Vicarious Trauma and Resiliency

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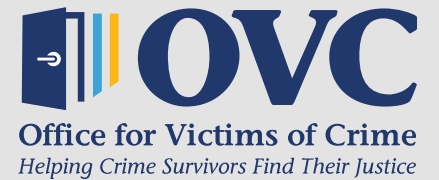
Why is this lady here?

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The Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center (OVC TTAC) is the gateway to training and technical assistance (TTA) for victim-serving organizations and allied professionals who serve crime victims. We aim to build the capacity, sustainability, and expertise of organizations that serve victims and survivors.

Why is this lady here? (continued)

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Here are some ways OVC TTAC might work with you:

- Provide subject matter experts (SME) for training events and conferences
- Conduct an organizational needs assessment and design a targeted response through TTA, tool development, or peer support
- Mass Violence Response TTA
- Strengthen advocacy programming that helps assure equal justice for victims and produces a positive, sustainable impact
- Multi-modal online training and resources on all topics impacting the field

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Focus for This Session

01
Discuss the concept of work-related trauma exposure, its prevalence, and risk factors

02
Examine common ways trauma exposure can impact staff and the importance of self-care

03
Introduce the concept of organizational responsibility to address vicarious trauma

"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."

Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal* (1996)

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Trauma's Impact
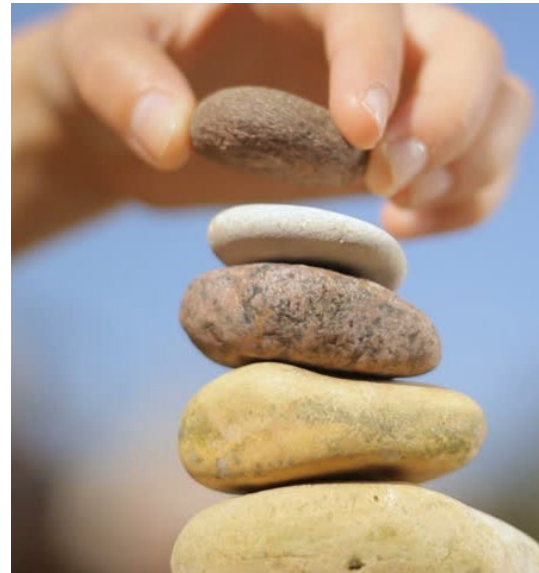
- The three defining characteristics of a traumatic event (or situation) are that it was:
  - Unpredictable
  - Overwhelming and
  - Created Powerlessness

Stress/Cumulative Stress
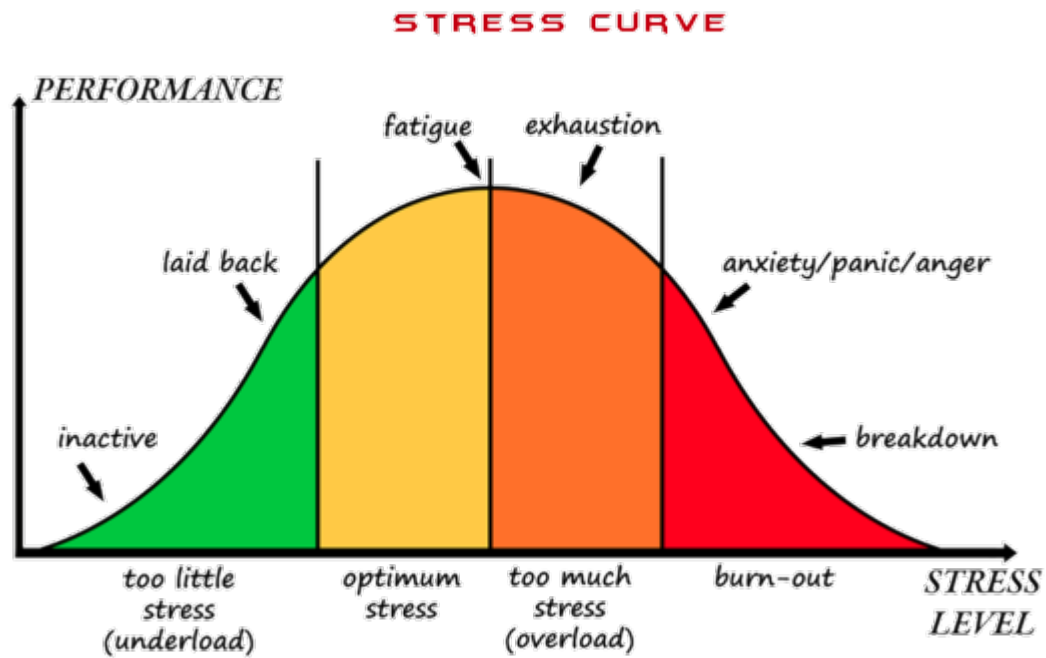
@Texas A&M University Honors Program, Student
Voices: Nkemdi Anyiam -Studying and Stress

