



[00:00:00] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Is it socially tolerated at the lowest level and is it culturally typical to talk about how good this job is?

[00:00:13] **Christina Rouse:** Welcome to the SRCAC Exchange, a podcast series for child abuse professionals who are looking to exchange innovative ideas and CAC movement. I'm your host, Christina Rouse, Program Manager for CAC Development with SRCAC.

[00:00:31] **Christina Rouse:** This season, we'll be focusing on the invisible threads that sustain the dedicated professionals in Children's Advocacy Center. Our guests will partake in dynamic discussions around supportive workplace cultures, the importance of MDT relationships, what we are telling ourselves about our work, and so many other topics that will ignite passion.

[00:00:52] **Christina Rouse:** So whether you are a seasoned CAC professional or just starting out in your career, join us as we delve into this [00:01:00] topic. Critical topic. Imagine if your career satisfaction and well being hinged on the narrative you create about your work. In this episode, we examine the components for enhancing career experience and reducing trauma or C CERT approach and the domain of conscious narrative and its essential role in sustaining professionals in the child abuse field.

[00:01:26] **Christina Rouse:** Dr. Brian Miller and Karen Hangartner will share their insights on how this concept is influencing the CAC community. Dr. Brian Miller is the developer of the C CERT model, author, and trainer on topics of secondary trauma and trauma informed supervision. He is a member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and has vast experience as directors of trauma informed agencies And as a psychotherapist in private practice.

[00:01:56] **Christina Rouse:** Karen Hingardner is the Director of Professional Services [00:02:00] with the National Children's Advocacy Center and has been a leader in the CAC movement for 20 years, delivering trainings

across the globe and advancing work on secondary traumatic stress. Thanks to both Brian and Karen for joining me today.

[00:02:15] **Christina Rouse:** Let's get started and learn how we can transform our conscious narrative.

[00:02:23] **Christina Rouse:** Brian and Karen, thanks for joining me today. And I'm going to kick us off with a quote to get our conversation going. So the most distinctive characteristic of professionals who are passionate and committed is the content of their narrative. I'm going to read that one more time for our listeners. The most distinctive characteristic of professionals who are passionate and committed is the content of their narrative.

[00:02:55] **Christina Rouse:** Brian, I'm gonna invite you to take a stab at who you might [00:03:00] think said that quote.

[00:03:02] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I'm willing to take a stab at that, Christina, because it was me. I plead guilty to that statement, and I'm delighted you lead there because I think it's pivotal. The reason that I said that That what it is that distinguishes and characterize those, I'm going to call them the masters of our field.

[00:03:25] **Brian Miller, PhD:** These are the people who thrive decade after decade into doing the helping work that we do. And what distinguishes them and characterizes them is the content of their narrative. In other words, the way that they think about. And the way they talk about their work. And as I say, that was not just an observation of mine, certainly not a casual observation, but it was a research finding that was the result of research that I did where I was going [00:04:00] after, what is it that Distinguishes those who thrive in this difficult work versus those that become disillusioned or just trying to get from here to there.

[00:04:11] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And that is ultimately what I found is that it has to do with again, the way they think about and talk about their work. And so, for me, this has become the load bearing wall of the whole enterprise. This is the thing that our career satisfaction, our sense of reward and our sense of well being rests upon.

[00:04:36] **Brian Miller, PhD:** It is that exactly.

[00:04:39] **Christina Rouse:** And I remember from your work and the research that you done, you labeled these professionals as passionately committed. That's kind of how you painted the picture of them. And I love that description.

[00:04:57] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Thank you. And you're now my new favorite person, [00:05:00] Christina, because the backstory of that is that I really had to fight for that language because it's informal, perhaps.

[00:05:08] **Brian Miller, PhD:** and maybe a little less than scientific. And so some of the experts that I had reviewing my review of the data really resisted that language a bit. I think it made them uncomfortable. But like you, to me, that describes exactly what we're after, is those that keep their passion red hot. And maintain their commitment unwaveringly throughout their career.

[00:05:36] **Christina Rouse:** Karen, have you heard that quote before from Brian? I know you've been in a lot of circles with Brian and engage in a lot of conversation with him. How does that quote resonate for you?

[00:05:46] **Karen Hangartner:** Oh, I think it just really resonates. I think about just in my own career, those times where I do feel so connected to the mission to what we're doing.

[00:05:57] **Karen Hangartner:** Those are high energy, high [00:06:00] engaged kinds of events for me. So yeah, I love that.

[00:06:04] **Christina Rouse:** So we're going to be spending a lot of time through our conversation talking about our narrative, right? What are we telling ourselves about the work we do? And Karen, you've been in the CAC field for a long time. What are some narratives that you've heard, either positive or negative, that CAC folks say about the work they do.

