

Vicarious Trauma



EXPOSURE TO THEIR STORIES

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Agenda

- Defining Vicarious Trauma
- Controlled Empathy
- Signs and Symptoms
- Which staff are at risk?
- Coping verses Transforming
- Organization's and Supervisor's role



Vicarious Trauma

*Every direct care worker need an effective **action plan** for addressing **vicarious trauma** that reflects her or his own needs, experiences, interests, resources, culture, and values.*

ACTION PLAN

Vicarious Trauma

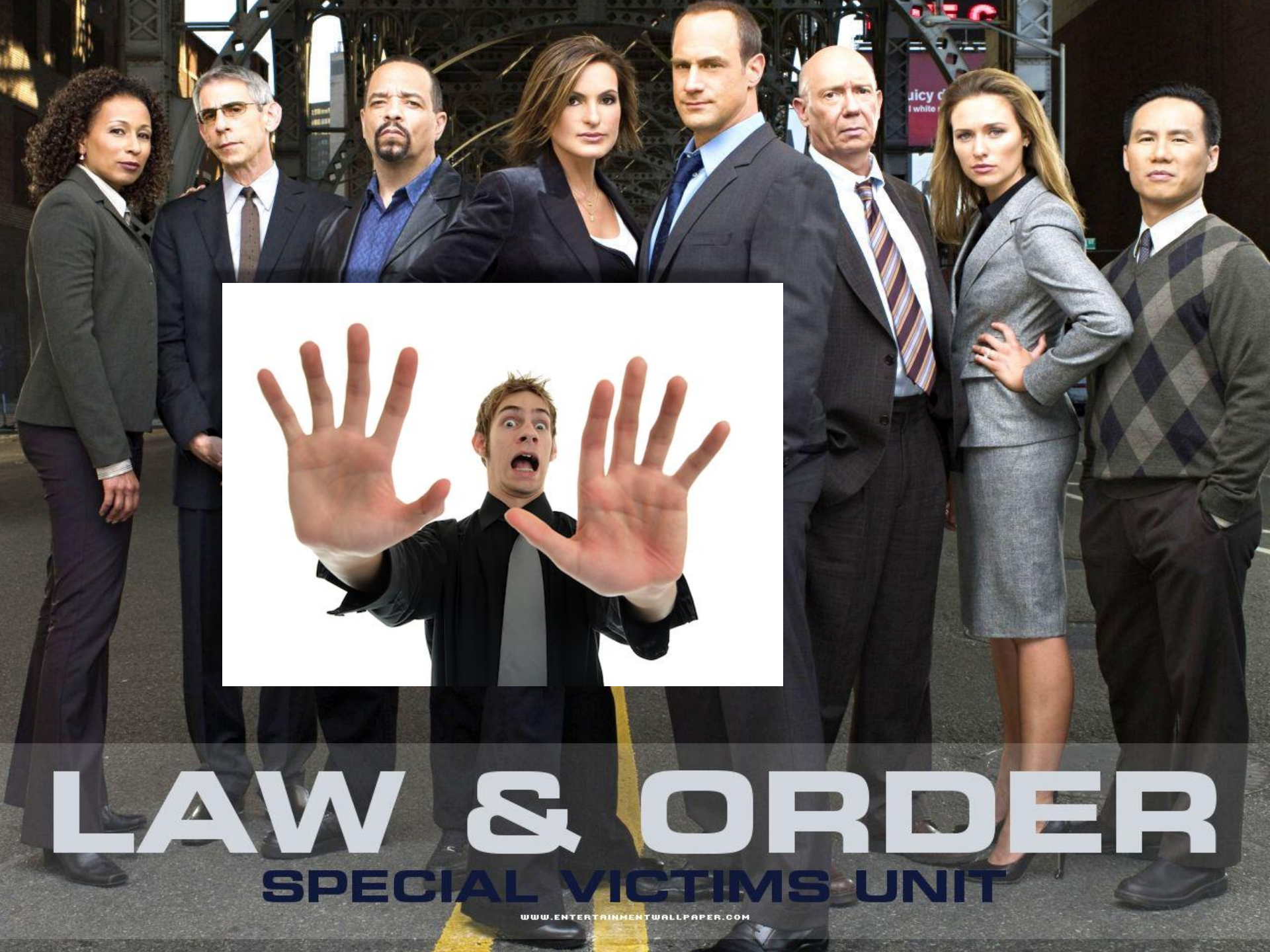
- ❑ the **cumulative effect of trauma** that someone's story has on the helping listener.
- ❑ **indirect exposure to trauma** through a first hand account or narrative of a traumatic event.

