Indicators and Healthy Coping Strategies for Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma

District of Columbia Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants
August 16, 2021
11:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.
WebEx Orientation

- Mute
- Chat Features
- Raising Hand
- Question Follow-Up
- Technical Assistance/Help
Learning Objectives

- **Recognize**
  
  Recognize the symptoms of personal vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.

- **Identify**
  
  Identify individualized adaptive coping strategies that contribute to health and well-being.

- **Learn**
  
  Learn ways to model self-care practices that contribute to a supportive work environment.
Getting to Know You Polls!
Why do you stay in your field?
Definitions

- **Compassion fatigue**: Reduced capacity or interest in being empathic; adverse reactions of helpers who seek to help trauma survivors.

- **Vicarious trauma**: The negative effects of caring about and caring for others.
“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

—R. N. Remen, M.D., 1996
Vicarious Trauma

Change in Worldview

Spectrum of Responses

Negative
- Vicarious Traumatization
- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Burnout
- PTSD
- Unhealthy Behaviors
- Compassion Fatigue

Neutral
- Resilient, Healthy Workers

Positive
- Vicarious Resilience
- Post-Traumatic Growth
- Vicarious Transformation
- Compassion Satisfaction

Post-Traumatic Growth

Vicarious Transformation

Compassion Satisfaction

Molnar, Sprang, Killian, Gottfried, Emery, Bride, Traumatology 2017
ABCs of CF/VT Strategies

Awareness
Balance and Boundaries
Coping Strategies
“The capacity for compassion and empathy seem to be at the core of our ability to do the work and at the core of our ability to be wounded by the work.”
~Charles Figley
Prevalence Poll
Risk Factors - Personal

- young age
- prior traumatic experiences
- pre-existing mental health issues
- highly empathetic
- social isolation, inadequate support system
- a tendency to avoid feelings, withdraw, or assign blame to others in stressful situations
- difficulty expressing feelings
- difficulty being assertive or setting boundaries
- loss in last 12 months (death of a loved one, divorce, layoff)
Risk Factors - Professional

- Early in career, newer employees, less experience
- Inadequate preparation, orientation, and training
- Lack of quality supervision
- Constant and intense exposure to trauma with little or no variation in work tasks
- Lack of an effective and supportive process for discussing traumatic content of the work
- Employee/role or organization mismatch
- Conflict in the workplace
Exposure to the Story and Its Results

- Witnessing reactions of the victim, family, friends, and community
- Exposure to the victim’s revictimization
- Confronting the worse of humanity
- Seeing the aftermath of the criminal justice process
Additional Layers of Stress
"The psychological distress, in particular fear and sadness, is a function of the pandemic’s negative impact upon people’s ability to meet their most basic needs (e.g., physical safety, financial security, social connection, participation in meaningful activities)."

The Ongoing Struggle for Racial Justice

Resilience Works 2021
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
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Professional Effects of Vicarious Trauma

- Morale
- Behavioral
- Performance
- Relational
Organizational Effects of Vicarious Trauma

- Loss in Productivity
- Staff Turnover
- Poor Organizational Health
Know where you end, and a victim begins.
Know how personal history affects your ability to work with victims.
Know your biases and values.
Know the difference between enmeshment and empowerment.
Balance your personal and professional life.
Healthy Boundaries

Assist victims only with what they cannot do for themselves. This gives victims a sense of empowerment and a return of control.

Support victims in doing what they can and need to do for themselves. This avoids creating dependence and helplessness.
“Resiliency is... the power to cope with adversity and adapt to challenges or change. Resiliency helps us return to healthy functioning after being in a stressful situation.”

Luthar, Cicchetti, and Bronwyn 2007
Core Elements of Resiliency

- Self-Knowledge and Insight
- A Sense of Hope
- Healthy Coping
- Strong Relationships
- Personal Perspective and Meaning
1. Self-Knowledge and Insight

- Knowing who you are
- Having a clear sense of what you believe and how you feel
- Identifying your strengths and weaknesses
Components of Self-Knowledge and Insight

- Positive self-esteem
- Strong inner locus of control
- Independence
Explore your motivation for working with victims of crime.
Identify your own strengths and challenges.
Identify themes associated with discomfort.
Clarify goals, mission, and boundaries of your organization.
2. A Sense of Hope

- Belief that situations can get better
- Belief that the future will be better than the present or past
- Recognizing the difficulty of the experiences of the victims you serve yet maintaining a positive view of the challenges of life
Components of a Sense of Hope

- Optimism
- A sense of humor and the ability to have fun
Strategies To Develop a Sense of Hope

- Develop opportunities to succeed.
- Practice gratitude.
- Change or expand your job description.
- Give praise.
- Diversify the types of victims you serve.
- Cultivate humor.
Humor and Stress

There are therapeutic consequences to using humor as a stress management tool.

Finding humor in a situation and laughing freely with others can be a powerful antidote to stress.

Laughter can temporarily banish feelings of anger or fear, replacing them with more lighthearted and hopeful feelings.
3. Healthy Coping

- Balancing the negative aspects of work with positive activities
- Paying attention to physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs
- Building on skills and planning for and addressing negative feelings proactively
Negativity Bias
Components of Healthy Coping

- Using your skills and abilities
- Creativity and flexibility
- Effective planning
- Addressing negativity proactively
Strategies To Develop Healthy Coping

- Learn to identify physical stress reactions.
- Balance your life.
- Get adequate sleep.
- Develop calming and modulation techniques.
- Change the pace of your work and personal life.
4. Strong Relationships

- Sense of belonging
- Positive connections with other
- Personal networks of support
Components of Strong Relationships

- Attachments to others
- Seeking and giving support
Enhance communication skills.

Learn boundaries of confidentiality.

Collaborate.

Seek inclusiveness and diversity.

Foster a team approach.
5. Personal Perspective and Meaning

- Personal points of view – weighing the costs, losses, and benefits associated with victim services work
- Individual morality, integrity, spirituality
- Coherent meaning for life
“Meaning is the sense that, no matter what is going on in your life, you can hang onto the things that really matter to you. It is the belief that there are elements and people and views that cannot – no matter what – be taken from you.”

~Viktor Frankl
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<td><strong>Assess</strong></td>
<td>your personal values.</td>
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<td><strong>Integrate</strong></td>
<td>new understandings in your work.</td>
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<td><strong>Assess</strong></td>
<td>your perspective of suffering.</td>
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<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>old beliefs.</td>
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Creating Space for Inquiry
• Why am I doing what I’m doing?
• Is trauma mastery a factor for me?
• Is this working for me?

Choosing Our Focus
• Where am I putting my focus?
• What is my Plan B?

Building Compassion and Community
• Creating a microculture
• Practicing compassion for myself and others
• What can I do for large-scale systemic change?

Finding Balance
• Engaging with our lives outside of work
• Moving energy through
• Gratitude

A Daily Practice of Centering Myself
The OVC Vicarious Trauma Toolkit
DC Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants: Vicarious Trauma Trainings - Indicators and Healthy Coping Strategies for Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma

Scan the QR code with your phone to open the survey.
Thanks for participating!