

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS EDITION

Trauma-Responsive Encounters in Healthcare

Caring for the People Who Care for Everyone Else

01 After the Code

A nurse walked out after an unsuccessful resuscitation. Someone asked, “You okay?”

“Yeah. I’ve done this before.”

A colleague didn’t argue. She simply said, “I know you have. That doesn’t mean this one didn’t matter.”

The nurse stopped walking. After a moment: “He reminded me of my dad.”

Now the real conversation could begin.

What Presence Looked Like That Day

The colleague didn’t mistake experience for immunity. She let “I’ve done this before” stand without treating it as the whole truth.

What I Was Paying Attention To

She listened for the personal connection underneath the professional composure, and stayed close enough to hear it when it surfaced.

What It Taught Me

It taught me that healthcare professionals can be highly competent and still be deeply affected.

Lessons I’m Still Learning

- Experience doesn’t cancel out impact.
- “I’ve done this before” is often not the whole story.
- The real conversation sometimes only starts after someone stops walking away.

Take a Moment to Reflect *Who cares for the caregiver after the room has been cleared?*

02 The Nurse Who Had Nothing Left

A nurse became unusually impatient near the end of several demanding shifts in a row. A coworker could have said, “You’ve really got an attitude lately.”

Instead: “You don’t seem like yourself. How are you doing?”

The nurse exhaled. “I’m exhausted.”

The conversation revealed overtime, family pressures, difficult patients, and very little recovery in between.

What Presence Looked Like That Day

The coworker led with curiosity instead of criticism, even though the irritability could easily have been read as an attitude problem.

What I Was Paying Attention To

She recognized irritability as a possible sign of depletion rather than a character flaw, and asked a question instead of making an assumption.

What It Taught Me

It taught me that compassion becomes difficult to give when our own reserves are empty.

Lessons I’m Still Learning

- Curiosity before criticism changes what people are willing to reveal.
- Irritability can be a sign of depletion, not disrespect.
- Recognizing the person behind the professional role opens the door to something real.

Take a Moment to Reflect *What happens when we recognize the person behind the professional role?*

03 “Just Sit Here With Me”

After losing a longtime patient, a healthcare worker sat alone in a break room. The chaplain entered.
“Want to talk?”

“Not really.”

“Okay.”

The chaplain sat down. Several minutes passed. Then the healthcare worker said, “Thank you for not making me talk.”

What Presence Looked Like That Day

Staying was more valuable than speaking. The chaplain didn’t need words to communicate that he wasn’t going anywhere.

What I Was Paying Attention To

He respected what she needed instead of what he assumed she should need, and let her silence set the terms of the visit.

What It Taught Me

It taught me that silence can be compassionate when someone doesn’t have words yet.

Lessons I’m Still Learning

- “Not really” is a complete answer, and it deserves to be respected.
- Staying can say more than speaking.
- Sometimes the most useful thing I can offer is simply not leaving.

Take a Moment to Reflect *Can you remain useful when there is nothing for you to say?*