



# Vicarious Trauma

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# Objectives



Define vicarious trauma and traumatization, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, resilience, and vicarious resilience



- Discuss how working with a traumatized population affects victim services staff



- Discuss the impact of vicarious trauma on organizations

Identify strategies that enhance both personal and professional resilience.















- ▶ Taking a Closer Look...
  - ▶ Trauma
    - Traumatic stress
      - Vicarious traumatization



▶ **Burnout**

- ▶ (or occupation burnout) is a psychological term referring to a general exhaustion and lack of interest or motivation regarding one's work

▶ **Compassion Fatigue**

- ▶ the physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced by those who care for sick or traumatized people over an extended period of time

▶ **Secondary Trauma**

- ▶ the natural consequent behaviors, resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other.

▶ **Vicarious Trauma**

cumulative transformative effect upon the professional who is working with survivors of traumatic life events.



# Background

Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.

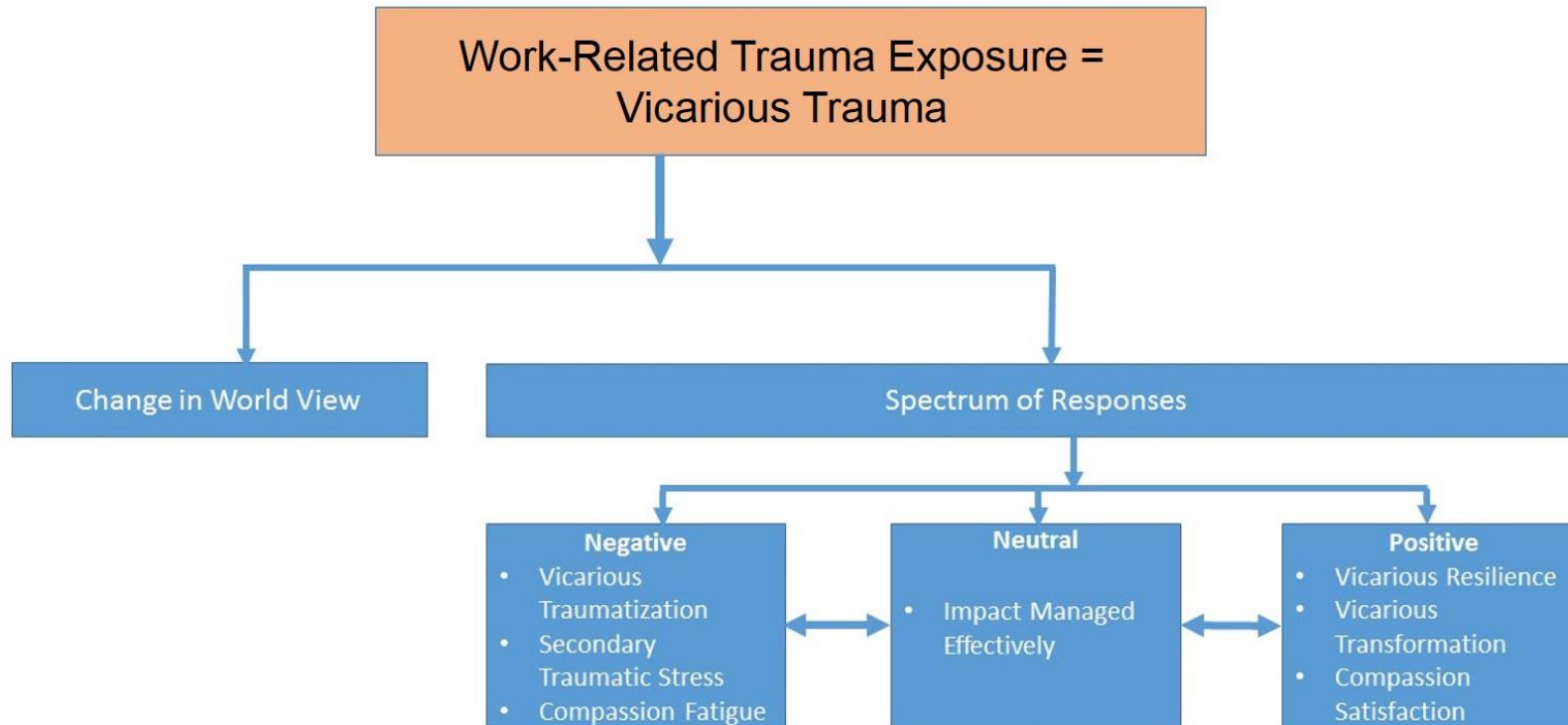
Each year more than 10 million children in the United States endure the trauma of abuse, violence, natural disasters, and other adverse events.