[00:06:27] **Karen Hangartner:** Part of the reason that I absolutely love Brian's work is that we don't have to be victims of this work. And I do think there's that narrative out there that this is toxic work, that working in these

high trauma exposed workplaces is dangerous for us and that we really should be working hard to protect ourselves from the work that we're doing.

[00:06:54] **Karen Hangartner:** And what Brian's work teaches us is that that's exactly what we don't need to be doing. We need to be [00:07:00] leaning into the things about this work that we love. And most of us. Yeah,

[00:07:10] **Christina Rouse:** there have been numerous times where I woke up when I was working at a CAC just thinking like, I love my job. With the knowing of what I was going to hear that day at the center, I still carried that I love my job and I love the work I do.

[00:07:26] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Christina, I love the way you entitled this conversation, which is narrating joy. And I thought, also, a bold description that to find joy in doing child abuse work, and yet it's very much what Karen was talking about, that ultimately, there is, in my opinion, only one thing that's going to sustain you and propel you through a career, and that is finding the joy in it.

[00:07:54] **Brian Miller, PhD:** That ultimately, you've got to believe that you've got a pretty good gig. And [00:08:00] definitely that must necessarily include embracing the difficult, the ugly and the very painful aspects of the work as well.

[00:08:09] **Christina Rouse:** When we're talking about the work that we do and what we tell ourselves about the work that we do and how that impacts our ability to either stay in the field or even be happy showing up at work that day.

[00:08:25] **Christina Rouse:** Brian, I'd love for you to talk. And tell our listeners a little bit about this conscious narrative skill domain in the C Cert work. And you might start just by letting us know what C Cert is and establish that groundwork for our listeners.

[00:08:42] **Brian Miller, PhD:** CSIRT is a model specifically focused on reducing secondary traumatic stress, although I also make the point that because the focus in CSIRT is on maintaining emotion regulation through doing [00:09:00] difficult work, it also extends to, I believe, have benefit in

reducing Burnout, compassion fatigue, as we commonly call it, and even good old fashioned job stress.

[00:09:12] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And so it's a set of 5 skills and practices. The CSERT is an acronym that stands for components for enhancing career well being and reducing trauma, and I stumbled over the career because it began for clinicians that were doing trauma work and now has expanded to really being enhancing career well being for people in all of the helping professions.

[00:09:42] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I think after I went through CSIRT, I had one of those aha moments where I was like, this is what I needed. This is what I was missing that would have been so supportive to me in the CAC profession when I began. And I love that it is [00:10:00] now beginning to become very popular CAC field, even though I know it's for a lot of careers, but it's so applicable for our CAC professionals.

[00:10:11] **Christina Rouse:** Thanks.

[00:10:12] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Could I talk about the narrative component, which is one of those five areas of practices? Because the conscious narrative in C Cert is more than just a concept. Like all of the skills discussed in C Cert, it is a set of practices. And what we mean by the narrative at all, when we talk about it being the distinguishing Of passionately committed helpers.

[00:10:40] **Brian Miller, PhD:** The narrative is really just about what you notice and how you remember it. It really distills down to just that. What is it you noticed and how do you remember it? And obviously we want to be cultivating that in a way. that what [00:11:00] we notice is the positive and rewarding aspects of our work, and that we want to remember it in a way that it has meaning, and also in a way that we feel like we are advancing in our competency to contend with the difficult things that we contend with.

[00:11:17] **Brian Miller, PhD:** So let me real quickly give you some examples of some of those practices. One of them is about beginning the day by noting what is known as the core affect the core affect is just kind of your

background state that your brain is casting over all of your experience based on blood hormone levels, blood sugar.

[00:11:39] **Brian Miller, PhD:** How you slept last night, based on whether you're hungry, based on what stress you're anticipating during the day. It's just this kind of general state that isn't the mood. It's much less complex than mood. It's just a basic state that basically puts you in either an advance or withdraw [00:12:00] position. It is a general sense of negative or positive, and then strong or weak, and those are the only components.

[00:12:09] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And so, in CSER, one of the practices is to begin to note that each morning. And not so that you're engaging in some kind of battle with it, but rather note it. And then just accept it, that that's where it is. And then once you've done that, and from that position, you can begin to cultivate narratives that open you up to the experience of the day.

[00:12:36] **Brian Miller, PhD:** So that would be an example of one of the practices that actually allow us to begin to cultivate narratives. One of the practices is about noting the narrative that you have that When you are subjected to stress, when you're in the most difficult of moments, how do you think about and talk about that?