Vicarious Trauma

Exposure to our youth's **traumatic stories** contribute to changes in our **cognitive schemes**.

This occurs on a **neurological** level; it changes the **“architectural”** design of the brain.

We **shift our reality** to theirs, causing us stress **without** experiencing the original stressors.



LAW & ORDER

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

Vicarious Trauma

It involves **listening** to and **absorbing** the trauma stories of others while, simultaneously, having to **control** one's own **empathic response**.



Controlled Empathy

Holding back your **true** emotions from your youth



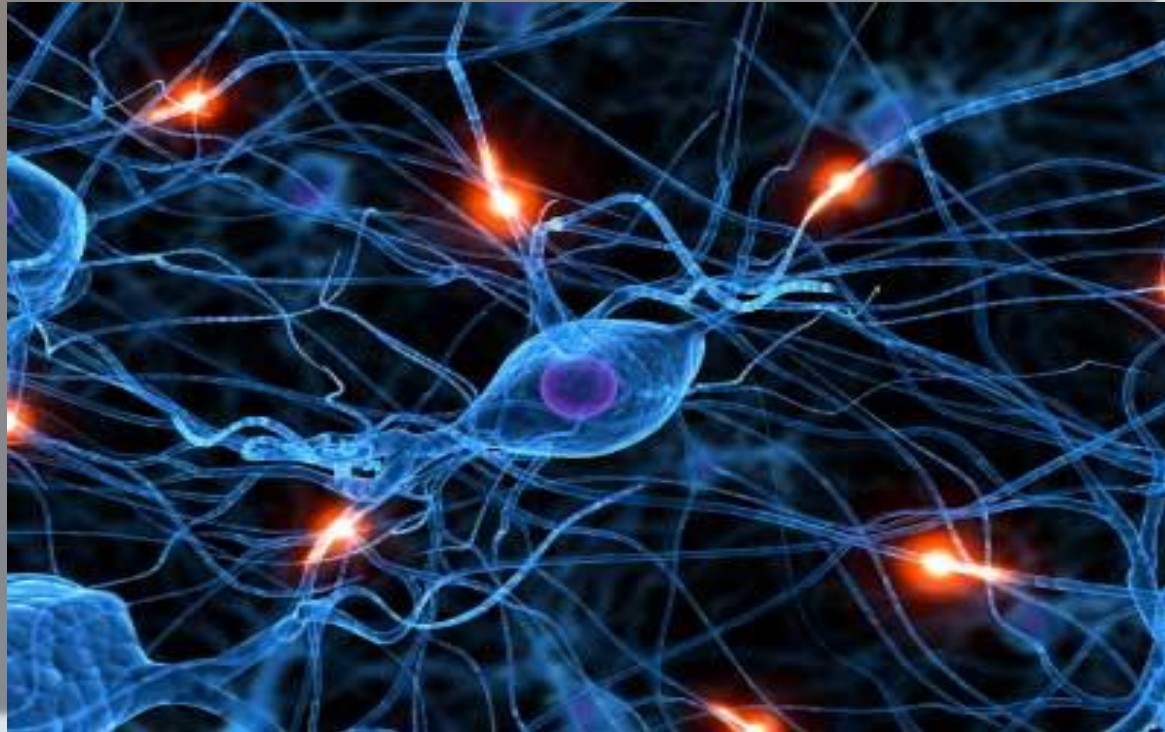
Controlled Empathy

Sometimes we **ignore** overwhelming emotions



Controlled Empathy

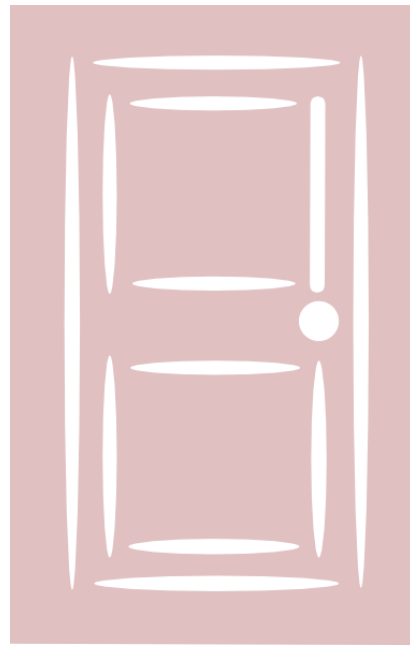
There are devastating **neurological consequences** to **controlled empathy**



