Turning the Tide: Preventing Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma
Linda Chamberlain, PhD MPH GCFP
www.drlindachamberlain.com

Trail Map
• Through Vicarious Resilience Lens-start and finish!
• Brain, body and stress
• Defining burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma
• Individual and organizational indicators of vicarious trauma
• Grief and resiliency
• Resources and strategies to promote vicarious resilience and prevent vicarious trauma
  • Working with brain from top down & bottom-up

Every practice in this presentation is an invitation. Take care of yourself and only do what feels comfortable, appropriate and safe to you. Just listening is great too.

VICARIOUS RESILIENCE
- Process of positive growth and empowerment that comes through working with clients who are coping with and overcoming adversity
  • Vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience co-exist
    - Recognizing people’s capacity to heal
    - Reaffirming the value of the work you do
    - Gift of HOPE

Vicarious Resilience: A Comprehensive Review, Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018
Vicarious Resilience, Vicarious Trauma and Awareness of Equity in Trauma Work, Hernandez-Wolfe & Killian, 2014

Where we are falling short is completing the cycle of trauma work and neglecting a critical piece of the process which leads our staff to heal and makes our difficult work worthwhile: vicarious resilience. Vicarious resilience happens when the professional experiences personal growth in their own life through witnessing the growth of their clients.

Keeping Our Trauma Therapists Healthy with Vicarious Resilience, Council on Accreditation, 2018

Vicarious resilience is only possible if skills and strategies are implemented by organizations and individuals to protect themselves.

Take a moment to think about the most rewarding moment you’ve had at your job—those moments that keep you coming back.

https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en
The Brain On Stress: “Downstairs”

PSYCHONEUROIMMUNOENDOCRINOLOGY - SAY WHAT?

- Specialty examines interaction between brain, body, immune system and hormones
- Body mounts stress response & we can become trapped in fight/flight alarm status
- Most stressors today are not physical
- Emotional stress is translated into physical symptoms

Every emotion and thought has a physical response in the body

“The Body Keeps the Score”

- Overwhelming stress/trauma fragments self- and body-awareness
  - Resides in nervous system
  - Stimulate survival areas of brain to release tension patterns

The past can live in the present in the body
Peter Levine, Trauma Summit, 2018

Vicarious Trauma

- We’ve known for some time...
  - Predictable and preventable
- Workers in helping fields affected by the work they do
  - Direct exposure to traumatic events (police, EMS...)
  - Secondary exposure through working with others who have experienced trauma
- We know more than ever before about best practices

If we are to do our work with suffering people and environments in a sustainable way, we must understand how our work affects us.

Trauma Stewardship, Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky

Why invest time and resources to prevent vicarious trauma?

- Vicarious trauma impacts:
  - Our work, colleagues, overall functioning of organization, and quality of assistance being provided to clients
  - Physical, mental and behavioral health
  - How we act and interact with people you care about
- Expensive to ignore → staff turnover and absenteeism
Having a prevention plan for vicarious trauma is the first step to becoming trauma-informed.

**Starts with Us**

**Breath Awareness Practice**

“Self-care isn’t complementary or alternative — it’s fundamental for good health."

James Gordon, MD
Georgetown University Medical School, Center for Mind-Body Medicine

**Burn-Out**

- Result of stress and frustration caused by toxic work environment
- Contributing factors include:
  - Unrealistic demands, heavy workload
  - Poor management, inadequate support
  - Feelings of depersonalization resulting in negative, cynical attitudes towards work/clients

**Compassion Fatigue**

- Profound physical, emotional and mental erosion that takes place when helpers/caregivers are unable to refuel and regenerate
- Emotional depletion → may feel like nothing left to give

**Vicarious Trauma**

**DEFINITION**

Profound shift in world view that can occur in helping professionals when working with others who have experienced trauma

- Transformation of our view of ourselves, others, and the world as a result of exposure to the suffering of others
- Symptoms may be similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Write down 2-3 signs that someone who does the type of work you do may be affected by vicarious trauma

**Indicators of Vicarious Trauma**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Rapid pulse/breathing; headaches, impaired immune system, fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological/Emotional</td>
<td>Feeling no one understands you, powerless-can't make a difference, fearfulness, disillusionment, “can't bounce back&quot;, don't enjoy things you used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Irritability, sleep/appetite changes, isolating from friends/family, self-medicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Cynicism, pessimism, intrusive thoughts and images, preoccupation with clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard and getting less done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>↓ confidence, negative attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Detached/withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication; ↑ conflict, impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Absent/tardiness, poor fellow-thought, overwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Content from The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit (Office for Victims of Crime, 2017); What About You?/National Center for Family Homelessness
Ah-Ha Moment…
“Grand Seduction Weekend Package”

Vicarious trauma is a change in one’s thinking due to exposure to other people’s traumatic stories.
David Berceli, Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercise (TRE)

Do you think we’re having any impact?
Feeling Helpless and Hopeless

Choose Two Questions
As a result of the work you do:
1. How has my identify and personal beliefs about myself changed?
2. Have the reasons that I chose to do this work changed from when I started?
3. Am I using my strengths and resources to keep growing with the work or am I in survival mode?
4. Has my perception of things that are under my control changed since I started doing this work?
5. Think about a critical situation in the last few months that affected how your thinking/how you felt outside of work.