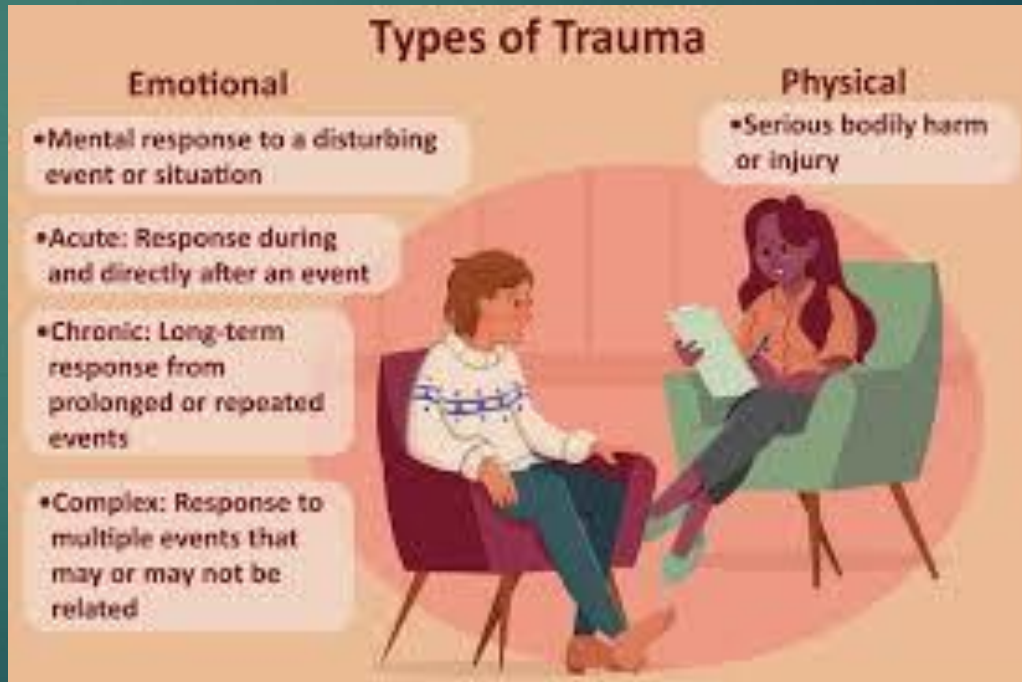
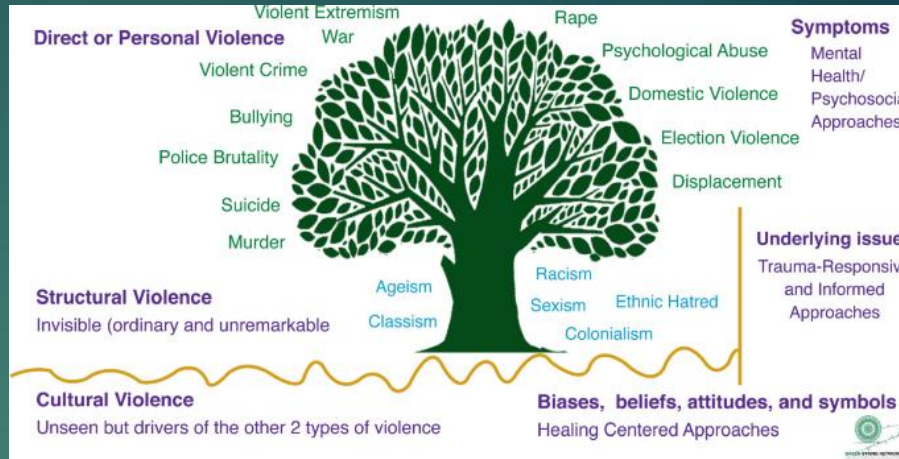
These experiences can give rise to significant emotional and behavioral problems that can profoundly disrupt the children's lives and bring them in contact with child-serving professionals.

For therapists, child welfare workers, case managers, and other helping professionals involved in the care of traumatized children and their families, the essential act of listening to trauma stories may take an emotional toll that compromises professional functioning and diminishes quality of life.

Individual and supervisory awareness of the effects of this indirect trauma exposure is a basic part of protecting the health of the worker and ensuring that children consistently receive the best possible care from those who are committed to helping them.

# Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Model





# What is a Traumatic Event?

- It involves a threat—real or perceived—to one's physical or emotional well-being.
- It is overwhelming.
- It results in intense feelings of fear and lack of control.
- It leaves one feeling helpless.
- It changes the way a person understands the world, themselves, and others.

Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995

# How does a work-related trauma exposure affect us?

- Vicarious Trauma
- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Indirect Trauma
- Empathic Strain
- PTSD
- Critical Incident Stress
- Burnout



# Vicarious Trauma-Personal (examples)

## Behavioral

- Irritability, sleep and appetite changes, isolate from friends and family, self destructive behavior, impatience, nightmares, hypervigilance, moody, easily startled or frightened

## Cognitive

- Diminished concentration, cynicism, pessimism, preoccupation with clients, traumatic imagery, inattention, self doubt, racing thoughts, recurrent and unwanted distressing thoughts

## Emotional

- Feelings of powerlessness, numbness, anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, depletion, hypersensitivity, sadness, helplessness, severe emotional distress or physical reactions to reminders

## Physical

- Rapid pulse/breathing, headaches, impaired immune system, fatigue, aches

## Relational

- Withdrawn, decreased interest in intimacy or sex, isolation from friends or family, minimization of others' concerns, projection of anger or blame, intolerance, mistrust

## Spiritual

- Loss of purpose, loss of meaning, questioning goodness versus evil, disillusionment, questioning prior religious beliefs, pervasive hopelessness

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)



# Vicarious Trauma-Professional (examples)



## Behavioral

Calling out, arriving late, overwork, exhaustion, irresponsibility, poor follow-through



## Morale

Decrease in confidence, decrease in interest, negative attitude, apathy, dissatisfaction, demoralization, feeling undervalued and unappreciated, disconnected, reduced compassion



## Performance

Decrease in quality/quantity of work, low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard, setting perfectionist standards, difficulty with inattention, forgetfulness



## Relational

Detached/withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication, conflict, impatience, intolerance of others, sense of being the "only one who can do the job"

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)

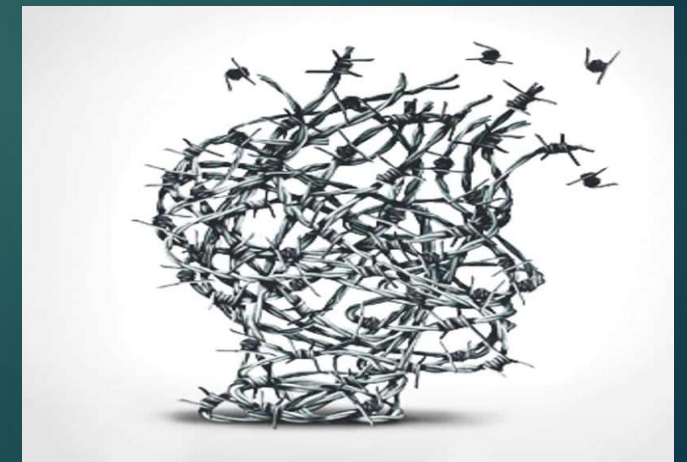
# Contemplating the effects of Vicarious Trauma

## Personal

- ▶ Physical
  - Behavioral
  - Emotional
  - Spiritual
  - Cognitive
  - Relational

## Professional

- ▶ Performance
  - Morale
  - Relational
  - Behavioral



# Some Red Flags

## Personal

- ▶ Pre-existing psychological issue
- ▶ Prior Childhood Trauma
- ▶ Familial Disconnect
- Loss in last 12 months

## Professional

- ▶ Lack of quality supervision
  - High percentage of trauma survivors in caseload
  - Little experience
  - Worker/organization mismatch
  - Lack of professional support system
  - Inadequate orientation and training for role



# How do we take care of ourselves?

- ▶ Personal Care Strategies
  - ▶ Diet, Exercise (Meditation/Yoga, etc)
- ▶ Self care
  - ▶ what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health, and to prevent and deal with illness.

THE 5 AREAS OF SELF-CARE				
				
PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	SOCIAL	SPIRITUAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Get enough sleep</li><li>■ Exercise</li><li>■ Eat regular and healthy foods</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Take time to pause</li><li>■ Practice positive self-talk.</li><li>■ Find joy in small things – laugh and smile</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Call, text with friends and family</li><li>■ Practice healthy social media habits</li><li>■ Develop a strong support group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Spend time in nature</li><li>■ Meditate</li><li>■ Practice regular acts of kindness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Be creative</li><li>■ Continuous learning</li><li>■ Practice mindfulness</li></ul>

# Resilience

THE ART OF BOUNCING  
BACK



# Vicarious Resilience

- ▶ Greater perspective and appreciation of own problems
  - Increased sense of hope, understanding, and belief in the possibility of recovery from trauma and other serious challenges
  - More optimistic, motivated, efficacious, and reenergized

Engstrom, et al, 2008



# Vicarious Trauma Informed Organization

Self Care is Critical

A vicarious trauma

- -informed organization recognizes these challenges and assumes the responsibility for proactively addressing the impact of vicarious trauma through policies, procedures, practices, and programs.

# Vicarious Trauma Informed Organization

Leadership and Mission

Effective leadership, clarity, and alignment with mission

Management and Supervision

Clear, respectful, quality, inclusive of Vicarious Trauma

Employee Empowerment and Work Environment

Promotes peer support, team effectiveness

Training and Professional Development

Adequate, ongoing, inclusive of Vicarious Trauma

Staff Health and Wellness

Devotes priority and resources to sustaining practices



# Peer Support



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- PRACTICE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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- EMPHASIZE COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK

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USE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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- ENCOURAGE TRUSTING, MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

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