[00:12:58] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Every one of us would [00:13:00] say, of course my job is going to have moments of stress. We expect that, we would say that, none of us would say, I want a job that's never stressful. Philosophically, we don't. How do you really talk about your stress when you are experiencing it? And at that point, what will make or break the experience of stress is about whether you allow it.

[00:13:26] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And the narrative in effect says, this sense of stress is making me think faster and perform better. Or, are you narrating that this sense of stress, it shouldn't have to be this hard. I shouldn't have to deal with this. I'm tired of being stressed all the time. I want to get away from this and self soothe because I don't like feeling stressed.

[00:13:51] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And so the first is an example of a career sustaining narrative. The second is an example of a career inhibiting narrative. [00:14:00] And then if I could, one third example. I'm assuming

that much of our audience for this podcast will be supervisors, and one of the unique ways I talk about supervision is that I say the core primary purpose of supervision is for you as a supervisor to cultivate a career sustaining narrative in your.

[00:14:26] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Supervisee. That is primarily why we're doing supervision, is because meaning can only be deduced and created after the fact. We don't create meaning during stressors. We only do it after. And so supervision is, I think, the opportunity in which we want to nurture those narratives that support a sense of advancing competency and support a sense of the deep meaning of the experiences that you're going through.

[00:14:59] **Christina Rouse:** [00:15:00] Karen, would you say that the CAC field leans more towards the Enhanced sustaining narratives or the inhibited sustaining narratives that happen in our work?

[00:15:14] **Karen Hangartner:** I think it's a good question. And I think it might depend on the CAC that you're in. I really do think that the organizational culture. Can play a part in this and I think for those organizations that this work is going to harm you.

[00:15:32] **Karen Hangartner:** If that's the narrative that the organization is kind of putting out there, then sure that is not going to be career sustaining at all. So, I think it really does depend on the. Supervisor in the CAC probably. I would like to think because CSIRT is becoming so prevalent and more out there that we're moving into those more career sustaining narratives.

[00:15:54] **Karen Hangartner:** Because I do feel like we're seeing a little bit of shift in that. I think the way we talked [00:16:00] about secondary CSIRT came along was that you're going to be damaged by this work. And I think we're really seeing a shift in how we talk about this.

[00:16:13] **Christina Rouse:** We're not going to really dive into radical acceptance, even though that's very widely talked about in CSIRT.

[00:16:19] **Christina Rouse:** We could have a whole part two episode about that. But I wonder if for those that have radically accepted that the work is

going to impact me, my job is stressful, I am working in crisis, ergo, I don't need to talk about it because I know that this is just what it is. How can that interrupt? Someone embracing the narrative and embracing shifting their narrative if they've radically accepted that the work is just what it is.

[00:16:49] **Brian Miller, PhD:** That statement, it is what it is. Actually, I think in its pure sense, I would say it's communicating radical acceptance, but if [00:17:00] you know it's actual use, even the way you used it just now, it's the opposite of that. What it really is is a brushing off. No, I'm not going to deal with it. It just is what it is.

[00:17:12] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And so I would add one bit of radical acceptance to the areas you were describing, Christina, that I think is necessary to wellbeing in this CAC work. And that is. radically accepting that we're not operating in the systems that we wish we were. We are not operating in perfect systems, and we may not even be operating in particularly effective or efficient systems.

[00:17:39] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And That is one of those factors that I find often stand in the way of people loving their work. I would love my work except for that fact. And so really the answer to your question is what's different from that? It is what it is from genuine radical [00:18:00] acceptance is that radical acceptance is an active act.

[00:18:05] **Brian Miller, PhD:** It is a conscious decision, and it is actively saying, I've got to release my feelings of resistance around this fact. And the reason we're resisting the fact is because it's an ugly truth. It's a painful truth, and it feels like more than we could bear. to accept it. And so really we're pushing it back and we're resisting it.

[00:18:32] **Brian Miller, PhD:** But true radical acceptance is letting it in. And what that necessitates is pain around the fact that this is true. There is pain associated with the fact that the systems aren't funded the way that we wish they were. There is the raw pain of the fact that children are abused in this world and we wish that it weren't true.

[00:18:55] **Karen Hangartner:** I just wanted to add to that, Brian, I think about when new people are coming into the [00:19:00] CAC world. And I



imagine their narrative coming in is that they're going to come in and save all these kids, and I'm going to make this huge difference in the world. And then, you know, You get in there and you do see how it is a very imperfect system and kids consistently fall through the cracks, despite our best efforts.

