

## Turning the Tide: Preventing Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma



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## 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.

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## 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

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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

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**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.**

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[https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en)

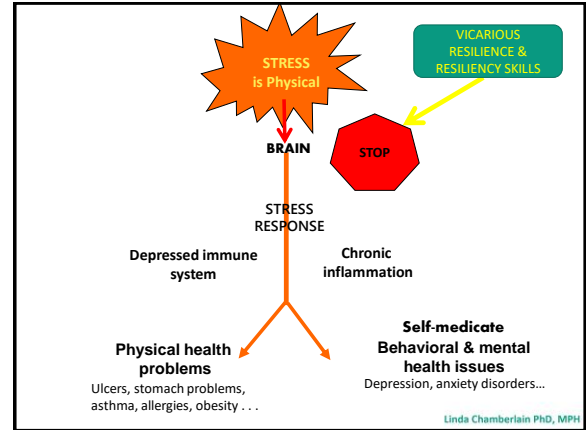
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### The Brain On Stress: “Downstairs”

Cortex  
Pre-frontal Cortex

HEALTHY HEALERS PROJECT Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC)

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### 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

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### “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

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### 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*

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### 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

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## Starts with Us

Having a prevention plan for vicarious trauma is the first step to becoming trauma-informed



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## 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

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## Burn-Out

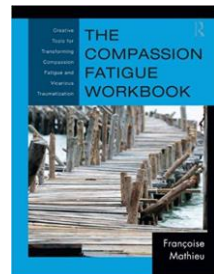
- Result of stress and frustration caused by toxic work environment
- Contributing factors include:
  - Unrealistic demands, heavy workload
  - Poor management, inadequate support
- Feelings of depersonalization resulting in negative, cynical attitudes towards work/clients



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## 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



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## 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

Van Derroot Lipsky, 2009; Figley, 2015

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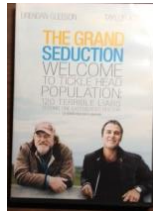
## Indicators of Vicarious Trauma

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

Sources: Content from *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit* (Office for Victims of Crime, 2017); *What About You?* National Center for Family Homelessness

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## 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 Berceci, Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercise (TRE)

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Do you think we're having any impact?

Feeling Helpless and Hopeless

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### 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.

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### Contributing Factors include:

#### Personal

- Trauma history
- Social isolation/
- Poor support system
- Major co-occurring life stressors
- Close identification with those being assisted

#### Organizational

- Lack of control over workload
- Lack of professional support system
- Inadequate orientation & training for position
- Poor supervision
- High prevalence of trauma among service population

Working with children

Mathieu et al, 2012; Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Slattery & Goodman, 2009

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### Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)

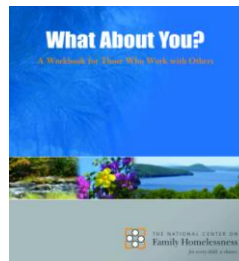
- Validated scale designed to measure negative and positive effects of helping others experiencing trauma
- Burn-out
- Compassion fatigue
- Compassion satisfaction
- Available in 25 languages

Unhelpful	Helpful	Unhelpful	Helpful	Unhelpful	Helpful
1. I feel trapped.	11. I feel proud of what I do for others.	21. I feel that my work is meaningful.	31. I feel that my work is meaningful.	41. I feel that my work is meaningful.	51. I feel that my work is meaningful.
2. I get exhausted from being able to help people.	12. I feel that my work is meaningful.	22. I feel that my work is meaningful.	32. I feel that my work is meaningful.	42. I feel that my work is meaningful.	52. I feel that my work is meaningful.
3. I feel overwhelmed by my work.	13. I feel that my work is meaningful.	23. I feel that my work is meaningful.	33. I feel that my work is meaningful.	43. I feel that my work is meaningful.	53. I feel that my work is meaningful.
4. I feel that my work is meaningful.	14. I feel that my work is meaningful.	24. I feel that my work is meaningful.	34. I feel that my work is meaningful.	44. I feel that my work is meaningful.	54. I feel that my work is meaningful.
5. I feel that my work is meaningful.	15. I feel that my work is meaningful.	25. I feel that my work is meaningful.	35. I feel that my work is meaningful.	45. I feel that my work is meaningful.	55. I feel that my work is meaningful.
6. I feel that my work is meaningful.	16. I feel that my work is meaningful.	26. I feel that my work is meaningful.	36. I feel that my work is meaningful.	46. I feel that my work is meaningful.	56. I feel that my work is meaningful.
7. I feel that my work is meaningful.	17. I feel that my work is meaningful.	27. I feel that my work is meaningful.	37. I feel that my work is meaningful.	47. I feel that my work is meaningful.	57. I feel that my work is meaningful.
8. I feel that my work is meaningful.	18. I feel that my work is meaningful.	28. I feel that my work is meaningful.	38. I feel that my work is meaningful.	48. I feel that my work is meaningful.	58. I feel that my work is meaningful.
9. I feel that my work is meaningful.	19. I feel that my work is meaningful.	29. I feel that my work is meaningful.	39. I feel that my work is meaningful.	49. I feel that my work is meaningful.	59. I feel that my work is meaningful.
10. I feel that my work is meaningful.	20. I feel that my work is meaningful.	30. I feel that my work is meaningful.	40. I feel that my work is meaningful.	50. I feel that my work is meaningful.	60. I feel that my work is meaningful.