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"I can't worry about that now.
I'm worrying about something else."

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Broader Definition of Trauma
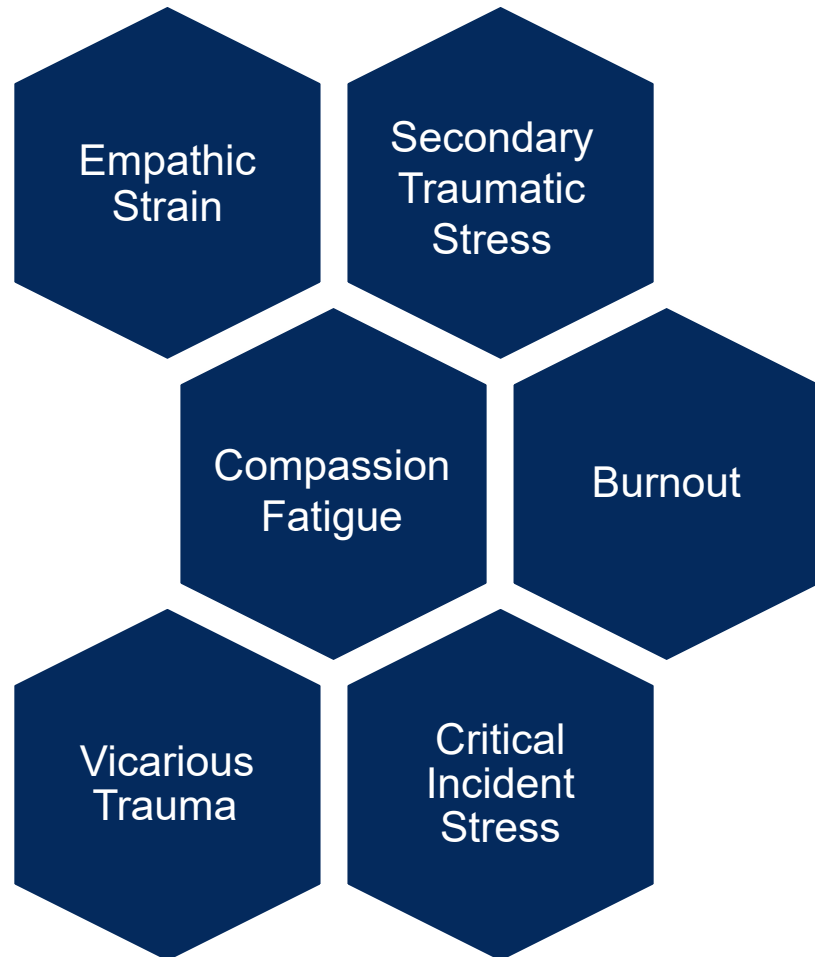
DIRECT exposure to trauma

- Experiencing or witnessing actual or threatened:
  - Death
  - Serious injury
  - Violence/sexual violence

INDIRECT exposure to trauma

- Learning of the traumatic event of a loved one
- **Experiencing first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to details, usually *during professional duties***

*From the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) section of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (DSM-V), American Psychiatric Association, 2013

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Many Terms…

Empathic Strain

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Compassion Fatigue

Burnout

Vicarious Trauma

Critical Incident Stress

What we're talking about is…

"…the emotional residue of exposure from working with people and hearing their trauma stories and becoming witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured."