Emotions at the Door



knock, knock



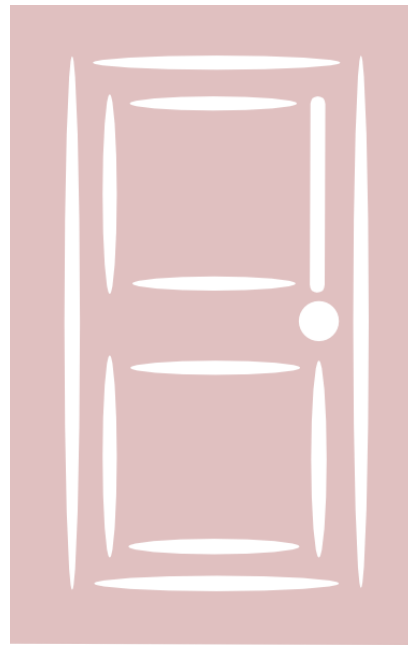
Maybe, if I don't answer, **sadness** will go away and I won't have to deal with her.

Emotions at the Door



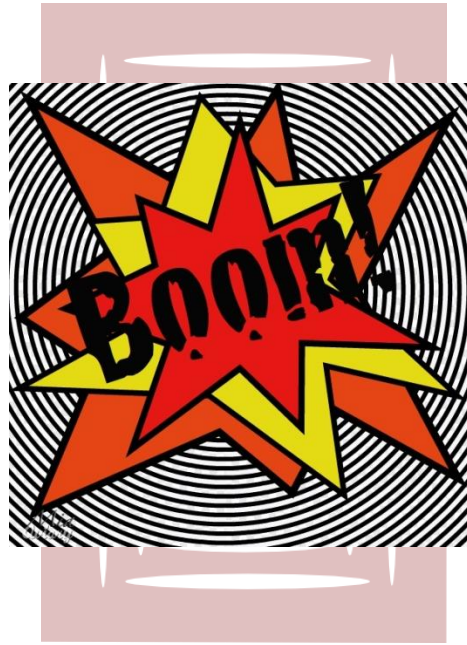
If I ignore them, **sadness** and **anger** will go away. I don't need to face them.

Emotions at the Door



Oh no! Now, I can't let **happy** or **joy** in. I have no emotions. I feel numb.

Emotions at the Door



Oh no! I'm overwhelmed by emotions!!!

Controlled Empathy

What would have changed if you had answered the door when sadness first knocked?

You may have been uncomfortable with such a strong negative emotion in the room with you.

You may have cried and felt very sad.

But it would have been easier to cope with this one emotion than all seven of them at once.?

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma changes the way you think about the world and yourself:

Changes in spirituality (changes in beliefs regarding meaning, purpose, causality, connection, hope, and faith)

Changes in identity (changes in the way you practice or think about important identities as a professional, friend, or family member)

Changes in beliefs related to major psychological needs (beliefs regarding safety, control, trust, esteem, and intimacy)

NOT

Burnout

A hand holding a lit matchstick, with the word 'Burnout' overlaid on the flame. The matchstick is lit, and the flame is bright orange and yellow. The word 'Burnout' is written in a bold, black, serif font, with the letters 'u', 'r', and 'n' partially obscured by the flame. The background is white.

Signs & Symptoms

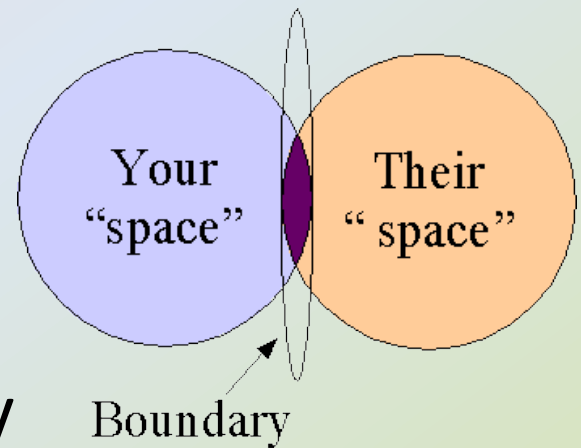
Often, staff have difficulty with . . .

