping** those who just administered Narcan to someone?

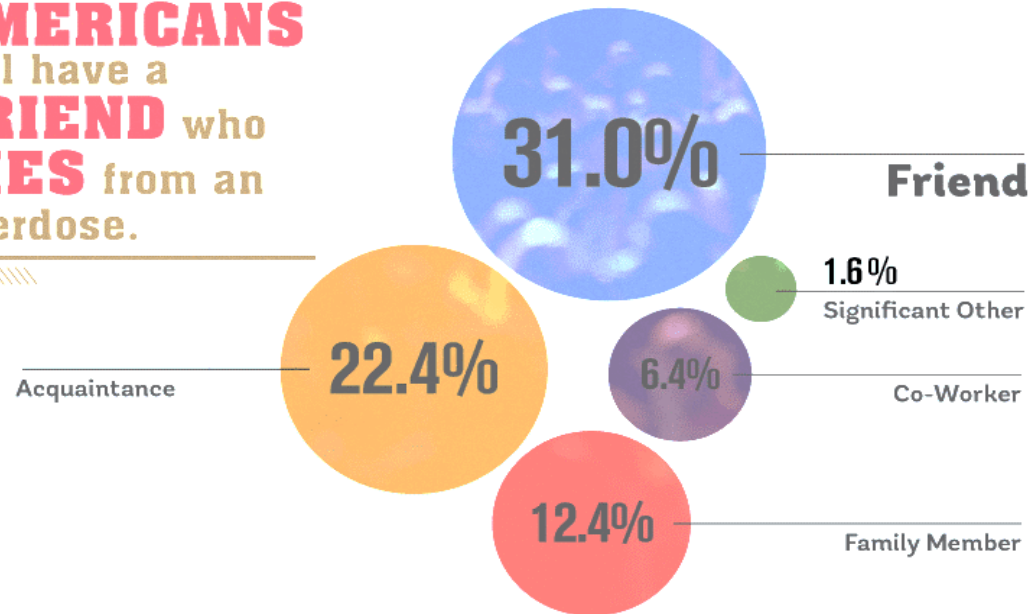


54% of people know someone who has died from a **drug overdose**.



OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE DECEASED

One-third of **AMERICANS** will have a **FRIEND** who **DIES** from an overdose.

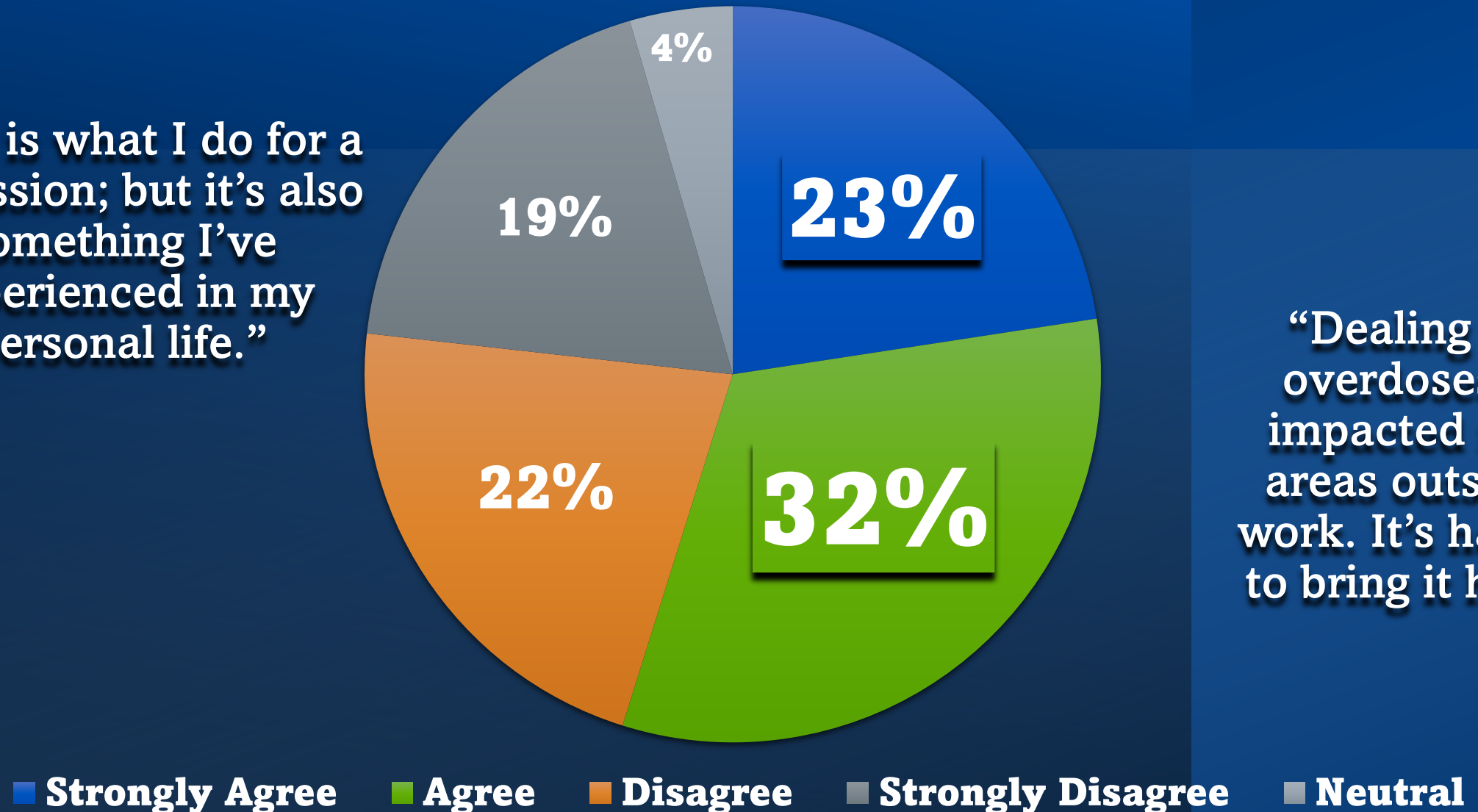


Impacting helping professionals in their **personal** lives?

Question #7: I have been impacted by overdoses in my **personal** life.

“This is what I do for a profession; but it’s also something I’ve experienced in my personal life.”

“Dealing with overdoses has impacted me in areas outside of work. It’s hard not to bring it home.”