American Counseling Association

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Change in World View

…the transformation or change in one's inner experience as a result of responsibility for and empathic engagement with traumatized clients [litigants].

Saakvitne et al., 2000

@Rebus Press

Prevalence Highlights

➢ 34% of **victim service providers** met PTSD diagnostic criteria from secondary exposure to trauma. (Bride, 2007)

➢ 50% of **child protection staff** in CO experienced high or very high levels of compassion fatigue. (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006)

➢ 98% of **police officers** experienced > 1 type of critical incident. (Weiss et al., 2010)

➢ **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners** are at greater risk for VT than other women's health nurses. (Raunick, et al., 2015)

➢ Early study of vicarious trauma in **judges** found that 63% reported one or more symptoms. (Jaffe, Crooks, Dunford-Jackson, & Town, 2003)

➢ Early study found **lawyers** at the top of the list of 104 occupations for suffering the highest rate of depression and higher suicide and substance abuse rates. (Johns Hopkins, 1990)

➢ **Exposure to multiple traumatic events has a cumulative impact on the severity of negative responses**. (Brunet & Best, 2010 – *LE*; Follette, Polusny, Harvey, 2015 – *fire*; Donnelly 2012 – *EMS)*

Risk Factors

Personal

- Trauma history
- Pre-existing psychological disorder
- Young age
- Social isolation, inadequate support system
- Loss in last 12 months

Professional

- Early career, inadequate orientation and training for the role
- High % of interaction with trauma survivors
- Lack of quality supervision & peer support
- Worker/organization mismatch
- Overextended assisting litigants

Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Slattery & Goodman, 2009; Bell, Kulkarni et al., 2003; Cornille & Meyers, 1999

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Contemplating the Effects

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Let's Take a Look at Your Exposure to Trauma

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Consider the following:

- What kinds of cases did you hear about, read about, or respond to during this past week?

- How many hours did you spend talking to people in crisis? What kinds of emotions were you fielding?

- How much time did you spend exposed to police reports, hospital records, protective service records, case-related data, and other such documents?

Experiencing Trauma: Relational

Trauma perpetuated by someone else—
an intimate relationship,
a familial relationship,
a workplace relationship,
an advisory relationship,
or even a stranger who attacks someone for any reason.

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JUSTICE FOR ALL | Office for Victims of Crime OVC

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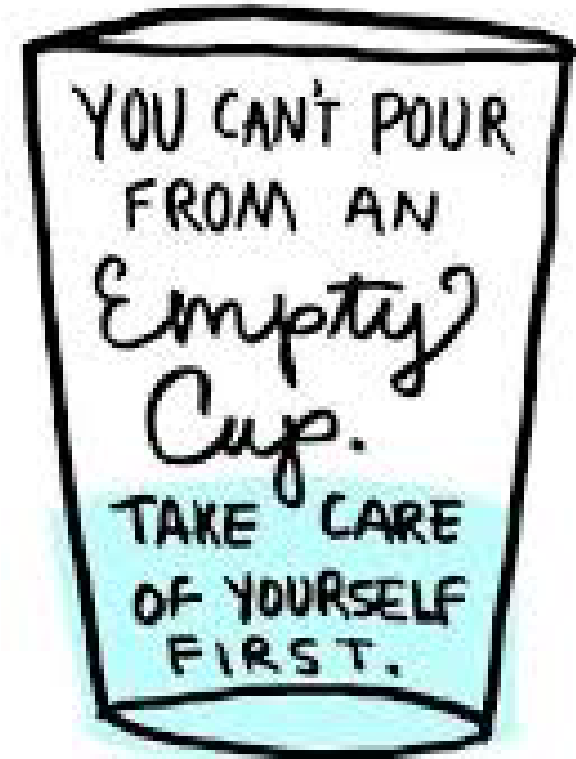Training & Technical Assistance Center

Experiencing Trauma: Collective

A specific, identifiable segment of a society is harmed, abused, or has suffering inflicted upon them.