[00:19:22] **Karen Hangartner:** But that's where I think going back to what you were talking about, how important it is for supervisors to be able to help, especially folks new to the field. How do they shift that narrative around? I thought I was going to be saving all these kids, and now instead I'm just watching kids get hurt and we're putting kids back in homes where we know they're not going to be safe.

[00:19:46] **Karen Hangartner:** And to your point, that's hard.

[00:19:49] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I think that it's interesting and actually funny to me that studies show that Our job satisfaction is the absolute highest [00:20:00] at the point at which we've accepted a position, but before we've worked our first day, because at that point, there you go, there's what we thought we were going to be doing.

[00:20:10] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And we had all of the promise. Now we start working and we run into the barriers and we run into the realities. And so I think we're in the right area since we're talking about radical acceptance, that it is noting these things that got in the way and a considerable amount of it is about our resistance to the fact that it isn't the system that we wish it was.

[00:20:39] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And, um, We, in essence, are saying, I'm going to hold my job satisfaction hostage until the system is the system that I wish it was. And at some point, we've got to, again, active is the key word here. We've got to actively say, I'm going to give up my resistance. I'm going to [00:21:00] deal with this reality in its real sense.

[00:21:04] **Brian Miller, PhD:** To answer your question, Karen, I think sometimes. It takes a recalibration of where we get our sense of meaning from, and realize it isn't about the big things of eliminating child abuse off the face of the earth. Or even those individual victories, we get them

sometimes big, dramatic victories that we can rave about, and we've got to recalibrate where our sense of meaning is, and to realize That I just had a session in which I gave pure empathy and compassion to a person and they experienced my sense of acceptance.

[00:21:47] **Brian Miller, PhD:** There it was. That's my sense of meaning. The fact that I gave that to them and maybe they don't get that anywhere else in their world, but they got that from [00:22:00] me just now. And so we really have to sometimes realize that those add up to that bigger sense of meaning and we can't always just wait for the big breakthroughs.

[00:22:12] **Brian Miller, PhD:** We get them sometimes. But that ultimately isn't the daily sense of meaning that we're going to be running on.

[00:22:19] **Christina Rouse:** I think what happens a lot of times in the CAC world is that We're not asking ourselves that question as often as we should be of why did I start? What's my purpose? What brings me joy in my work?

[00:22:34] **Christina Rouse:** And so Karen, I'd love to hear from you. Why do you think that that kind of gets pushed to the back burner? Why is that not a constant piece of our language and our conversation that we have to kind Remember why we're doing this in the first place.

[00:22:52] **Karen Hangartner:** I think it gets lost in the busyness. CACs are busy, chaotic places.[00:23:00]

[00:23:00] **Karen Hangartner:** You may have a to do list when you start the day and a case may come in that completely blows up everything. And so I think that's part of it. We get into this fast paced, reactionary kind of settings and The whole key to CSIRT is we're making the unconscious conscious. And I think when you're in that reactionary, in that busy ness kind of place, it's really hard to stop and just I think number one, what's happening in my body?

[00:23:35] **Karen Hangartner:** What do I need in this moment? What's the story? I'm telling myself about this law enforcement officer that just came in and brought this case in. So I think that's part of the problem. We haven't

built in those moments and those checkpoints. And I wonder, too, if we've not said. We need big spaces. We need a whole hour to do this and what I love about [00:24:00] CSER, you can do so much of this stuff in two or three minutes.

[00:24:03] **Karen Hangartner:** It's just a check in. And so these are easy things, I think, to switch the culture around how we're thinking about this. And how do we take just two or three minutes while I'm getting another cup of coffee to just check in with myself?

[00:24:20] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, it's this what Brian had mentioned of like and carrying you to the people that start, they're so excited, right?

[00:24:27] **Christina Rouse:** And we see that kind of drain from people over time. What happened to your passion and excitement that you had knowing that you were going to be able to do this work? And I wonder if that's the unknowing of people. being mindful of our narrative, or if it's that we don't know how to do it, or to your point, Karen, maybe we're not in an organization that supports those conversations even happening.

[00:24:55] **Christina Rouse:** We're very tough it out mindset and how that can be [00:25:00] detrimental as well.

[00:25:01] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I would add one thing to that list, Christina, and that is that we let the aversive parts of our job hypnotize us. And we started paying attention to the things we get up each morning and it's what have I got to get through today?

[00:25:16] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And those aversive things are holding our attention. rather than those things we had in mind that we thought we were going to do to contribute meaning to the world through our work. And so, if you think of it in terms of the individuals, those of you who are listening to this podcast, this morning when you got up, was that narrative that started rolling in your brain a task list, or was it how deeply meaningful my work is?