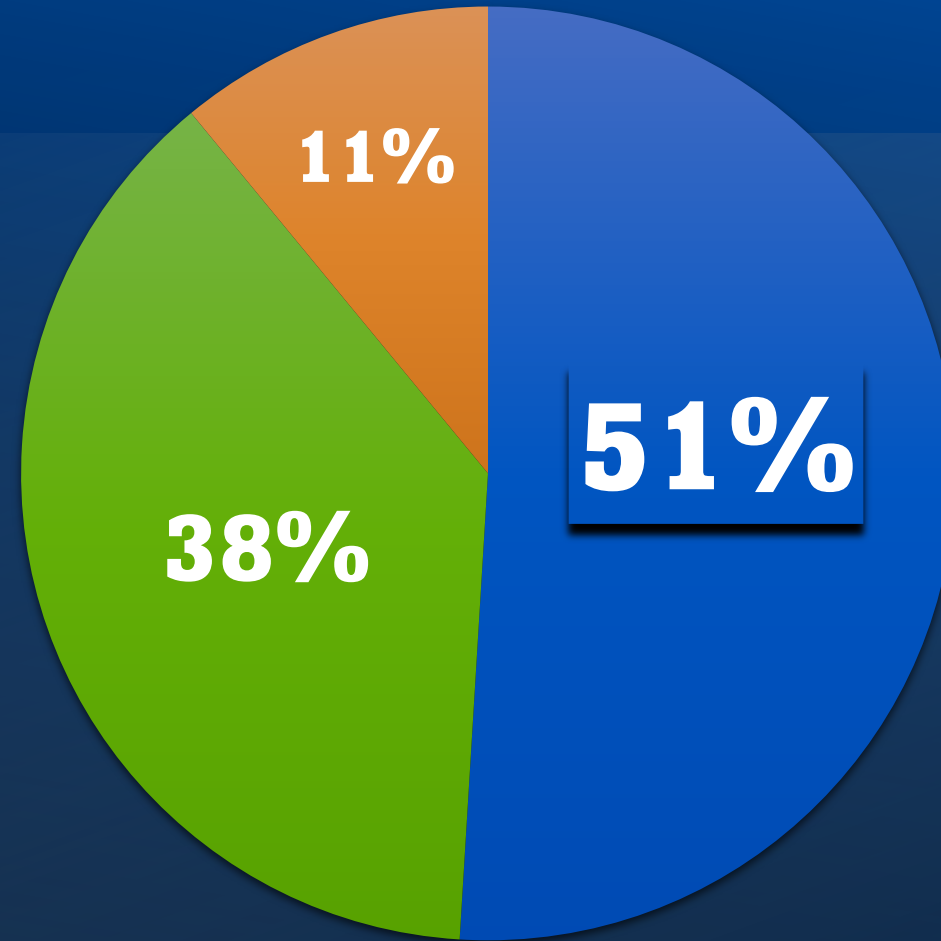


How are **we** doing?

What **happens** as we are informed
or exposed to overdoses?

What do we **experience**?

Question #1: I have noticed a **change** in my reaction/response when being informed about an overdose.



■ **Agree** ■ **Disagree** ■ **Undecided**

Risk Factors of Becoming Desensitized

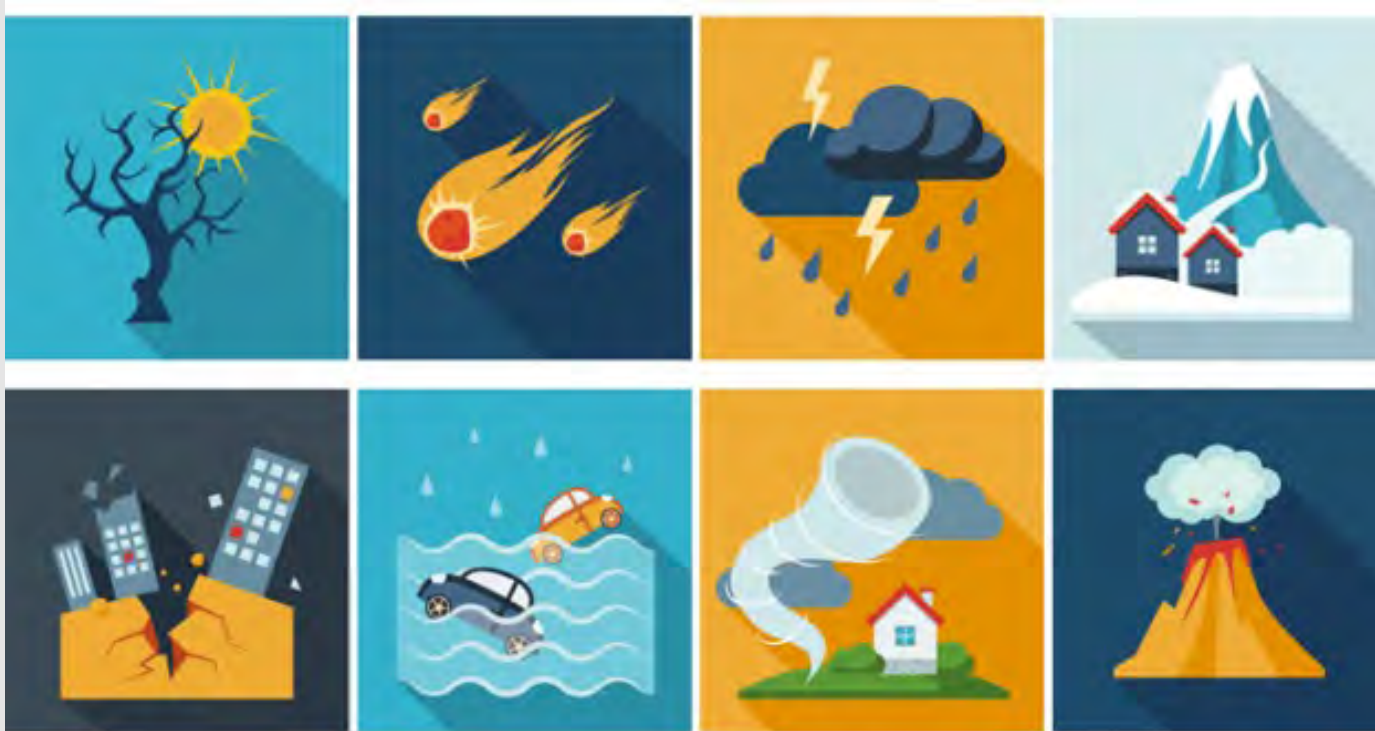
- Populations:
 - Soldiers
 - Medical Professionals
 - Frontline Workers
 - Substance Users
 - Those in Recovery
 - Areas of High Crime Rates
- Common Sayings:
 - “Front Lines”
 - “Fighting”
 - “Battle”
 - “Boots on the ground”



How many risk factors **associated** with our work?



