


# Vicarious Trauma

## *Traditional Modalities of Prevention and Response for Service Providers*

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## What is Vicarious Trauma?

- *Vicarious trauma is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed or responsible to help them. Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.*
- Not direct trauma
- Caused by 2<sup>nd</sup> hand exposure
- Accrual of exposure to other people's trauma

## Also Known As....

- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Trauma
- Secondary Trauma Syndrome
- Secondary traumatic stress disorder

## “Emphatic Engagements”

Because you are a human (and because you care), it is difficult to respond to trauma in other people’s lives without

- absorbing some of the sadness,
- feeling the other person’s sense of loss,
- experiencing for yourself some of the trauma that affected the other person

## Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

- Sleeping problems/Nightmares
- Intrusive thoughts
- Hyper-vigilance
- General anxiety & anxiety attacks
- Isolation & disconnection
- Substance abuse & high risk behaviors
- Changes in appetite & sex drive
- Irritability & depression
- Cynicism, negativity & apathy
- Not affected at all by horrific events like you once were
- Feeling vulnerable or unsafe

## Impact On Your Work

- Coping mechanisms overwhelmed & less effective in problem solving
- Detachment from co-workers, work in general, family or friends
- Angry/bad attitude
- High turnover - "burnout"
- 65% of teachers at Columbine High left the school and most who left quit teaching altogether

## Impact On You

- Trauma causes physiological and psychological reactions
- Our minds and bodies respond to trauma at an instinctual level as danger (negative energy)
- Responses are survival based:
  - Fight
  - Flight
  - Freeze

## Continued Impact On You

- Information is stored as:
  - Images or pictures
  - Physical sensations
  - Feelings
  - Behaviors
- It can be triggered by reminders of the trauma
- Can feel as intense as original exposure

## Continued Impact On You

### During Trauma

- Hyper-arousal
- Anxiety
- Dissociation

### Post Trauma

- Hyper-arousal
- Intrusive re-experiencing
- Avoidance or numbing

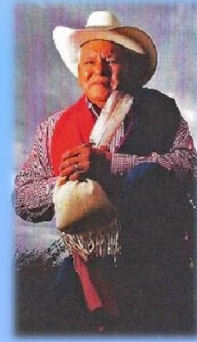
## Native Perspective

- When you are directly confronted by and exposed to “the negative” (a teen who has been raped by an uncle, a woman who was murdered by her boyfriend, etc.) you can “pick up” some of that negativity and carry it with you
- You may need “to be cleansed ”



## In The Old Days...

- Ceremonies for the person directly experiencing the trauma & often involving family & others experiencing vicarious trauma from the event.
- Goal: mitigate the long term consequences of the horrific event on the victim, her family, her helpers, and her community
- Can/Should any of these cultural coping mechanisms be used to help 1st responders and advocates?



## Especially in Tribal Communities

- You may be responding to a victim who is a relative, neighbor or friend
- The trauma may be experienced at work and continue with your interactions with family, friends & community off-duty
- **May trigger your own memories of victimization or that of your loved ones**
- Historical trauma may be triggered by system responses or by hate crime/racist motives of perpetrator



## Setting Boundaries In Tribal Communities

- If you live in the same community where you work, are you “on” 24/7?
- How do you “disengage” politely (or can you?) when you run into victims or concerned family or community members?
- Are you empowering the victim or enabling the victim to your own and her detriment? (“If you teach a man to fish”)

## Coping In Modern Times

- Many professionals drink or use substances to cope
- Overeat or binge eat
- Risky behaviors: gambling, promiscuity, etc.
- Push it way to the back
- How many agencies have formal policies to help employees with vicarious trauma?
- Should law enforcement, advocacy, etc. have formal mechanisms to deal with it?
- Does admitting trauma make you be perceived as weak by your co-workers?