coping w/ emotions

accepting yourself

managing boundaries

- taking on too much responsibility
- difficulty leaving work at the end of the day
- trying to control the lives of others
- relationships (family, friends, colleagues)



Signs & Symptoms

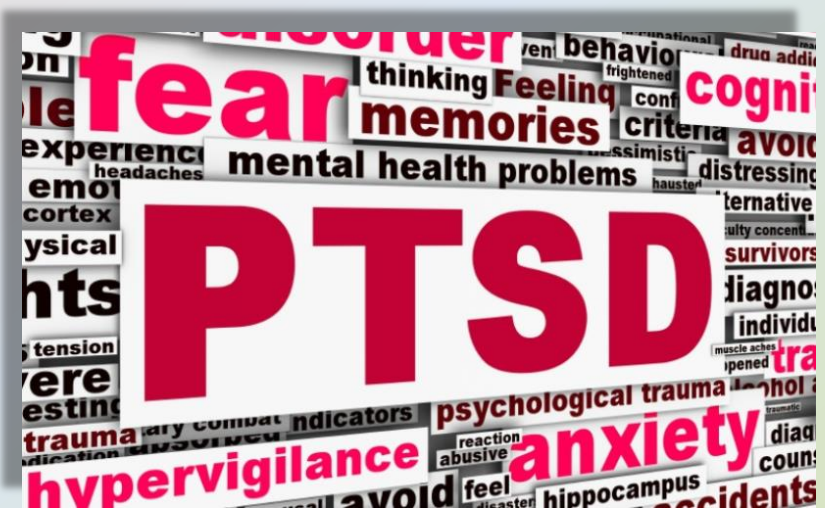
Other Behavior & Relationship signs

- Difficulty separating work from personal life
- Feeling like you never have time or energy for yourself.
- Feeling disconnected from loved ones, even when communicating with them
- Increased conflict in relationships
- General social withdrawal
- Finding yourself unable to pay attention to other's distressing stories
- Decreased interest in activities that used to bring pleasure, enjoyment, or relaxation
- Irritable, intolerant, agitated, impatient, needy, and/or moody
- Increased dependencies or addictions involving nicotine, alcohol, food, sex, shopping , internet, and/or other substances
- Impulsivity

Signs & Symptoms

Vicarious Trauma mimics PTSD with . . .

- aches, pains, illnesses
- sexual problems
- sleep difficulty
- cynicism
- aggression
- intrusive imagery
- greater sensitivity to violence



View of the world changes with security, trust, esteem, intimacy, control, hopeless, loss of meaning



What are some ways **vicarious
trauma** could impact your work?

Vicarious Trauma: Study

- 259 individuals providing mental health services
- Those workers who spent more time per week working with victims of trauma reported . . .
 - **higher** levels of traumatic stress symptoms
 - **higher** levels of intrusion symptoms.
- Largest factors:
 - 1. hours per week** providing services
 - 2. years** of staff exposure/experience

Vicarious Trauma: Study

Largest exposure factor was working with victims of interpersonal violence

- assault on wife/mother
- child abuse
- rape
- torture



Other Research Studies

- Two or more trauma courses **decreased** the likelihood of developing vicarious trauma.
- Vicarious trauma will be more problematic for people who tend to **avoid problems** or **difficult feelings**, **blame others** for their difficulties, or **withdraw from others** when things get hard.
- People who are able to **ask for support**, who try to **understand themselves** and others, and who actively try to **solve their problems** may be **less susceptible** to severe vicarious trauma.

Vicarious Trauma

Who may be at risk?

- PERSONALITY AND COPING STYLE
- PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
- SOCIAL SUPPORT
- SPIRITUAL RESOURCES
- WORK STYLE



Vicarious Trauma

Personality and coping style

- How you **experience and process your feelings** about other's pain and suffering will **significantly influence** your experience of vicarious trauma.



Vicarious Trauma

Personal Experience

- If **YOU** experienced the same trauma, **YOU** could be at a greater risk for VT



Vicarious Trauma

Social Support

- Need people to **talk** to, who **care** about you
- It can be tempting not to **reach out** to them (you may feel they won't understand)
- Its harder due to **confidentiality**
- Research strongly suggests: **social isolation** puts you at increased risk for developing VT.

Vicarious Trauma

Spiritual Resources

- You are more likely to find **vicarious trauma**, if you don't have a **connection** with a source of meaning, purpose, and hope.
- Very hard to **make sense** of the cruel violence we witness.