[www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)  
Heritage et al, 2018

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### Self-Care and Balance



<http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf>

Physical Self-Care	Emotional Self-Care
1. I get enough sleep.	1. I feel that my work is meaningful.
2. I eat healthy food.	2. I feel that my work is meaningful.
3. I exercise regularly.	3. I feel that my work is meaningful.
4. I take breaks when needed.	4. I feel that my work is meaningful.
5. I feel that my work is meaningful.	5. I feel that my work is meaningful.
6. I feel that my work is meaningful.	6. I feel that my work is meaningful.
7. I feel that my work is meaningful.	7. I feel that my work is meaningful.
8. I feel that my work is meaningful.	8. I feel that my work is meaningful.
9. I feel that my work is meaningful.	9. I feel that my work is meaningful.
10. I feel that my work is meaningful.	10. I feel that my work is meaningful.

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

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## 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

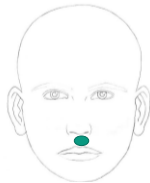
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## BUFFER ZONE

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

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## 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.

D.C.

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[www.relaxationresponse.org](http://www.relaxationresponse.org)

**“ONE”**

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## 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

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## 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.

Killian KD. Helping till it hurts? Traumatology,14(2):41.

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### 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

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### 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



<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/what-about-you-workbook-those-who-work-others>

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### Organizational Self-Care Check List

**activity 3.3 The Organizational Self-Care Checklist**

**Instructions:** Check off everything your organization currently does to support self-care.

<p><b>Training and Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization provides education to all employees about stress and its impact on health and well-being.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization provides all employees with education on the signs of burnout, compassion fatigue and/or vicarious traumatization.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization provides all employees with stress management trainings.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization provides all employees with training related to their job tasks.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff are given opportunities to attend refresher trainings and trainings on new topics related to their role.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff coverage is in place to support training.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization provides education on the steps necessary to advance in whatever role you are in.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</li> </ul> <p><b>Support and Supervision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization offers an employee assistance program (EAP).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Employee job descriptions and responsibilities are clearly defined.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All staff members have regular supervision.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Part of supervision is used to address job stress and self-care strategies.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Part of supervision is used for on-going assessment of workload and time needed to complete tasks.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff members are encouraged to understand their own stress reactions and take appropriate steps to develop their own self-care plans.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff members are welcome to discuss concerns about the organization or their job with administrators without negative consequences (e.g., being treated differently, feeling like their job is in jeopardy or having it impact their role on the team).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff members are encouraged to take breaks, including lunch and vacation time.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization supports peer-to-peer activities such as support groups and mentoring.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>continued on next page</small></p>
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<http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf>

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### 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*)

Law enforcement agencies need to foster a culture of adaptive coping strategies...

Fighting Police Trauma, 2018 & Lindsay & Shelley, 2009

### Low-Impact Debriefing

- Contagion factor to sharing too many details
- Talking about trauma as part of work seems normal and may feel “desensitized” to it but research shows otherwise
  - Negative impact of cumulative exposure whether we are aware or not
- Two types of debriefing
  - Informal (ad hoc, talk to colleague etc.)
  - Formal (structured, scheduled) debriefing

Mathieu, Compassion Fatigue Workbook

<https://www.tendacademy.ca/low-impact-debriefing-how-to-stop-sliming-each-other/>

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### 4 Steps for 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?

Mathieu, Compassion Fatigue Workbook

<https://www.tendacademy.ca/low-impact-debriefing-how-to-stop-sliming-each-other/>

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## 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

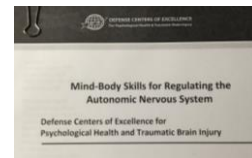
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## Resilience is Not a Fixed Trait

- 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

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What are the U.S. Armed Forces, the National Institutes of Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other systems doing for stress reduction that we need to know?

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# iREST

Integrative Restoration

## iRest and U.S. Armed Forces



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## iREST (Integrative Restoration) Practice

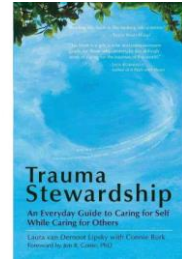
### Peeling Away the Tension

JabuMind App- See Stress and Anxiety

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## 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



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