[00:25:51] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And what I'm going to guess is that for many of you, it was a task list. I got up and immediately started to think of [00:26:00]

all of the things that we do. And so I think the way that we turn the corner on that is going to be especially effective if we do it as a team. It is about, we've got to make why we're doing this part of our daily conversation within ourselves, but also within our teams.

[00:26:20] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Our eyes go where the brain tells them to go. This morning, where did your brain tell your eyes to go? To the task list and the stressful parts of the job, or to the deeply meaningful, rewarding, and even enjoyable parts of the job? And we have gotten into this pattern because the brain has so many lovely qualities, but one thing it does is it searches for things to worry about and danger.

[00:26:52] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Those survival oriented things. Long before it searches for things to make us happy and feel good, and so we've got to [00:27:00] do it with some intentionality. Will Storr has this lovely quote where he said that if tribal thinking is our original sin, then story is our prayer. Here's how I put that to use, if our normal state is to think in this tribal way of us versus them, or even apply it to the circumstance we're talking about here, if our normal state is to think in terms of things that stress me and to worry about, then story is our prayer.

[00:27:35] **Brian Miller, PhD:** We've got to have a story bigger than those little things that we are worrying about. And so again, I'm going to turn to the supervisors that are listening. Are you telling that story? Is there a story that your team tells that not only makes it worth it? Because talking about a story that [00:28:00] makes it worth it includes the suffering about our job, but maybe it carves out the deeply pleasurable part of our job.

[00:28:09] **Brian Miller, PhD:** When you look at the surveys of the most rewarding jobs and people that are happiest in their jobs, it's all. People who work with other people. Barbara Streisand was right. It's people who work with other people. We've got all of the components there to have a job that we love. They're all there. And so, if we aren't focused on those, why is it?

[00:28:37] **Brian Miller, PhD:** It's an important question. It's a righteous question. But it also is an answerable question. We've got to answer why we are attending to this. And sometimes I think we do do a disservice in the

interest of validating each other. Sometimes we focus too much on the hard and ugly parts of the work, the broken parts of [00:29:00] the system.

[00:29:00] **Brian Miller, PhD:** They need to be part of our narrative, too. They can't be denied, even as we've talked about radically accepting them, but the narrative needs to be complete. And so, I know that the two of you have heard me talk about a practice that I instituted in a workplace of grace and goose bumps. It was during our multidisciplinary staffings that I would, at midpoint, call out for stories of grace and goosebumps.

[00:29:31] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And the stories of grace were these moments where something, kind of without my own doing, something unexpected and miraculous happened here, where I was working this case and feeling pretty bleak about it. But then this cool thing happened out of nowhere, and now I'm feeling hopeful about it. Suddenly, this caregiver that I thought had no capacity for self reflection at all, all of a sudden came in in this reflective [00:30:00] moment and say, I think I need to work on changing this.

[00:30:03] **Brian Miller, PhD:** The stories of grace bumps are those daily, and I mean that advisedly, they've got to be daily. Those daily experiences we have of, oh, yeah, this is why I wanted to do it. This is why I wanted to do this work. But if you don't notice them and don't narrate them, it's the same as if they never happened. And so we've got to practice and we practice even beforehand, setting our.

[00:30:31] **Brian Miller, PhD:** brain to start looking for these things. That's where I found great success in the stories, not just the stories that the team was enthusiastic for months afterwards. They were enthusiastic about the stories during staff meeting, but of particular importance is when they would interrupt each other, including me during the week and say, let me tell you this goosebumps moment I just had, which meant now [00:31:00] their brain was going to him.

[00:31:01] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I'm noticing them and I want to narrate them with you.

[00:31:05] **Christina Rouse:** I love that. And I know we talk a lot about reflective supervision and Karen, how would that look from a supervisor's lens of. inviting those opportunities for the narrative. I

[00:31:20] **Karen Hangartner:** think just as Brian said, how do you challenge folks to be aware of the places where they get great joy in their work?

[00:31:28] **Karen Hangartner:** How do we talk about successes and what successes are? And to Brian's point, And we're looking for the small little things that happen when an MDT comes together and just works a case beautifully as a team, are we stopping and acknowledging that for everybody? How do we help our staff stop and think, hear the stories that they're telling themselves and then helping them think about those in [00:32:00] challenging them to create more positive narratives for themselves.

[00:32:05] **Karen Hangartner:** But I like what Brian says sometimes, though. It's not about false cheer. It's not about toxic happiness or whatever. It's got to be really tapping into what you actually feel and looking for those.

[00:32:20] **Christina Rouse:** What have you seen play out when folks kind of are drawn to the narratives that are not joyful? How can that impact the work CAC professionals bring to the office and then how does that trickle down to the families we serve?