Vicarious Trauma

Work Style

- The **way** you work and **think** about work contribute to your experiences of vicarious trauma.
 - Not managing **boundaries**
 - Holding **unrealistic expectations** of yourself or your youth/families

TRAUMATIC OCCUPATIONS

Lawyers

Doctors

Mental Health Professionals

Teachers

Rescue Workers

Judges

Job Placement Professionals

Police Officers

Therapists

Nurses

Financial Advisors

Journalists

Hospice Workers

Commissioners

Middle Management

Parole Officers

Clergy

Paralegals

Occupational Therapists

Bankers

Volunteers

Physical Therapists

Insurance Claim Agents

Social Workers

Custody evaluators

CPS workers

Human Resource Professionals

Public service workers



What is currently putting you
at risk for **vicarious trauma**?



**What helps protect you from
vicarious trauma?**

Coping

Transforming

Coping

Learning to live with
vicarious trauma

Nurturing a sense of
meaning and hope

Transforming

Coping

learning to live with Vicarious Trauma

identifying strategies that can help . . .

- **prevent** *vicarious trauma from becoming severe*
- **manage** *vicarious trauma during times when it is more problematic*

Coping

COPING: Good coping strategies are things that help you take care of yourself

Escape: getting away from it all, physically or mentally

(books or films, taking a day or a week off, playing video games, talking to friends about things other than work)

Rest: having no goal or time-line, or doing things you find relaxing (lying on the grass watching the clouds, sipping a cup of tea, taking a nap, getting a massage)

Play: engaging in activities that make you laugh or lighten your spirits (sharing funny stories with a friend, playing with a child, being creative, being physically active).

Coping

COPING: Effective Self-Care

No single technique will relieve all your stress, but paying attention to your **physical, emotional-relational, & spiritual** may build your:

hardiness - your ability to handle more stress with less distress

resilience - your ability to “bounce back” after stressful or traumatic events

Self-Care

EFFECTIVE SELF-CARE



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You will never become so good at taking care of yourself that you lead a stress-free life. However, there is much you can do to help alleviate stress reactions.

No single technique will relieve all your stress, but paying attention to the following three areas of self-care may build up your *hardiness* (your ability to handle more stress with less distress) and your *resilience* (your ability to “bounce back” after particularly stressful or traumatic events).