Contributing Factors include:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Organizational</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trauma history</td>
<td>Lack of control over workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation/</td>
<td>Lack of professional support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor support system</td>
<td>Inadequate orientation &amp; training for position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major co-occurring life stressors</td>
<td>Poor supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close identification with those being assisted</td>
<td>High prevalence of trauma among service population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Mathieu et al, 2012; Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Slattery & Goodman, 2009

Working with children

Professional Quality of Life Scale (PrOQOL)

- Validated scale designed to measure negative and positive effects of helping others experiencing trauma
  - Burn-out
  - Compassion fatigue
  - Compassion satisfaction
  - Available in 25 languages

Heritage et al, 2018

Self-Care and Balance

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Workplace/professional

http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf
No “One-Size Fits All” Strategy

- Stress is an individual experience
- Mind and body are constantly influencing and altering one another
  - How you are affected by stress is not static
- Know your triggers and warning signs
- What do you expose yourself to outside of work?
- How are your boundaries?
- Creating social connections even during social distancing
  - Especially outside of work
- Toolkit of best practices

BUFFER ZONE

Do you have a daily transition ritual between work and home?

The Science of Acupoints

Stimulating acupoints can↓ activity in limbic system—amygdala, brain stem and midbrain structures involved in Fight, Flight and Freeze (FFF), survival response

Point Beneath the Nose for Panic, Anxiety
With index fingertip or knuckle of the finger, press into the point directly below the nose on the upper lip.

Write Down Three Potential Indicators of Organizational Vicarious Trauma

- Widespread cynicism and pessimism
- Lack of communication and frequent miscommunications
- Increase in interpersonal conflicts
- High rates of absences or tardiness
- Ethical or boundary violations
- Unexplained reductions in productivity/service delivery
- Increase in client complaints
- High rates of staff turnover
- Negative atmosphere/low moral

Organizational Wellness

The industry needs to make a paradigm shift away from blaming helpers for developing compassion fatigue/vicarious trauma to where we see the solution in a larger organizational context rather than focusing solely on individual helpers’ responsibility for self-care.

Essential Elements of Trauma-informed System to Promote Worker Resiliency

- Recognize exposure to trauma is a risk of the work you do
- Recognize impact of vicarious trauma on workforce
- Understand that trauma can shape the culture of organizations in the same way that trauma can shape the world view of individuals
- Awareness that trauma-informed organizations are less likely to re-traumatize the clients/families they serve
- Develop capacity to translate trauma-related knowledge into meaningful action, policy & improvements in practice

National Child Traumatic Stress Network Fact Sheet

Developing a Prevention Plan for Vicarious Trauma

- Organizational and Personal Self-Care Checklists
- Use checklists to brainstorm (page 37) about steps
  - During recruitment
  - During orientation
  - During employment
  - When leaving position


Best Practices to Promote Vicarious Resilience and Prevent Vicarious Trauma

1. Baseline assessment—individual and organizational level—essential to get buy-in
2. System-wide training on impact of vicarious trauma on workforce, culture of organization and quality of services
3. Create culture of supporting staff that begins during hiring process, is part of orientation, continuing education & exit interviews (National Center for Homelessness)
4. Discuss in team/staff meetings and low impact debriefing after critical events ASAP (Hospice)
5. Build a toolkit of resiliency practices that are integrated into organizational practices (Center for Mind-Body Medicine)

Low Impact Debriefing

1. Increased Self Awareness
   Become aware of the stories you tell and the level of detail. What details do I need to share?
2. Fair Warning
   What would I say to someone if I was sharing bad news?
3. Consent
   I need to debrief with you. Is now a good time?
4. Limited Disclosure
   Start with outer circle of your story and as you move in, decide how much of the graphic details you need to include. Check in with yourself—is this too much information to share at this time?
**Mind-Body Resiliency Skills**

- Mind-body skills (mindfulness, body scans, mindful movement) are a gateway to neuroplasticity.
- The brain can change throughout the lifespan = neurogenesis.

>*A resilient individual is not someone who avoids stress but someone who learns how to tame and master it.*

— The Resilient Brain, Scientific American Mind, July/August, 2013

**Resilience and Grief**

**CORE ELEMENTS OF BEING RESILIENT THROUGH GRIEF**

1. Understanding that suffering is part of human existence.
2. Ability to focus on what you can change and knowing what you can’t change.
3. Focusing attention on what is good.

Stand up if... see Lucy Hone in Suggested Resource List.

**Resilience is Not a Fixed Trait**

- Research & traditional practices agree that gratitude is an essential tool of healing and well-being.
- Army calls it “hunting the good stuff”.
- Write down 3 good things a day.
- Ask yourself “is what I’m doing helping or harming me?” (not just what you’re doing but also what you’re thinking...)

*“Ordinary Magic” - Ann Masten*

also see Lucy Hone.

**iREST and U.S. Armed Forces**

Ordinary Magic - Ann Masten

also see Lucy Hone.
iREST (Integrative Restoration) Practice
Peeling Away the Tension

JabuMind App- See Stress and Anxiety

Tools for Trauma-Informed Systems

- Daily practices through which individuals, organizations, and societies tend to the hardship, pain, or trauma experienced by others

- Through trauma stewardship, daily suffering can be transformed into meaningful growth and healing when a quality of presence is cultivated & maintained