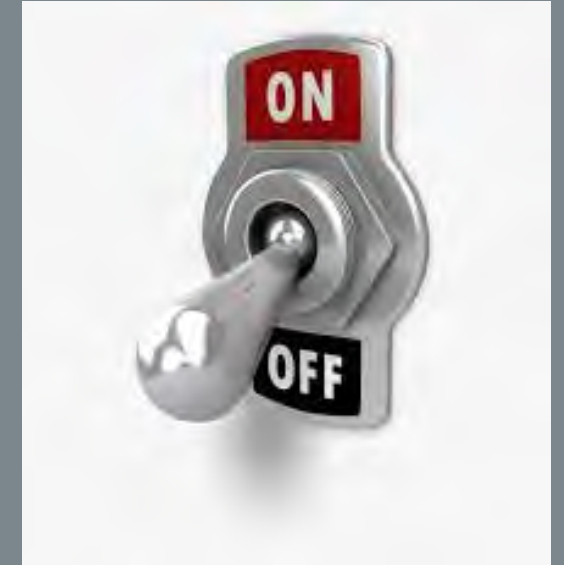
Are We Becoming **Desensitized** to Mass Casualties?



- History has shown that desensitization to disaster is a **common** human response.
- In disaster psychology, the desensitization or numbing to death or on-going threats has been well **documented**.
- This is a **survival mechanism**, the way our brains adapt – no matter how horrific – that is constant and persistent. It allows us to continue to function amidst the crisis or disaster.

Are the Numbers **Turning Off** Our Sensitivity?

- Humans experience a type of **numbing** when dealing with events that involve **large numbers** of people.
- Research has repeatedly shown that we become desensitized as the number of individuals affected by events **increase**.
- We **don't process** large numbers well as we do smaller numbers.
- We have an easier time feeling empathy for **one person** than for large groups of people.



“The trial was ironically, as several journalists noted, making it harder to sympathize with the plight of the victims. Indeed, the last five years of world war had **desensitized** many people who had lived through the Holocaust, the ferocious firebombing raids, and an array of horrors that left between fifty and sixty million people dead. One of the trial’s low points was when Dupin presented that ‘human life is sacred’ and the audience laughed.”

Quote from “Devil in the City of Light”

Certain jobs deal with death specifically everyday as a part of role.

- “This is what I have to do several times per day.”

Large volume of caseloads.

- “It’s not just one person, or one case; but several of us have high caseloads with people who are at high-risk of overdose.”
- “I have to do 3-5 cases of these a day related to overdose reports or responses.”

Engaging with family members and loved ones.

- “I need to be all together when I am talking with loved ones asking questions.”

Interacting/Communicating with other professionals.

- “When someone looks like they are having a hard time with it I think I need to keep it together for their sake.”

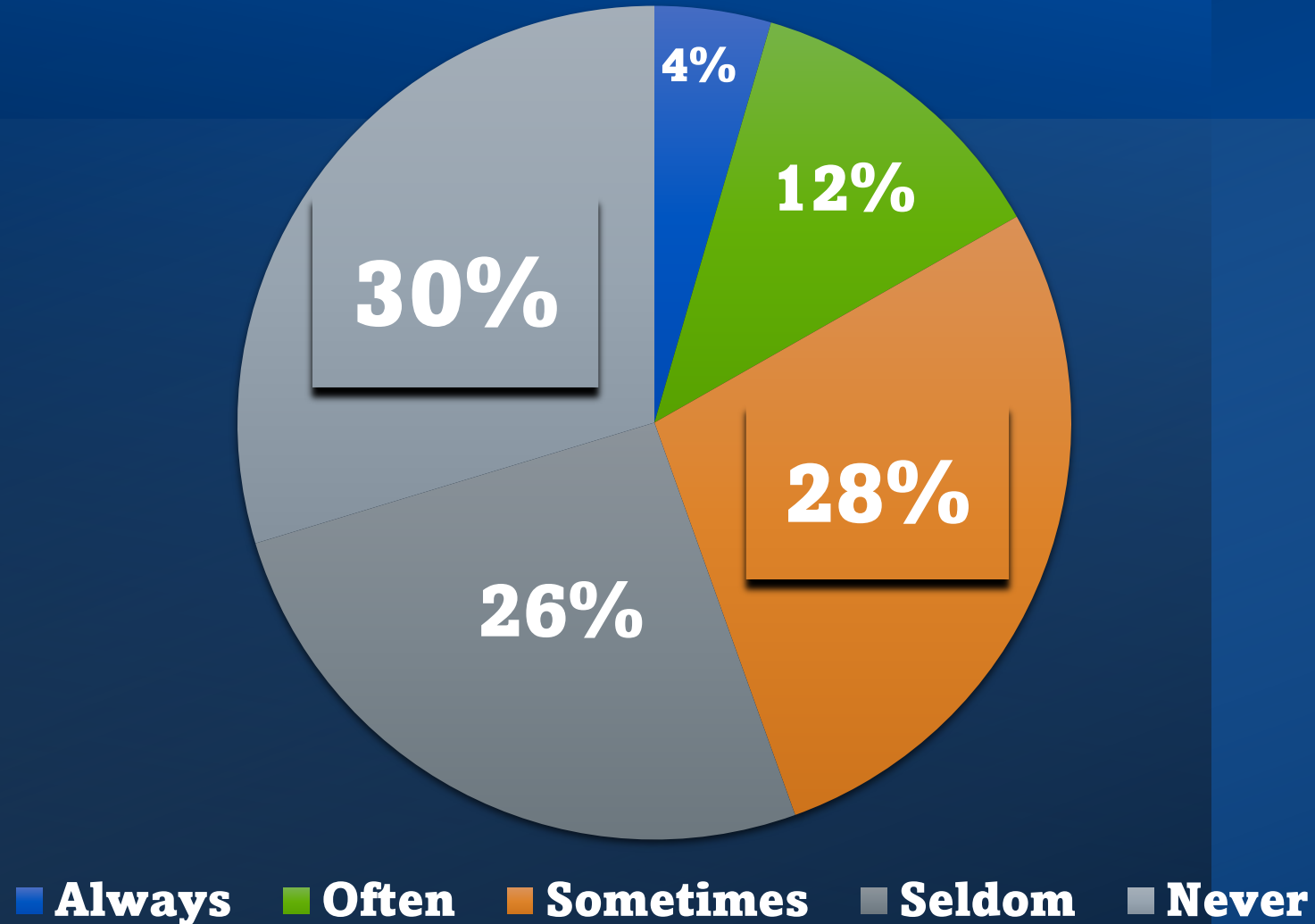
**Does
Desensitization
Serve a
Purpose?**



Signs and Symptoms

- There is no “normal” reaction to death.
- It is natural and common to grieve and mourn.
- After experiencing loss, you may feel shocked, numbness, anger, guilt, helplessness, or sadness.
- Not experiencing any emotional reaction to death or not empathizing with someone who is grieving may be a sign of desensitization.
- Lack of grief.
- Comedic responses to death.
- Apathy.