Physical

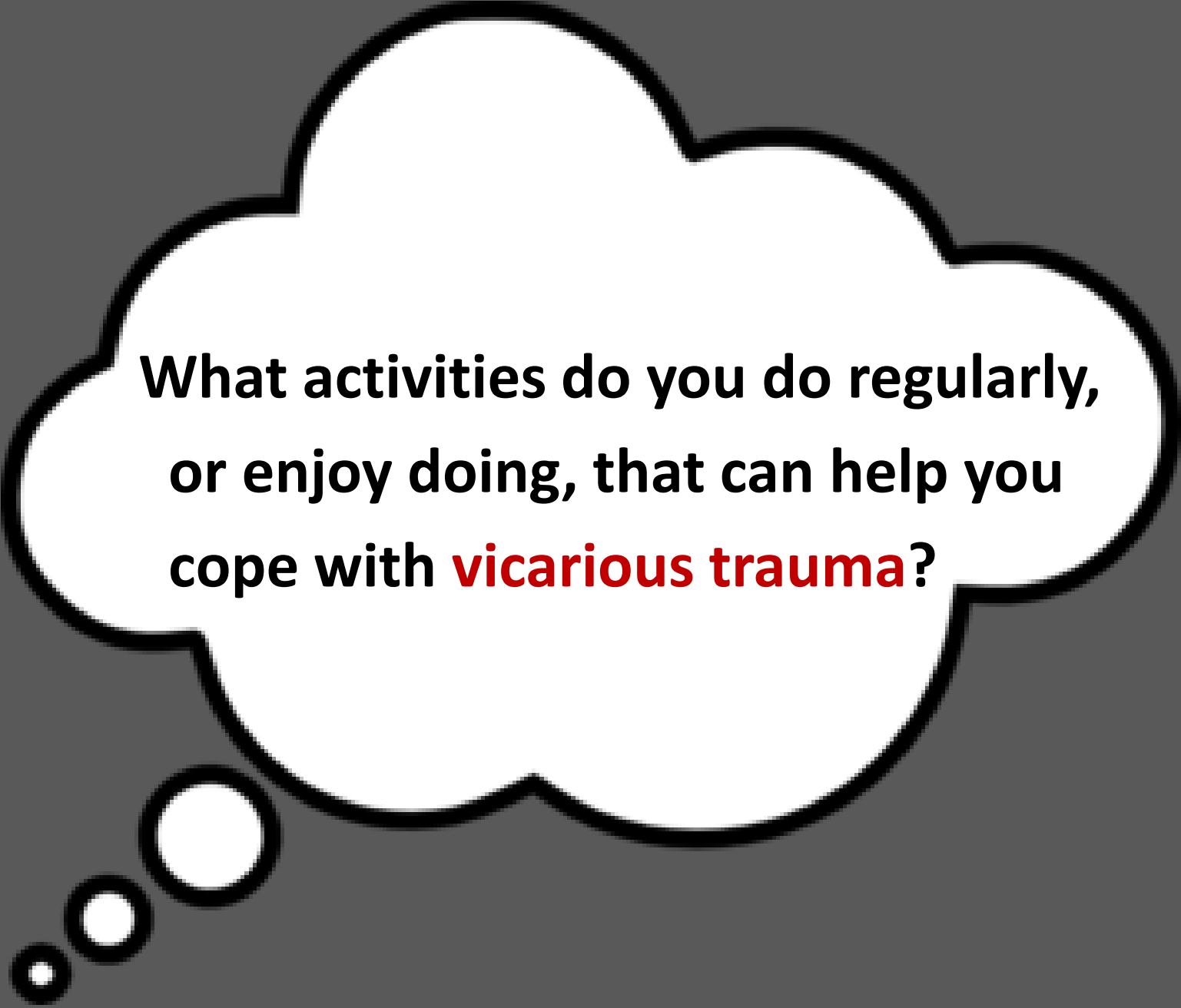
Regular exercise
Sleep
Healthy eating
Drinking enough water
Humor and laughter
Limit your consumption of alcohol
Pilates or yoga
Relaxation techniques (such as progressive muscle relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing, visualization and meditation)
Massage, whirlpool, sauna
Repetitive activities (such as cross-stitching, walking, quilting, drawing and cooking)

Emotional and relational

Nurturing relationships
Contact with home/friends through email, phone, tapes
Talking
Humor
Ongoing support group
Reflection: journaling, writing, meditating, poetry
Creative activity such as drawing, sculpting, cooking, painting and photography
Movies, books, music
Having balanced priorities
Understanding traumatic stress and have realistic expectations
Counseling

Spiritual

Knowing your values: Where do you tend to find meaning and purpose in life?
Participating in a community of meaning and purpose
Regular times of prayer, reading, meditation
Spiritually meaningful conversations
Singing or listening to meaningful music
Contact with religious leaders or inspiring individuals
Time with art, nature or music
Solitude



What activities do you do regularly,
or enjoy doing, that can help you
cope with **vicarious trauma**?



How do these activities actually help you cope with **vicarious trauma**?

Transforming

Deeper than just Coping

identifying ways to nurture a sense of **meaning** and **hope**.

Finding ways to **stay connected** to important sources of meaning and hope in your life.

Transforming

Here are some ways to **TRANSFORM**:

- Reminding yourself of the importance and value of this work.
- Staying connected with family, friends, and colleagues.
- Noticing and deliberately paying attention to the “little things” – small moments in your life.
- Marking transitions, celebrating joys, and mourning losses with people you care about through traditions, rituals, or ceremonies.
- Taking time to reflect (e.g., by reading, writing, prayer, and meditation).
- Identifying and challenging your own cynical beliefs.
- Undertaking growth-promoting activities (learning, writing in a journal, being creative and artistic).

Spiritual Self Care

Humanitarian work is an occupation that carries the potential for great spiritual growth in one hand, and the risk of great spiritual disruption in the other. Paying attention to personal spirituality is therefore important for humanitarian workers, although we generally have little training on how to go about “caring for” and “exercising” our souls.

Clarify Your Values

- ✓ Values clarification involves seeking a clearer understanding of what we value in life and why. This is a unique source of energy - it fuels purpose, focus, direction, passion and perseverance.
- ✓ Clarifying your values means asking and answering questions that help you clarify your life mission and your road map. Questions such as:
 - What am I doing?
 - Why am I doing it?
 - How is it coming along?
 - What do I embody most?
 - What is it I want to embody most? What are the things, qualities, attributes, attitudes I value most in life?
 - What do I wish I was doing more? Why?
 - Who am I at my best?
- ✓ Think of someone you deeply respect. Describe three qualities in this person that you most admire.
- ✓ What one sentence inscription would I like to see on my tombstone that would capture who I really was in life?
- ✓ When I look back at the end of my life, what do I expect the three most important lessons I've learned to be, and why are they so important?