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Experiencing Trauma – Historical

The policies of a society induced by or contributing to the traumatic events or circumstances through governmental funding, laws, forces, or proclamations.

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Exploring Strategies To Build Resilience

- Who are you connected to & seek support from (family, friends, work community, faith community, other)?

- Do you use any helpful self-care strategies currently to "decompress" from work?

- What do you need more of? Less of?

YOU CAN'T POUR FROM AN Empty Cup. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST.

@thebekindpeopleproject

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# Self-care is essential, but it is not the full picture

@worksafetyhub

Organizations have **a "duty to train"** workers about the potential negative effects of the work and how to address it. (Munroe, J. F., in Figley, Compassion Fatigue, 1995)

Although many stress reduction methods pertaining to [individuals] could provide potential benefits, action needs to be taken at an organizational level. (Resnick et al., 2011)

What can happen when organizations don't address vicarious trauma?

Research suggests…
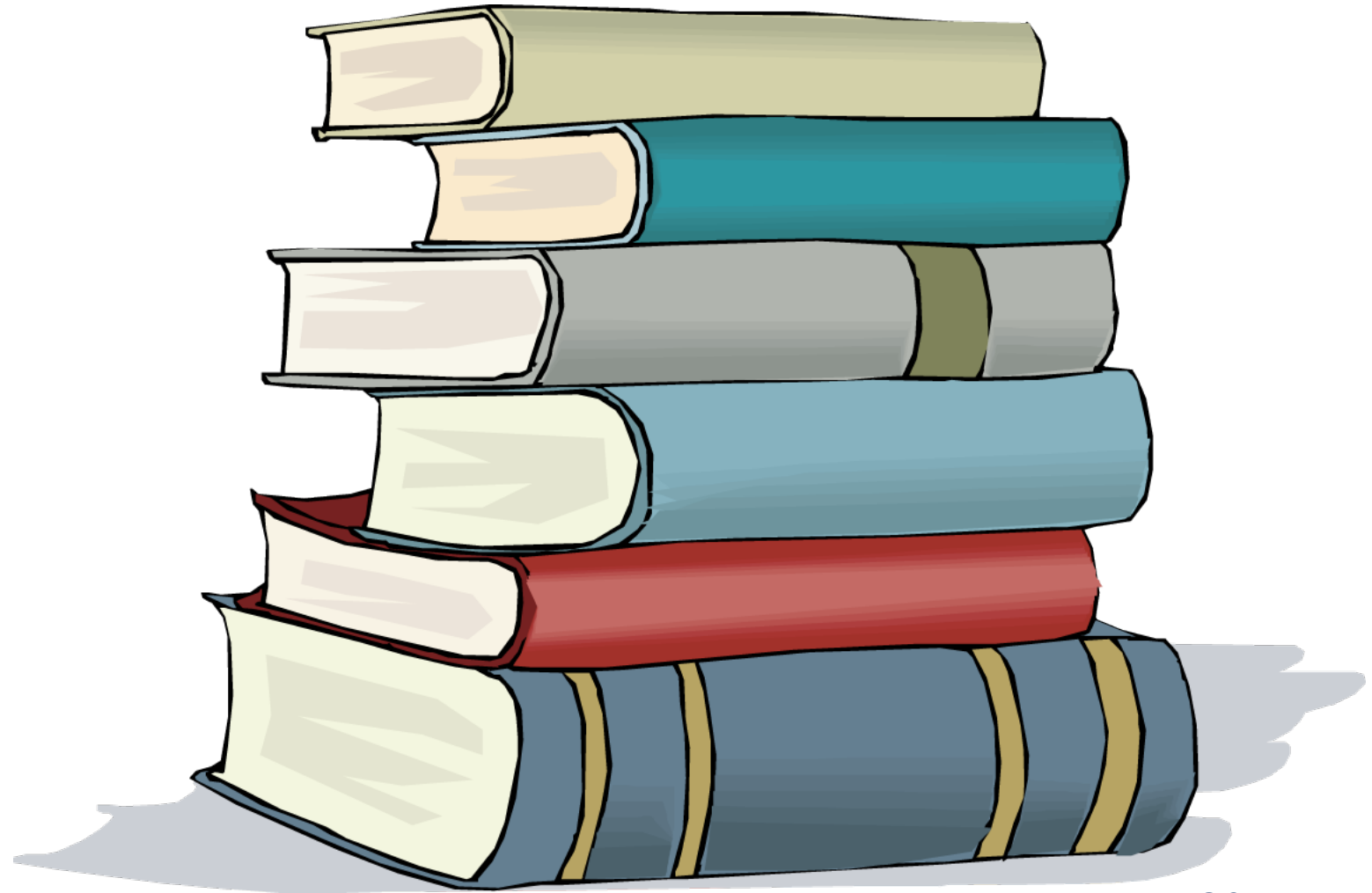
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Lost Productivity

