VICARIOUS TRAUMA

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What is vicarious trauma?

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

Also Known As....

- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Trauma
- Secondary Trauma Syndrome
- Secondary traumatic stress disorder
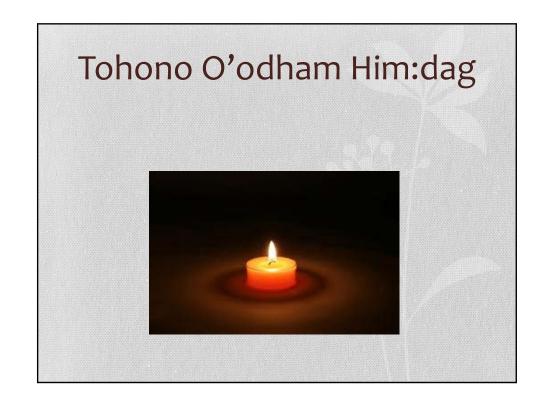
"Walking in Each Others Shoes"

- 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

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 "

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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

What can happen….

- 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

What can happen 2nd part…

- 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

Affects 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

In The Old Days...

- Ceremonies for the person directly experiencing the trauma & often involving family & others experiencing vicarious trauma from the event.
- Goal: lessen 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?

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?

- "Put your own oxygen mask on first"
- 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!

Women of Strength

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: Wear a Medicine Pouch, a space around yourself, take a half step back; take a moment
- Mantras – "I can help without absorbing their pain" or "Please Creator help this person without absorbing the negativity present here."
- Notice reactions
- **Leave the trauma when you leave and don't take it home**
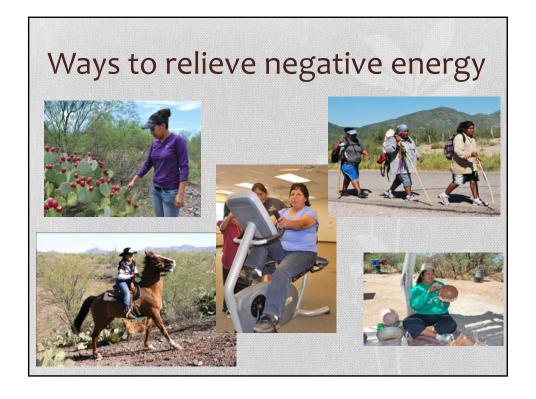
Setting Boundaries In Tribal Communities

- 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")

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)

Take Part in Social Activities

Ways to relieve negative energy

SCENIARO

- 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?

Strong Spirits Leads to Healthy Communities