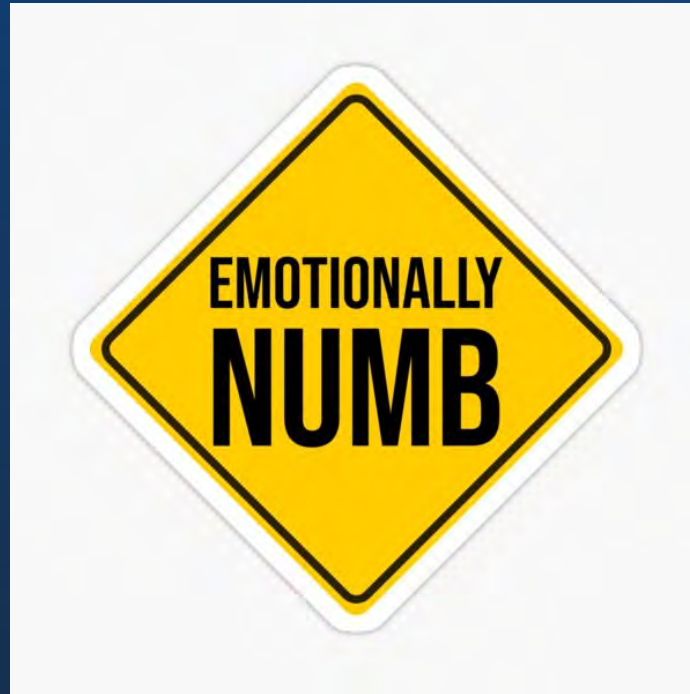
Question #3: I have experienced a **numbing** or **shut down** of emotions in response to an overdose(s).



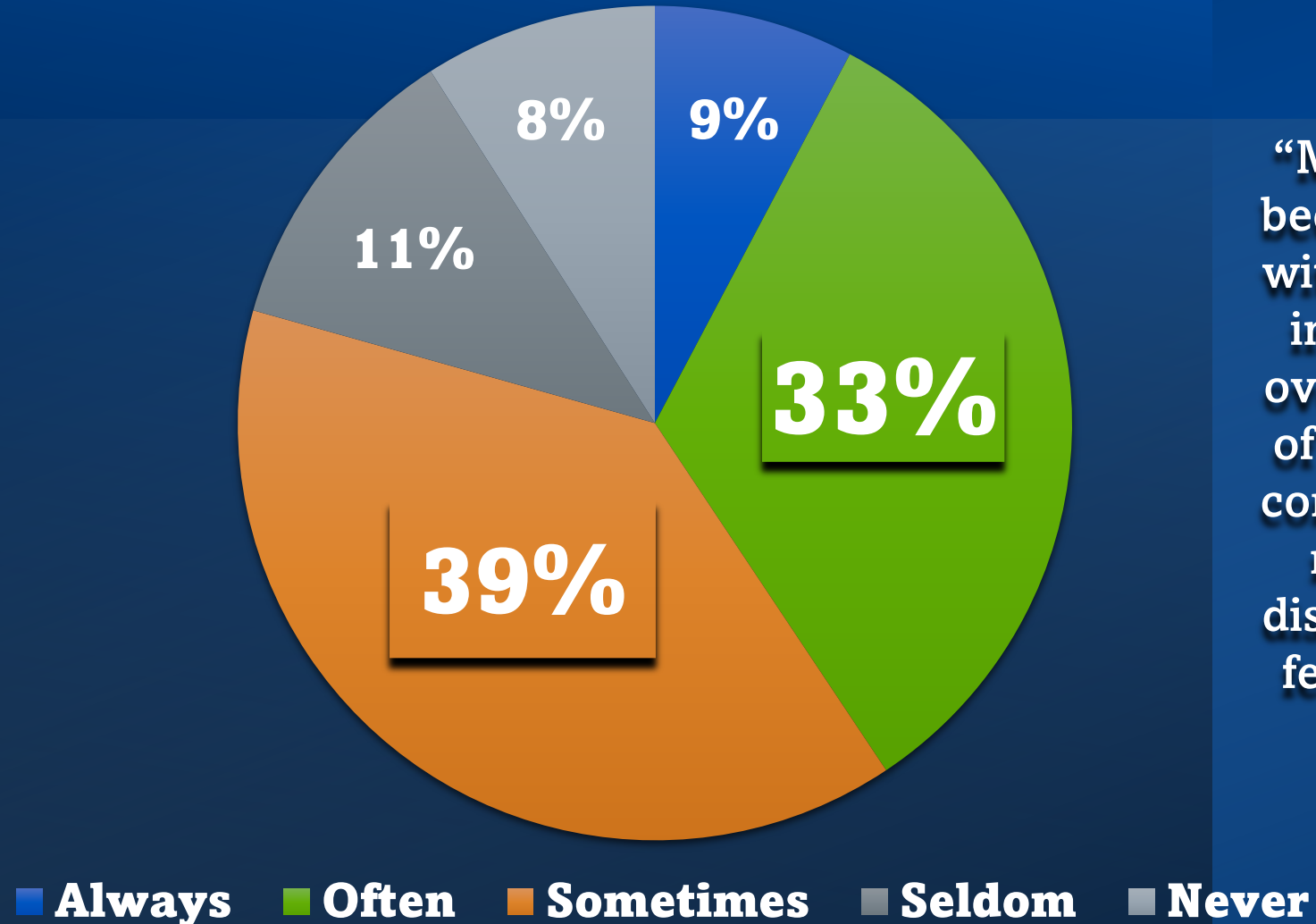
The Function of **Desensitization**

- Desensitization can be used to treat phobias, fears, or other mental health disorders.
- It can help train your brain to remove the anxiety or fear that accompanies a trigger-inducing situation.
- For those in situations where death is inevitable, such as trauma units or war, desensitization can benefit survival. Avoiding the emotions associated with death may make it easier to deal with the constant exposure.
- While desensitization can be beneficial in some ways, it can also be **damaging**.

What are the concerns of becoming
desensitized?