[00:32:39] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I think what you're describing will be familiar probably to most of the people listening here. In CSIRT, I refer to it as co rumination. That's true. where we are ruminating together about the negative and undesirable and without a question it has an effect on the whole team and the climate of the [00:33:00] workplace.

[00:33:01] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I called it co rumination just now, but what do we generally call it? We call it benting. But of course, it's not bending at all. It doesn't bend anything off. And there has been research done on this point, by the way. And what is found in that research is after bending with one of my coworkers, which really just means complaining about something that I'm unhappy with, that afterwards, Both of us feel worse, both of us feel more burnout, but we do feel closer to each other.

[00:33:34] **Brian Miller, PhD:** So there's that payoff that it actually binds us together, right? There's the tribalism that is our original sin, right? It's us pulling together, and it's us against the world. the world, but the story we're telling is that this world we're living in has made us a victim. And so what I try to guide people towards in [00:34:00] CSERT is moving those co ruminations into the third act.

[00:34:06] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Pete Holmes said that if there's a hell, the worst thing about it won't be the suffering that's imposed on us. It'll be the fact that they don't give us any breaks to complain about the suffering that we're doing, right? We need that. It's a human thing. We all do it. That's normal. That's natural. But when it transforms is essentially when Christina asked me, what is it you want right now?

[00:34:31] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Is it better if I just validate you or do you want some advice? When I started complaining, I didn't really have an answer to that question. The truth is, well, I just want to complain. That's all I'm aware of. I'm unhappy, I want to complain. But when I have to answer that question and say, I don't need advice about this, I guess I just want to be heard.

[00:34:55] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I want to be validated. The fact that I've said that now moves it [00:35:00] into the third act of the story. It allows me to release it because now, if you validate it for me, I'm happy. Now I can feel like I got what I wanted and that completes it. Without that step of me setting that intention, it just goes on.

[00:35:16] **Brian Miller, PhD:** You've, I tell you, have you seen what the boneheads have done now? And you say, Oh, and you know what else they're doing? Here's what the geniuses are going to do next. And so all we're doing is we're stoking each, nothing's getting invented. We feel worse. Although we do feel like we're now part of the same tribe.

[00:35:34] **Christina Rouse:** And then those stories. Become part of our reality. We think that that becomes the truth to however, that person is going to interact with me or however, that family is going to show up or whatever the outcome of this case might look like. We then kind of solidify those narratives into what we. expect when that's our own creation.



[00:35:58] **Brian Miller, PhD:** It certainly is going [00:36:00] to permeate down to even the services that we provide if we feel like we are victims and we are helpless here. As you ask that question, Christina, I think an acid test question to leaders of organizations is, is it okay for people to say, I love my job. I like what I'm doing here, or is it culturally foreign to say that?

[00:36:27] **Brian Miller, PhD:** It's like, no, we don't talk about that. We talk about how hard it is and how broken the system is and the services that we're not able to provide that we wish we were. Is it socially? tolerated at the lowest level and is a culturally typical to talk about how good this job is. I have a hero who was a woman who's the medical director of a homeless serving agency in the city.

[00:36:55] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Did her medical training at Ivy League University. Had an [00:37:00] automatic pathway to wealth and prestige. And rather than taking that she's working out on the street with the unhoused and she was given an award by the YWCA. And when she received that award, she said, thank you. I appreciate the recognition, but I just have to tell you.

[00:37:22] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I've got a pretty good gig here. You're rewarding me for doing what I love when I've really got a very good job. I think that is what we aspire to. I think we've got to be there and yes, it's difficult work. It's part of what we've got to love about it is it is hard. It is work that most people couldn't do.

[00:37:45] **Brian Miller, PhD:** But we can, we can stay well, and we can love it. Not just from the deep meaning. We've talked about finding meaning in the work, but now what we're talking about is part of the joy [00:38:00] we're in search for comes from the meaning, but part of it comes from just the simple pleasure of doing the work. That's there as well.

[00:38:10] **Christina Rouse:** And I think someone might want to say, or a listener might be thinking, but what if I don't love all the parts of my job that has to be also very okay. Right. And accepted. We're not telling people to love everything about their work because that's maybe impractical.



[00:38:32] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Yeah, well, it's unsustainable and it's not based in reality.

[00:38:36] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Have you ever tried to eat more than three teaspoons of honey? It'll make you sick. However good that first teaspoon tasted, the third one's going to make you ill and you won't want it. We don't live just on pure sweetness. We want the full mix of the hard, the painful. Every day we want, [00:39:00] like Jim Valvano said, that we want to think, we want to laugh, and we want to cry.