decreased morale,
cohesion,
communication,
collaboration

Staff Turnover

time, resources
needed to hire and
train, drains other staff

**Poor Organizational
Health**

erosion of concentration,
focus, decisionmaking,
motivation, performance

**Diminished Health
& Well-Being**

**Diminished Quality
of Services**

How can this appear at work?

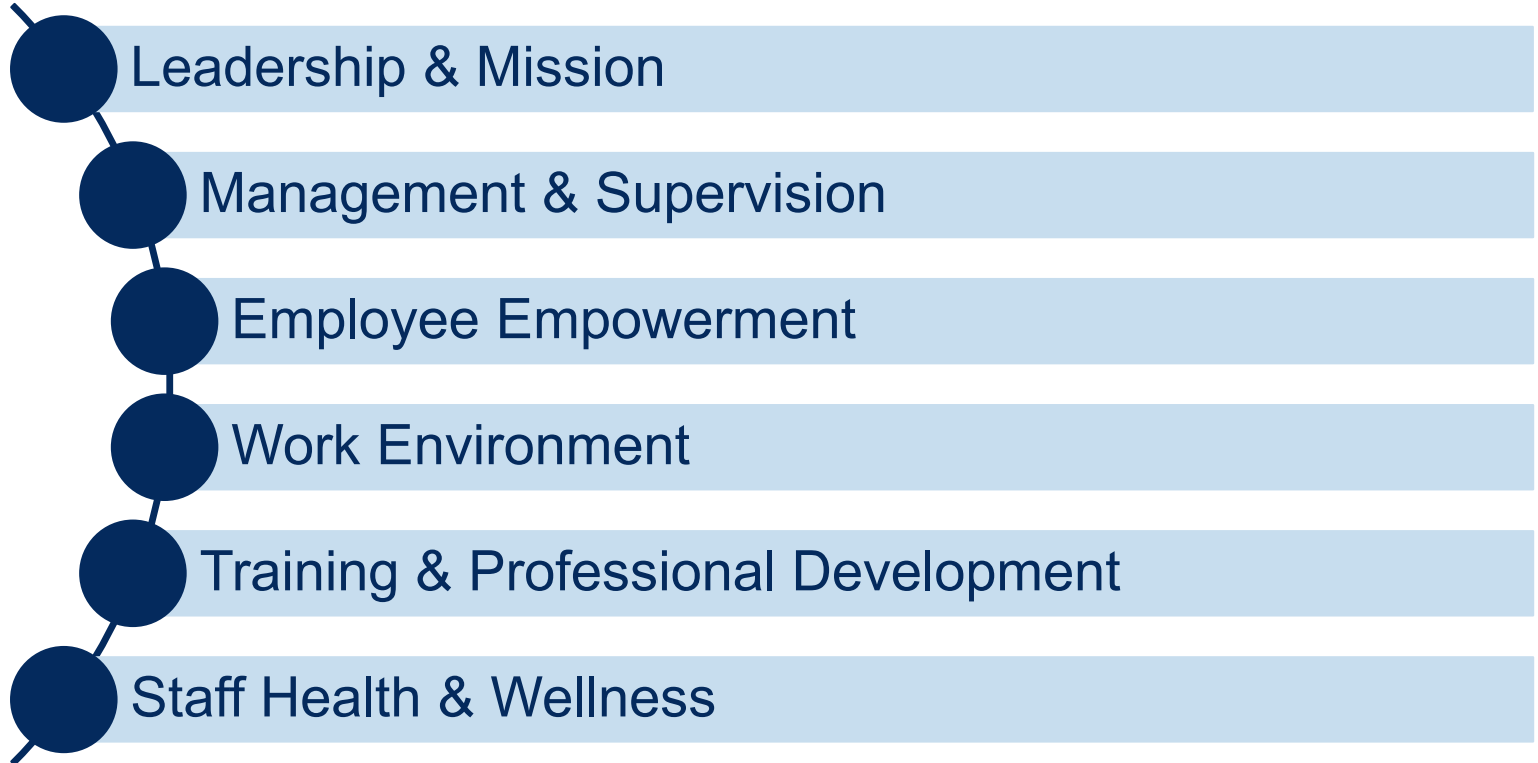|				
Absenteeism	Chronic Illness	Crisis After Crisis	Frequent Mistakes	Blaming the "Other"
Dividing the Team	Anger	Accidents	Lack of Empathy	Inability To Meet Goals/Complete Tasks