Question #5: I have **encountered** other professionals in this field that appear desensitized to overdoses.



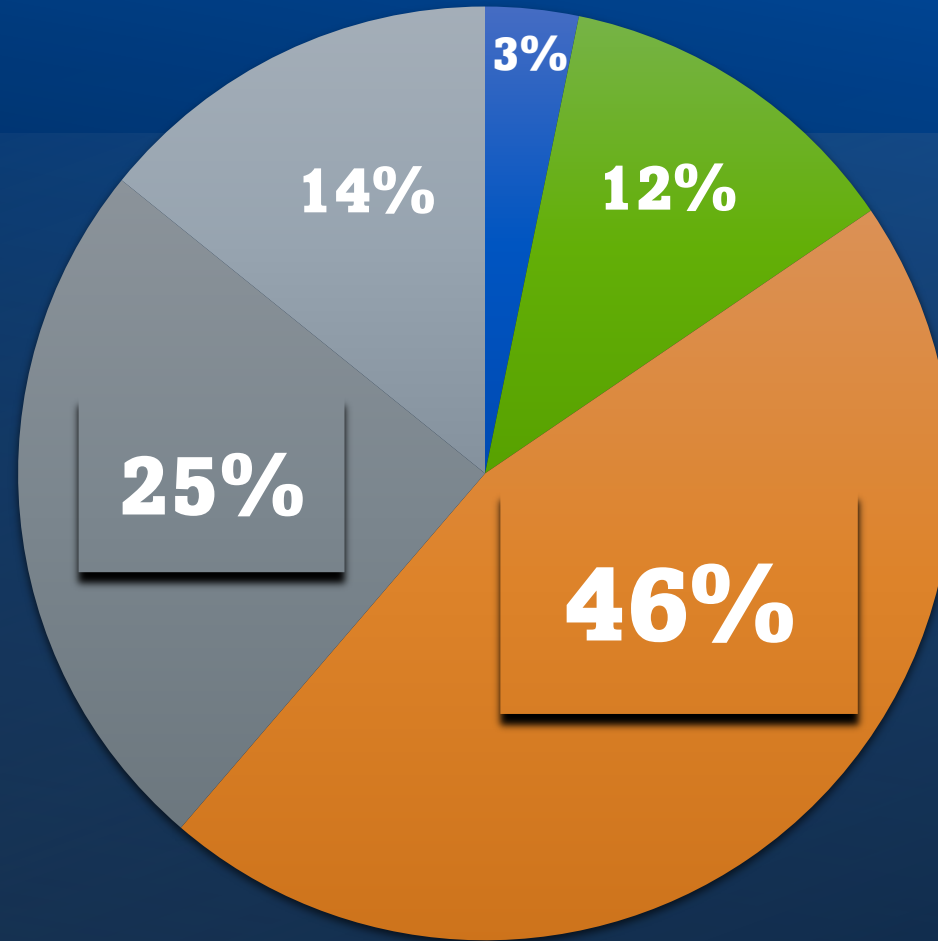
“My coworkers often become very annoyed with helping the same individual over and over again. I see a lot of eye rolling when it comes to preventative measures such as distributing Narcan or fentanyl test strips.”

Defining Burnout

- *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines **burnout** as “exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation, usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.”
- The emotional connection is what differentiates burnout from occupational stress.
- Burnout is tied to work that is demanding and involves emotional investment.



Question #2: The impact of overdoses has **affected** the ability to do my job at times.



■ **Strongly Agree** ■ **Agree** ■ **Disagree** ■ **Strongly Disagree** ■ **Neutral**

Three-Dimensional Aspects of **Burnout**

Emotional Exhaustion

- Inability to feel compassion for clients.

Depersonalization

- Detachment from the emotional needs of their client.

Lack of Personal Accomplishment

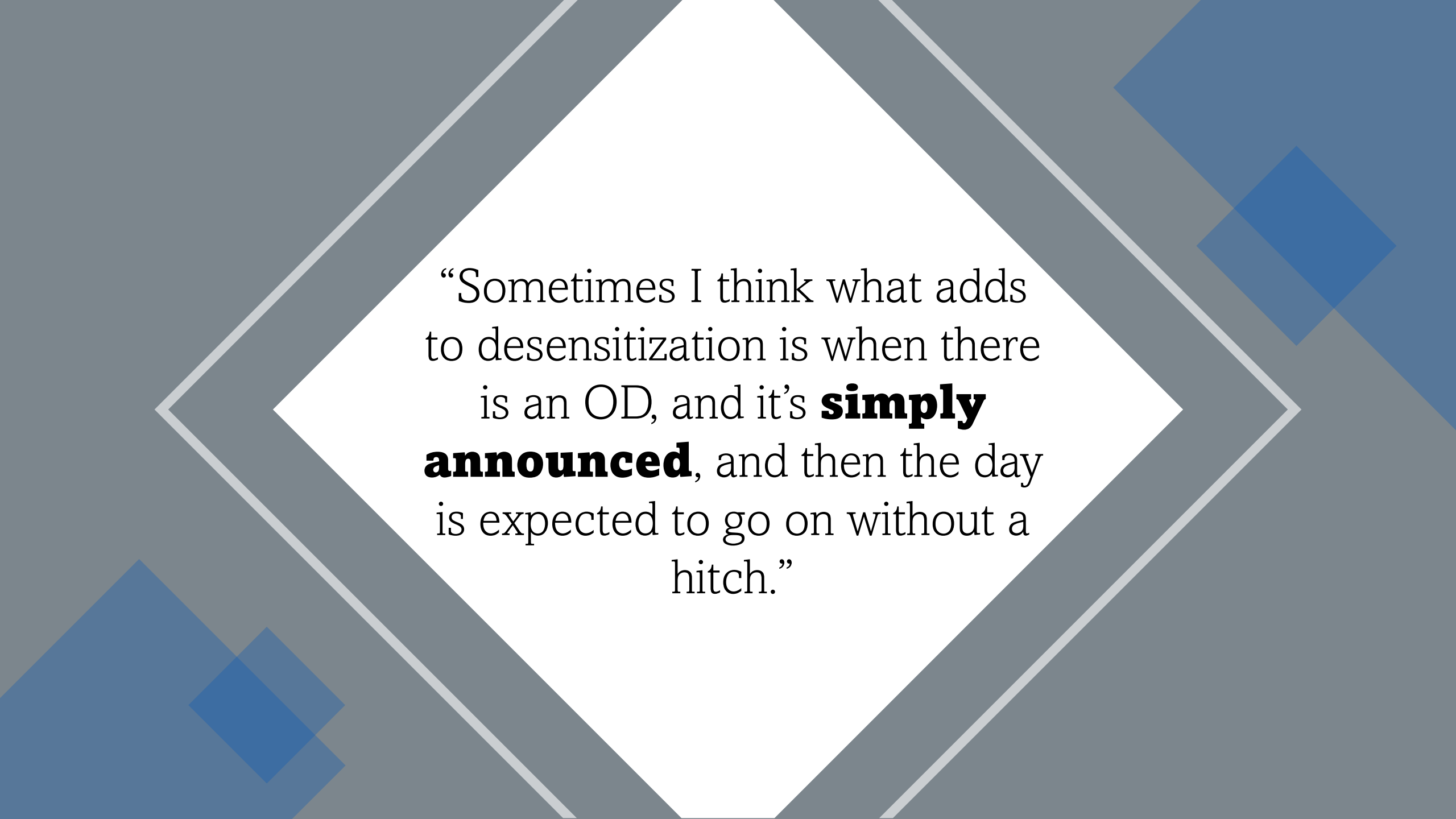
- Critical evaluation of oneself.