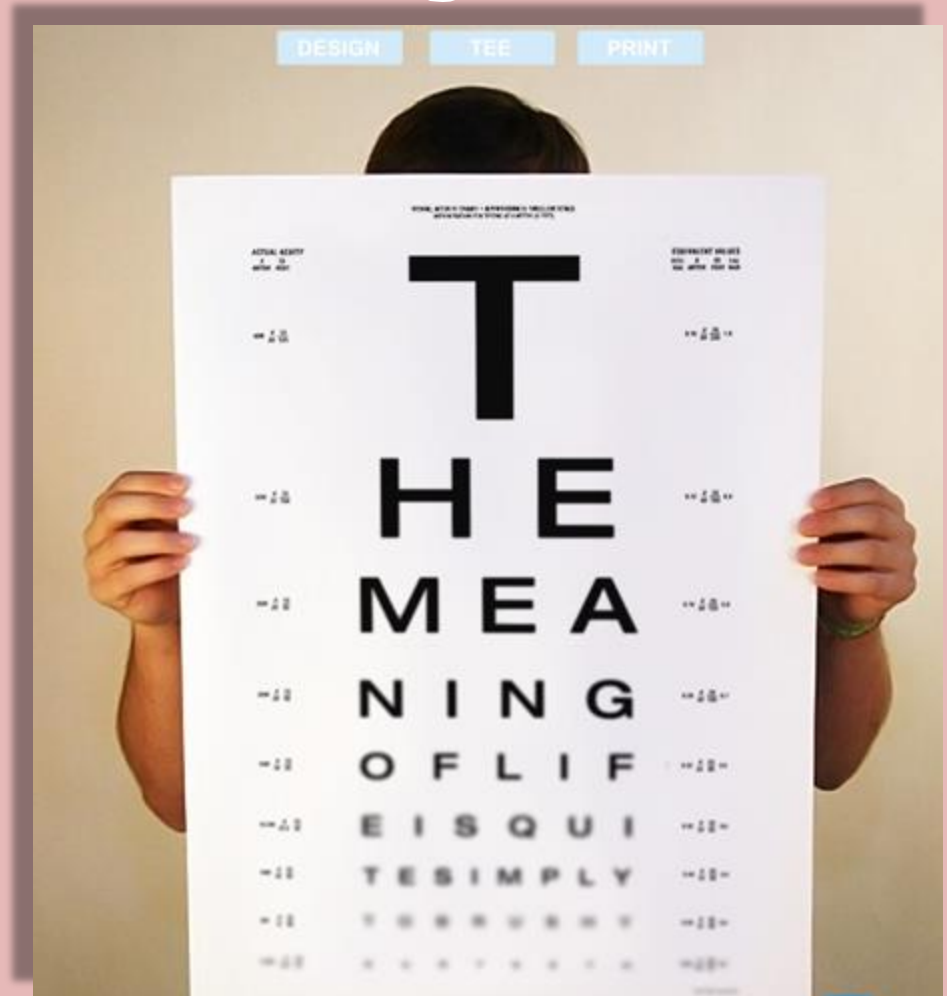
Seek Out Soul Food

- Exercising the soul also involves actively seeking out things and activities that make us feel whole, alive, joyful, and connected with something beyond ourselves. Soul food tends to shift the way we view life and the life around us.
- Some common sources of soul food include:
- Prayer, meditation, solitude, guided imagery, relaxation, yoga
- Reading scriptural or inspirational texts
- Listening to lectures, sermons, or inspirational speakers
- Listening to music, singing
- Being creative — writing, drawing, composing music
- Spending time in nature
- Contemplating art
- Spending time with the people most dear to you
- Consulting with a spiritual director
- Participating in a small communal group involving sharing, discussion, accountability, and/or teaching
- Participating in traditional practices associated with your faith, family and background
- Acts of service involving giving time, expertise, or money to others in need.

Transforming

“The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them.”

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery



Transforming

Staff need the following In order to **Transform**:

SELF-AWARENESS

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

WORK PROTECTIVELY



Awareness

Awareness can help you address vicarious trauma in at least two ways.