[00:39:05] **Brian Miller, PhD:** We want the full mix, and that includes radical acceptance of all of the difficult and undesirable stuff, but it also means not blocking out the positive, enjoyable stuff at the same time. We want it all to be swirled into this.

[00:39:23] **Christina Rouse:** Karen, you might resonate with this. I remember that when folks asked me what I did and I told them what I did as a forensic interviewer talking to children about child sexual abuse allegations, I would want to say I love my job, but I was worried about what that perception would be from that person going, well, that's interesting that you work in this content.

[00:39:47] **Christina Rouse:** How do you love that work? Have you had

[00:39:51] **Karen Hangartner:** that similar experience? Yes, and I think about oftentimes when I say something like, I love my job, people look at you [00:40:00] like you're some sort of crazy freak that you love working in this field. But I also feel like that's something that unites us in the CAC world, because we know exactly what we're talking about when we say, um, I love my job, and I think that's when we can see that what we're doing, we are making a difference.

[00:40:20] **Karen Hangartner:** We are making progress in this field, and that's very encouraging for us. And we'd love being a part of it. But yeah, feels weird to say that to other people outside the field, though, right?

[00:40:33] **Christina Rouse:** So we've talked a little bit about supervision, we've talked about some intentions individuals can have at the start of

their day, but let's offer some additional advice on how someone can maybe, whether they're in a structure that doesn't have supervision, or maybe They're in a structure or an organization where they want to pay more attention to acknowledging the narrative.

[00:40:59] **Christina Rouse:** What are some [00:41:00] things that they can do on a day to day basis that helps them tap into that?

[00:41:04] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I'm going to lead with the fact that again, you're asking the right question about how do we get better at noticing our narrative, because when I do the CSER training, I say that. When you get to where you're noticing your narrative, you aren't half the way there, you're 80 percent of the way there.

[00:41:25] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Because the very fact of noticing it, number one, you disidentify from it, you notice that it is a narrative. What happens when you don't notice it, it just is your reality, and there's nothing you can do about your reality. 80 percent of the game really is just getting better at noticing what this narrative is.

[00:41:52] **Brian Miller, PhD:** First of all, That we have talked about and that's about starting out early in the morning to know your core [00:42:00] affect. It wasn't just about noticing the narrative, it's just noticing what is this core affect, which is really just whether I'm feeling is my energy kind of moving me towards or is it moving away.

[00:42:13] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I notice even after years of my own trying to practice what I preach about getting better at noticing my narrative, that it often isn't about hearing my inner voice and knowing what that quote is that's going on in my head. It really is often about noticing my behavior, noticing my body, a truism is that the body always lives in the here and now.

[00:42:41] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And so if I want to know what narrative is going on, a lot of that's just noticing by what is the action that my body is wanting to move me towards or away from, and then I can begin to narrate that. I'll say, just literally this morning in the New York [00:43:00] Times, I was reading research that has been done for controlled research around LSD

trips, and that when they would have subjects that were in the full effects of LSD, and they would have them subject on their body right fMRI see all of a sudden the brain comes to this immediate sense of order.

[00:43:24] **Brian Miller, PhD:** Even though you're being disordered by the hallucinogen, as soon as you start to focus on the way that you're feeling right here and now in my body, it immediately produces this sense of order. And then another important point, because as I said, Meaning can only be created after the fact. It doesn't occur during the stress or provocation.

[00:43:49] **Brian Miller, PhD:** So when you say supervision may not be available, that is certainly true. And supervision is never going to be the most important practice here, but it [00:44:00] is all of the pure supervision that we don't even call supervision. We call it going into Christina's office to talk. It is just that. There's the narrative.

[00:44:12] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And that's when I want to start noticing, is it a narrative? And notice, what is it that I'm tending to want to say to Christina right now? How am I Noticing and talking about it, but I think because I wanted to really underscore noticing the pleasurable aspects of your job as well as the difficult things that a lot of that does require that you prime that up front so that you begin to notice that

[00:44:40] **Christina Rouse:** Karen, what have you seen work for folks who are wanting to tune into their conscious narrative?

[00:44:46] **Karen Hangartner:** I think developing some rituals kind of helps, like Brian alluded to, how you start your day. How do you start your day at home? How do you start your day at work? How do you end your day at work? [00:45:00] And I think those little things can make a big difference for folks. But there's this really smart guy that said this quote.

[00:45:10] **Karen Hangartner:** The Greatest weapon we have against job stress is our ability to choose one story over another. So I love the idea too of whenever I'm doing some work around this and I'm thinking about what's the story I'm telling myself here and how can I shift that story for myself. can be really powerful.