“I have concerns that becoming desensitized to overdose fatalities may impact the way in which **support** and **resources** are distributed to **families** I serve.”

“I’m concerned about student and co-worker **mental health, career length**, and the constellation of **poor** provider and patient **outcomes** that poor coping mechanisms can bring.”

Concerns About Helping Professionals Becoming Desensitized

“I do think our office tends to have the feeling of ‘oh, the daily overdose’ because it is becoming so common. I think it is sad that some feel that these need **less attention** because it should be cut and dry.”



“Sometimes I think what adds to desensitization is when there is an OD, and it’s **simply announced**, and then the day is expected to go on without a hitch.”

Taking a page from **mental health**





Grief & Loss for Some

- Provide grief and loss resources and support for loved ones and family members who have lost someone to an overdose.
- Encourage them to seek out therapy or other services that might help.
- Hold gatherings and memorials for individuals who have lost their lives due to overdose.
- Foundations, awareness campaigns, and even special events have been created to bring awareness to overdoses.



What about....

Treatment
Providers

Counselors

Law Enforcement

Health Providers
& Professionals

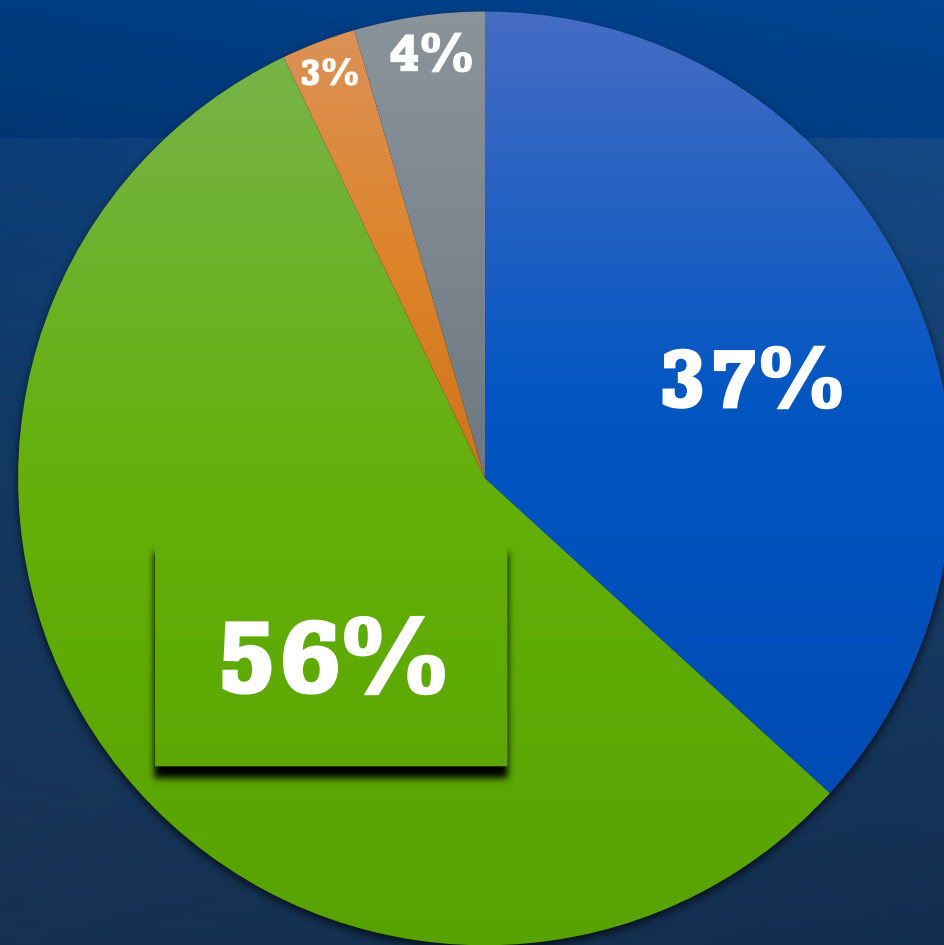
Probation
Officers

People in
Recovery

People Using
Substances

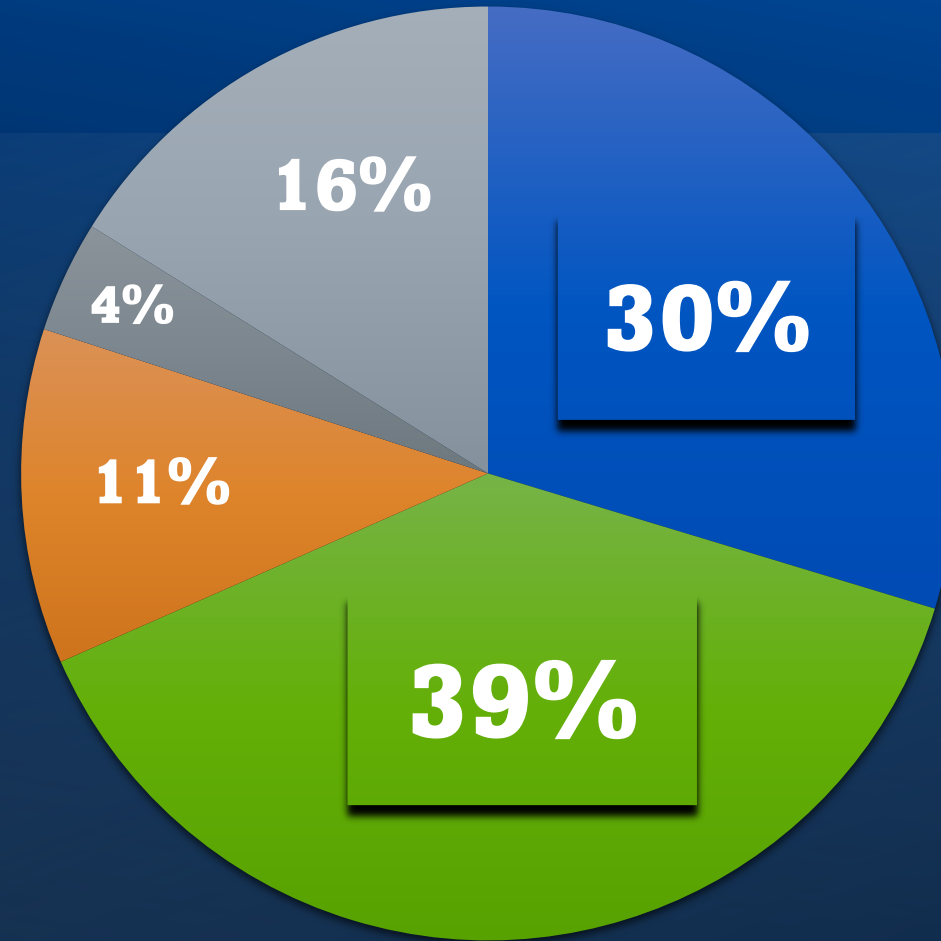
Coworkers &
Employers

Question #6: I work in a culture or environment where it is **comfortable** to talk about the impact of overdoses with coworkers and teammates.



■ **Strongly Agree** ■ **Agree** ■ **Disagree** ■ **Neutral**

Question #4: I have **adequate** support and resources to deal with grief and loss in relation to overdoses.



■ **Strongly Agree** ■ **Agree** ■ **Disagree** ■ **Strongly Disagree** ■ **Neutral**

How Are Professionals **Coping**?

Talking

Debriefings

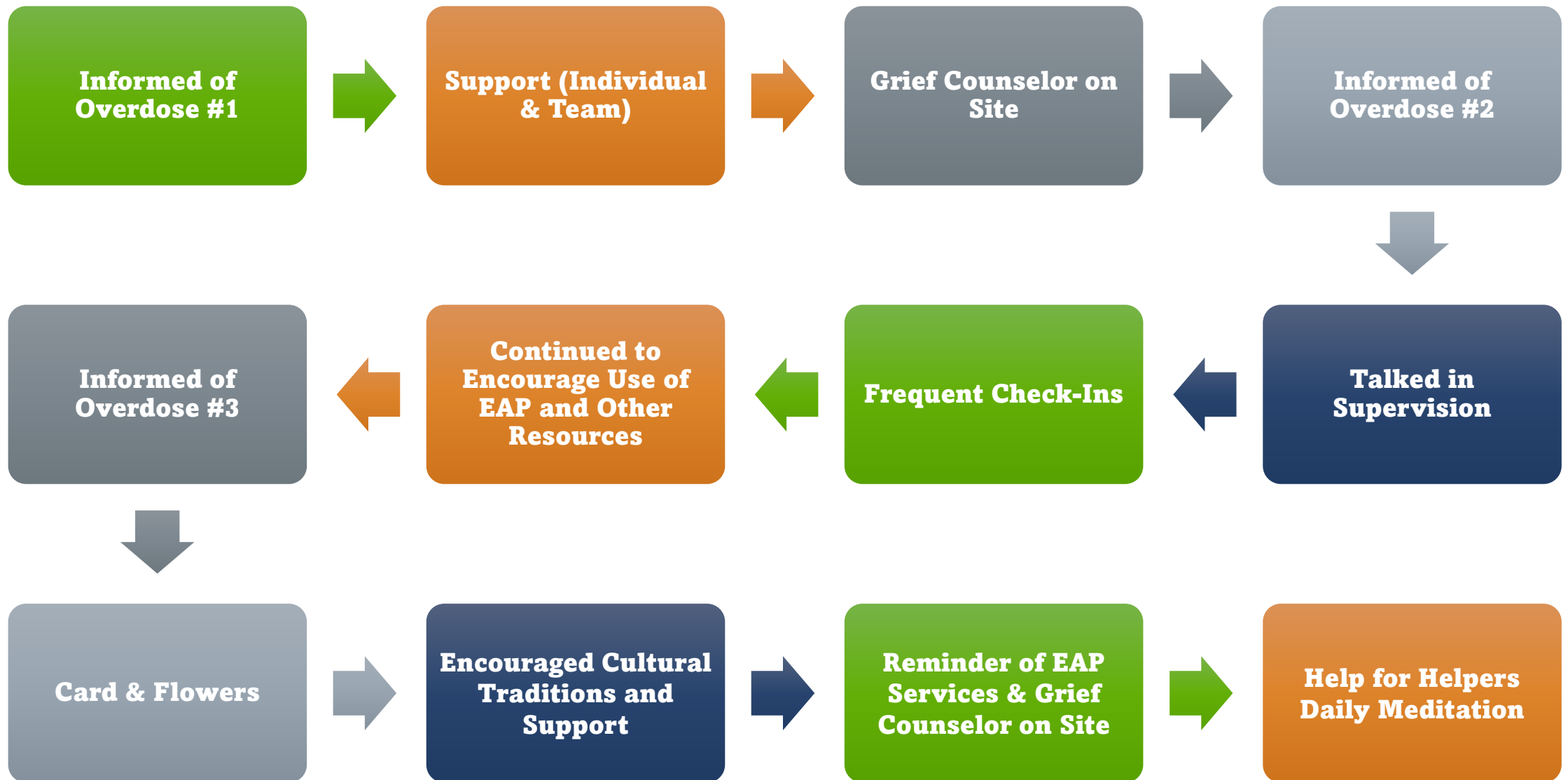
Gratitude

Humor

Trainings &
Education

Normalizing
Death

**Are You
Talking?**



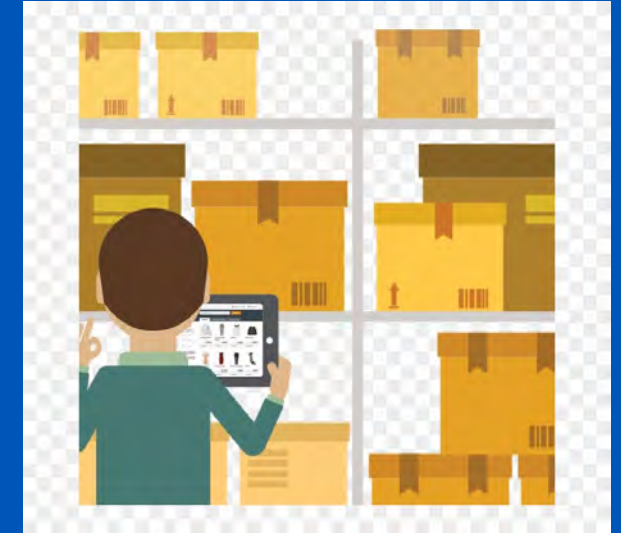
A Collaborative Support

Supporting Grief & Loss

- Grief is Unpredictable
- Recognize the Loss
- Giving Ourselves Permission to Grieve
- Traditional Rituals
- Coping Skills
- Develop a Culture of Open Atmosphere
- Provide & Encourage Resources for Helping Professionals
- Consider Attending Therapy