1. Help you **identify** and **understand** your own reactions.
2. Help you **address** vicarious trauma, **directly**.



ARE YOU BALANCED?



The way you **think** about your work and **do** your job has a big impact on your experiences with vicarious trauma.

You can help **prevent** and **manage** vicarious trauma on the job.

**PROTECT
YOURSELF**

Work Protectively

How you **think** about your work?

This plays a big role in helping keep you healthy and balanced:

1. ***Why do you do this work?***

- Why did you choose to work in this field?
- Why do you do it now?

2. ***Do you know what you're doing in your work, and why?***

3. ***How do you measure success in your work?***

- Do you have a long list of specific goals you must accomplish to feel like you've succeeded?
- Do you feel like you've succeeded if you simply give your best every day?

Work Protectively

How you **think** about your work?

4. *What can you control in your work?*

- Where can you make choices about your work content, structure, and schedule?
- What can you control about your work and its outcomes, and what can't you?

5. *What are the costs and rewards of this work, and how are you personally changing?*

- Understanding this can help you stay alert to ways (both positive and negative) in which you are changing.
- Knowing what you find rewarding about your work can also help you focus on the positive.
- Look for and support these attitudes and behaviors, both in yourself and in others.

Work Protectively

How you *do* your work?

Healthy thinking is good on its own, but even better if it's linked to healthy practices at work:

- 1. Change some of the things that bother you, that you can control:***
if you're in your car a lot for work, clean it up.
- 2. Intentionally make choices when you can:***
Make choices about things you can control.
- 3. Connect with (or disconnect from) people:***
Find ways to connect with people during the day.
- 4. Try something different at work:***
Look for opportunities to take on new tasks/roles.

Work Protectively

How you *do* your work?

Healthy thinking is good on its own, but even better if it's linked to healthy practices at work:

5. *Write about your experiences at work*

6. *Find more than one healthy habit*

7. *Invest in professional networks and relationships with fellow staff:*

- *Helps to talk with someone who understands*
- *Also, helps to discuss non-work topics*

8. *Find ways to retain or regain perspective during the day:* These activities can help you calm your body as well as ground your mind.

- *Looking at pictures of loved ones*
- *praying or meditating*
- *imagining themselves in a refreshing place*
- *breathing exercises*

Organization's role

- ❑ **Adequate salary and time off** (including R & R) for all staff
- ❑ **Sufficient orientation, professional training, and management supervision**
- ❑ **Plans for staff safety** (including crisis training and building safety)
- ❑ **Access to medical and mental health support services:**
 - ❑ Health insurance
 - ❑ Information/training about the psychological and spiritual hazards of the work and effective self-care
 - ❑ Access to good confidential counseling support as needed (EAP)
- ❑ **Support/understanding for staff 's families:**
child care, separation, crises, and other personal needs

Organization's role

Encouraging connections, morale, and relationships:

- Working in teams
- Social activities (lunch or occasional outings together)
- Peer support networks

Encouraging communication and staff contributions by:

- Providing a voice in decision-making from all levels of the organizational hierarchy
- Providing information to help staff understand how and why decisions about resource allocations, deadlines, policies, and assignments are made

Looking for ways to build diversity and job enrichment into the work

Encouraging staff to take adequate breaks during work

Supervisor's role

Supervisors can take many steps to help lessen the impact of vicarious trauma on staff they are supervising:

Understand the psychological and spiritual impact:

- Be alert to how the cumulative exposure to stressful and traumatic situations may be affecting staff
- Regularly check in with staff about how they're coping
- Support staff in seeking counseling or coaching if and when needed

Set a good example in the way that you care for yourself:

- Work at a sustainable and reasonable pace over time
- **Openly** value things and people outside of work (i.e. time spent with your family)

Supervisor's role

Look for ways to help staff keep current challenges in perspective:

- Reminding staff of the bigger picture of the organization's mission
- Reminding staff of the value the organization places upon them

Express concern for the general well-being of your staff

(and not just the quality of the work they are doing)

Make sure that staff suggestions and feedback are heard

(even if you are fairly sure they will not result in change)

Strive to stay positive, and to praise and acknowledge effort and results whenever possible

Do not say or do things that would stigmatize staff

(who are struggling with trauma/MH concerns)

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

The Headington Institute=TONS of resources

Self Care Apps:

Examine

Provider Resilience