[00:45:33] **Christina Rouse:** I think I heard one person who was in the CSER training share one of their rituals at the end of their day, because we know that the work that we're doing is over consumed in the enormity of suffering of folks, right?

[00:45:50] **Christina Rouse:** Of children that at the end of the day on their drive home, they would always try to find at least one thing that was joyful, whether it [00:46:00] was Kids playing, friends having a coffee, people laughing or being intimate, just something that kind of re centered them away from the things that they heard during the day, but also to remind them that it's not all doom and gloom in the work that we do.

[00:46:22] **Christina Rouse:** And I thought it was just a really simple, like you mentioned, Karen, less than two minutes takes to focus that narrative. All right, so let's head into our closing. I know that we could talk for many more hours about the CSER domains and the impact that it has in the CEC field, but to wrap this up, I would love to know from both of you and Karen, we'll start with you.

[00:46:49] **Christina Rouse:** What's the story you tell yourself about the work you do and how does that help keep you passionately committed?

[00:46:57] **Karen Hangartner:** Oh, that's such a good [00:47:00] question. If I'm being brutally honest and transparent, it varies from day to day. And there are some days that the story I'm telling myself is not necessarily a positive one.

[00:47:13] **Karen Hangartner:** And so, that's just the reality. But, I'm also real quick to remind myself that it really is a privilege to be able to do this work with the colleagues and the people that I know I get to do this work with. It's a privilege. I just can't imagine doing anything else where The work that we do is so important in the world, and we get to do it with colleagues that are just rock star superstars and are as passionately committed as we are.

[00:47:48] **Karen Hangartner:** Brian, what about you?

[00:47:49] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I do have a clear answer to that superb question, Christina, because I've thought a lot about it, not only in CSIRT

terms, but just in personal terms, [00:48:00] that I really consider that what I am doing as I promulgate CSIRT is I'm in the third act of my career. And I say that not just based on my age, But I have these very clear acts to my career story.

[00:48:14] **Brian Miller, PhD:** The first one in adult behavioral health, the second one in children's behavioral health, and now this third one around CSER, in which the meaning that I find in this. I have a high target that I want to support the career of you who are doing this work presently in whatever act in your career may be that I want to do something to make it better.

[00:48:41] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And I know what the big payoffs are is when I have communication email or personal communication with somebody that said you changed my career. CSER has been transformative to my career. That will move me to tears. That's the big payoff. Also, in [00:49:00] trying to practice what I preach. I'm willing to be quite okay with just somebody say, I now realize that rumination is a problem and I've got some ideas I want to try around reducing my tendency to, that I'll take that.

[00:49:15] **Brian Miller, PhD:** There's a quote that, it's attributed to Ronald Reagan, but he didn't say it, but the quote is that some people have a problem wondering whether they've made a difference in the world. The Marines don't have that problem. Well, to the audience we're talking with today, I think I do work in health care with physicians.

[00:49:36] **Brian Miller, PhD:** I do work in the CACs with you, and I think for those two groups, especially more than any other groups I can think of, is the profound meaning of what you do is right there and I do sometimes feel like saying, can't you see it? It's right here. Where did you lose the plot line of that? [00:50:00] And why you wanted to do that?

[00:50:01] **Brian Miller, PhD:** And can we work with each other to keep reminding ourselves of that? These are what David Brooks refers to them as the eulogy virtues at shutter. I'm sorry to make you think about it, but at your funeral, what you do for a living will feature in the eulogies that are said about you. That's different than just bragging about something on a resume because I got this publication or I got this big time job.

[00:50:30] **Brian Miller, PhD:** The work that you do is so much a stuff of what makes you the person that you are and makes you the good person that you are. That's worth remembering every single day.

[00:50:44] **Christina Rouse:** As you reflect on today's discussion, Remember that a mindful and intentional narrative can help you find joy and stay passionately committed to your work.

[00:50:55] **Christina Rouse:** Thank you for joining us for a thought provoking conversation. Much [00:51:00] appreciation for our guests on this episode. Remember in the moments between episodes, look for the invisible threads that connect you to your purpose. If what you heard sparked your curiosity to learn more. Hit the subscribe button and follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn at Southern Regional Children's Advocacy Center for more learning content.

[00:51:21] **Christina Rouse:** All resources mentioned in this podcast are linked in the show notes below the S-R-C-A-C Exchange Podcast is made possible through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice Under award number one five PJ DP 22 GK 0 3 0 5 9. J. J. V. O. The opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this podcast are those of the guests and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice.

[00:51:54] **Christina Rouse:** The SRCEC Exchange Podcast Season 3 is hosted by me, Christina Rouse, [00:52:00] and produced by Peachtree Sound. Music provided by Midnight Dream.