Trauma Informed Care:
Vicarious Trauma And Self-Care

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Lots of Words…One Concept

Vicarious trauma

Compassion fatigue

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Co-victimization

Traumatic counter-transference

BURNOUT!!!!
Vicarious Traumatization

What is it???
Vicarious Traumatization

The cumulative transformative effect on the helper of working with survivors of traumatic life events, both positive and negative.

--Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996
What We Know

- Many people gain a sense of personal satisfaction from their work.
- Many people also feel a strong sense of empathy for those with whom they work, and can take on the feelings, symptoms, or behaviors of those in our care.
Take Care!

• We must take care to recognize the traumatizing effects of being caught in reenactments with clients or being the targets of their aggression and anger when they act out their past.
Vicarious Traumatization
--Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996

- No time, no energy
- Disconnection
- Social withdrawal
- Sensitivity to violence
- Cynicism
- Despair and hopelessness
- Nightmares
- Disrupted frame of reference

- Changes in identity, worldview, spirituality
- Diminished self-efficacy
- Disrupted schemas
- Alterations in sensory experiences (PTSD)
If it goes on too long...

AVOIDING BURNOUT:
Understanding Vicarious Traumatization

CAUTION

BURNOUT!!!!
Vicarious Traumatization: What Causes It??

- Biological causes (emotional)
  - What makes us vulnerable??
    - Empathy
    - Emotional reactivity
    - Ease in connecting emotionally to others
    - Tendency to mimic the facial expressions of others

- Psychological causes (loss of positive illusions)
  - Exposure to the harsh realities of the painful realities of the lives of other people
  - This can shatter our beliefs about fairness and justice
Vicarious Traumatization: What Causes It???

• Social causes
  – Victim blaming in our society
  – Taboo subjects make it difficult to access support from others
  – Seeing our clients as bad/sick rather than injured

• Organizational causes
  – Lack of supervision and support
  – High caseload/low pay

• Moral causes
  – Therapy, helping work no longer sacred
  – Budget cuts
Individual Risk Factors for Vicarious Traumatization

- Personal or family history of trauma
- Overwork
- Poor respect for boundaries
- Too high caseload of trauma survivors
- Less experience
- Too much exposure
- High percentage of traumatized children, especially sexually abused children
- Too many negative clinical outcomes
Organizational Risk Factors for Promoting Vicarious Trauma

- Provide no respite for staff
- Unrealistically high caseloads
- Denial of severity and pervasiveness of trauma
- Failure to identify and address secondary trauma
- No opportunities for continuing education
- Insufficient vacation time
- Role ambiguity
- Failure to capture success
Individual Protective Factors Against Vicarious Traumatization

- Supervision and consultation
- Resolution of one’s personal issues
- Strong ethical principles of practice
- Knowledge of theory
- On-going training
- Competence in practice strategies
- Awareness of the potential and impact of VT
- Good physical, emotional, social, spiritual self-care
Organizations that Facilitate Healing  
(Catherall, 1999)

- Stressors are accepted as real and legitimate
- Problem is viewed as a problem for the entire group and not limited to the individual
- General approach to the problem is to seek solutions, not affix blame
- High tolerance for individual disturbance
- Support is expressed clearly, directly, and abundantly in the form of praise, commitment, and affection
- Communication is open and effective with few sanctions about what can be said
Organizations that Facilitate Healing
(Catherall, 1999)

- Quality of communication is good and messages are clear and direct
- High degree of cohesion in the group
- Considerable flexibility of roles and individuals are not rigidly restricted from assuming different roles
- Resources—material, social, and institutional—are utilized efficiently
- There is no subculture of violence
- There is no substance abuse
Think About It!

How can we promote a productive workplace environment that promotes recovery, healing, and resilience???
Think About It!

• What do you find rewarding about your work?
• What things make you most vulnerable to VT?
• What are your warning markers for stress?
• What does stress make you feel like?
• What are your external signs of stress?
• How can someone best intervene if they see those signs?
Make A Plan!

• Make a commitment to yourself
• Make a commitment to your coworkers
Safety Plan

- A list of activities that you can choose from
- Use when you are feeling overwhelmed to help mitigate the feelings
- Helps you to avoid engaging in negative behavior
Safety Plan

• Choose things you can do by yourself
• They do not require permission
• They can be done anywhere, anytime!
Sample Safety Plan

1. Think of my happy place
2. Call my husband
3. Sing my favorite song
4. Breathe

KEEP CALM AND BREATHE DEEPLY
Safety Plan vs. Self-Care

- Self-care plans are practiced regularly and proactively
- Safety plans are in-the-moment interventions
Self Care: What is it??

• The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL-R 5) is a way to measure how satisfied workers are with their jobs providing help to others.
• It is also a way to measure their distress from exposure to traumatized people.
• Understanding these factors can help workers make a plan to cope with their reactions to working with traumatized clients.
Self Care: Why is it important??

- In order to help others, we must first take care of ourselves—the airline motto.
- Many of us come to the field as helpers because we have faced and overcome our own traumas or problems. This can make us more vulnerable.
- We can only help ourselves and our agency manage the risks if we identify them.
Self Care: how do you do it??

- Determine your risk factors for vicarious trauma/compassion fatigue as well as your level of satisfaction with your work.
- Make a plan for how you might manage stress or protect yourself from the impacts of exposure to the trauma of those you help in your job.
Self Care Planning

• Your plan should include FOUR domains:
  – Personal
  – Professional
  – Organizational
  – Social
Self Care Planning

- The personal section of the plan should include all kinds of safety (physical, psychological, social, and moral/spiritual)
- Not all suggestions are feasible for you
- Don’t include things that don’t really work for you—you won’t use them anyway!
- Think outside the box—get creative!
To Share or Not To Share??

- Safety Plans: YES!
- Self Care Plans: maybe
Respite is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity.

The Thoughtful Caregiver