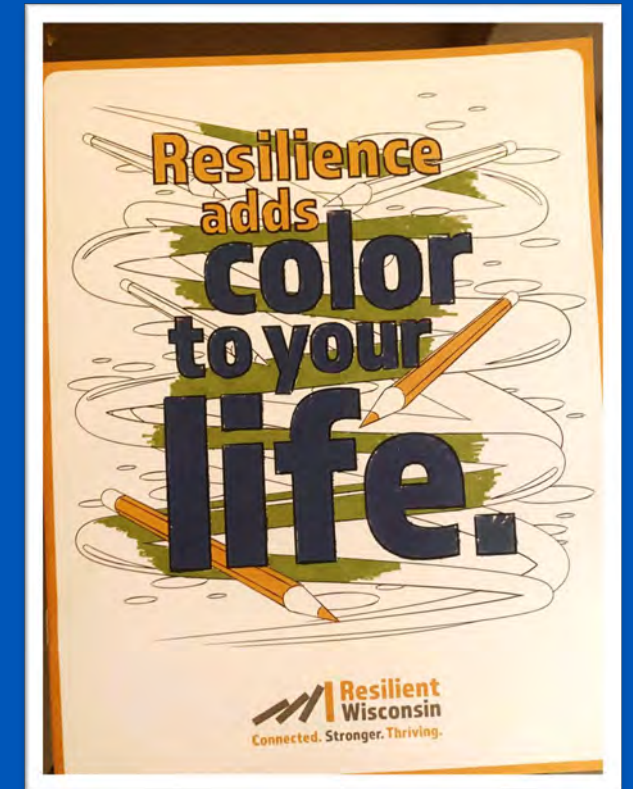
Addressing Overdoses **Inventory**

- ☐ What are some of the immediate **actions** you take?
- ☐ What **policies** or **procedures** are there?
- ☐ **Who** do you inform about the overdose?
- ☐ **How** do you inform others about an overdose?
- ☐ What **resources** are available for dealing with grief and loss as a professional?
- ☐ How do you process it as an **individual**?
- ☐ How is it addressed as a **team**?



How Can We **Improve?**

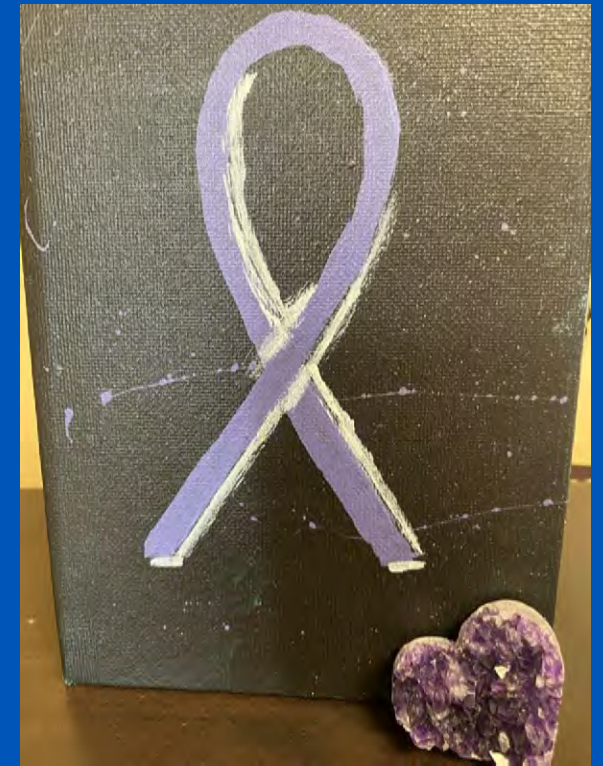
- Additional Support Groups
- Improving How We Inform
- Training
- Education
 - Death and Dying
- Normalizing Death
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- Allowance of Self-Care & Rest
- Preventative Training vs. Reactionary
- Counseling (Grief)
- EAP
- Secondary Trauma and Burnout Prevention
- Memorial or Traditions



Desensitization **Awareness**

How do I **cope** and deal with overdoses in this profession?

How do we (team or profession) **support** one another in dealing with overdoses?

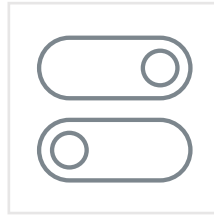


Conclusion: Becoming Desensitized to Overdoses as Helping Professionals



Informed & Exposed

Over the years we have become increasingly exposed to overdoses due to substance use. We are informed in various ways about people we have helped; and even those who we never met.



Becoming Desensitized

Helping professionals are at risk of becoming desensitized; even something like mass casualties to substance use overdoses. Becoming desensitized can impact us on various levels.



Support & Resources

Providing support and resources for helping professionals is vital to minimize and heal from the impact of dealing with overdoses.

Am I...

Are We...

**Making a
Difference?**

The Starfish Story

Original Story by: Loren Eiseley

One day a man was walking along the beach, when he noticed a boy hurriedly picking up and gently throwing things into the ocean.

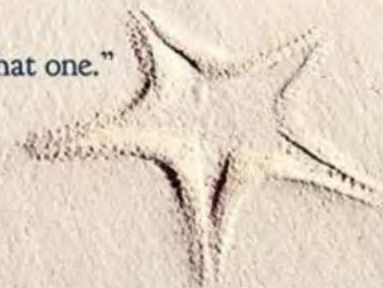
Approaching the boy, he asked, "Young man, what are you doing?"

The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."

The man laughed to himself and said, "Don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make any difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said,

"I made a difference to that one."



THANK YOU!



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Becoming Desensitized to Overdoses as Helping Professionals

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communitymedicalservices.org