## What Can You Do To Weaken the Negative Energy?

- Self-care – what does that look like for you?
- Train newer employees that they may experience vicarious trauma- “occupational hazard”
- “Staffing” cases or SART/MDT can provide support- “debriefing”
- Ally yourself with someone you can discuss your feelings & frustrations without breaching confidentiality
- Take your sick, vacation & leave time!
- “Put your own oxygen mask on first”

## Trauma Recovery

- The information moves from the primitive (survival oriented) part of the brain to the cortex: Integration
- You don't feel emotionally overwhelmed by the information
- You don't need to shut down to protect yourself
- You are connected to your support systems
- You have identified some transformational meaning associated with your trauma



## At The Scene:

- Focus on task at hand
- Breath and body awareness
- Create distance or protection: A space around yourself, take a half step back; take a moment
- Workers-"I can help without absorbing their pain" or "Please Creator help this person without absorbing the negativity present here."

**Leave the trauma when you leave and don't take it home**

## After The Event

- Body awareness and relaxation techniques
- Breathing exercises
- Visualization exercises (particularly those related to letting go of images)
- Redirected thinking or reframing
- Utilizing support (Supervision; colleagues; case reviews; education and training)

## Prevention/Recognition of Vicarious Trauma Requires

- Continual self-assessment
- Monitoring
- Prevention
- Intervention

## Self Assessment

- Physical Self Care
- Psychological Self Care
- Emotional Self Care
- Spiritual Self Care
- Workplace or professional Self Care

## Physical Self Care

Includes: Balance, limits, healthy habits....

- ☐ Do you....
  - Eat regularly?
  - Eat healthy?
  - Exercise?
  - Get regular medical care for prevention?
  - Get medical care when needed?

## Self Nurturing

Includes: gentleness, relaxation and play.....

- ☐ Take time off:
  - Get massages
  - Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing or do something fun
  - Get plenty of rest
  - Wear clothes you like
  - Take Vacations

## Escape

Includes: activities that allow you to forget about work

- Make time for self reflection
- Have your own therapist
- Write in a journal
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which you are NOT an expert or in charge
- Decrease stress in your life
- Practice receiving from others
- Engage your intelligence in other areas- go to the museum, a sports event, auction, the theater

## Psychological Self Care

Do you?....

- Make time for self reflection?
- Have your own therapist?
- Write in a journal?
- Read literature that is unrelated to work?
- Do something at which you are NOT an expert or in charge?
- Decrease stress in your life?
- Practice receiving from others?
- Engage your intelligence in other areas- go to the museum, a sports event, auction, the theater?

## Emotional Self Care

Do you?...

- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy?
- Love yourself?
- Give yourself affirmation, praise?
- Cry?
- Find things to make you laugh?
- Play with children?
- Express your outrage in healthy social action, protests?
- Re-read favorite books, re-watch favorite movies?

## Spiritual Self Care

Do you?....

- Make time for reflection?
- Spend time with nature?
- Be open to inspiration?
- Be aware of the non material aspects of your life?
- Cherish your hope?
- Pray?
- Sing?
- Spend time with children?

## Workplace Self Care

### Do you?....

- Take a break during the day?
- Take time to chat with co-workers?
- Make a quiet time to complete tasks?
- Identify tasks or projects that are exciting and rewarding?
- Arrange your work space so that it is comforting?
- Get regular supervision feedback?
- Have peer support?

## Your Thoughts (Activity)

- 1.) Think of a case at work that has troubled you or impacted you
- 2.) What were or are your reactions?
- 3.) How can you let that go?
- 4.) What can or could you do to prevent or manage that trauma?

Strive for Balance  
and live in harmony




We are all in this together



**I am ending with a picture of Boulder River, think of your work as a flowing river, as the river flows it sifts and moves objects, turns over boulders and provides life to creatures. How will your life flow and affect others? How will you provide nurturing to others?**

**Most of all take care of yourself and stay in balance and harmony throughout your journey of life.....**

**Remember the Light of Hope Left Us by Our Ancestors**



***Thank You***

***Questions???***

***Comments???***

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