When the stress response is active for a long period of time, it can damage the cardiovascular, immune, and nervous systems. People develop patterns of response to stress that are as varied as the individuals. (Selye, 1984) These responses simply suggest a need for corrective action to limit their impact. (Mitchell & Bray, 1990; Selye, 1984)

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...it will affect our ability to carry out our mission

North Carolina Court System Mission Statement: To protect and preserve the rights and liberties of all the people, as guaranteed by the Constitutions and laws of the United States and North Carolina, by providing a fair, independent, and accessible forum for the just, timely, and economical resolution of their legal affairs.

Pillars of a Healthy Organization

A vicarious trauma-informed organization recognizes the potential negative consequences of the work and assumes responsibility for addressing the impact of vicarious trauma proactively through policies, procedures, practices, and programs.

- Leadership & Mission
- Management & Supervision
- Employee Empowerment
- Work Environment
- Training & Professional Development
- Staff Health & Wellness

Vicarious Trauma-Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG), Created by the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Project, 2016

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Core Elements of Resiliency

- Self-Knowledge and Insight
- A Sense of Hope
- Healthy Coping
- Strong Relationships
- Personal Perspective and Meaning

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Vicarious Trauma Toolkit

Contents – ~500 Resources:

- Policies, procedures, practices, programs
- Websites, podcasts, videos
- Research literature
- Newly developed tools

https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov

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Rationale for Taking Action To Become a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization

Working with people who have experienced trauma can impact staff profoundly.

Employees are our most valuable resource, and their well-being is paramount.

Discussing the negative impacts of our work without worry of stigma and shame helps mitigate negative consequences.

Recognizing and promoting the positive impacts of our work promotes resilience and sustainability.

Science!

"A compassionate workplace culture was associated with lower emotional exhaustion and better psychological vitality among the nurses. And there is evidence that this culture also impacted nurse behavior toward patients: Where there was a compassionate workplace culture, the patients perceived greater caring by the nurses."

Trzeciak, S., & Mazzarelli, A., *Compassionomics, The Revolutionary Scientific Evidence That Caring Makes a Difference,* Copyright 2019
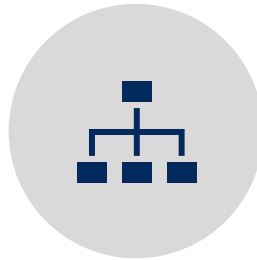
Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.

Safety

Security

Protection from Harm

Learning

Opportunity for Growth

Accomplishment

Social Support

Connection & Community

Belonging

Centered on
Worker Voice and Equity

Dignity

Mattering at Work

Meaning

Autonomy

Work-Life Harmony

Flexibility
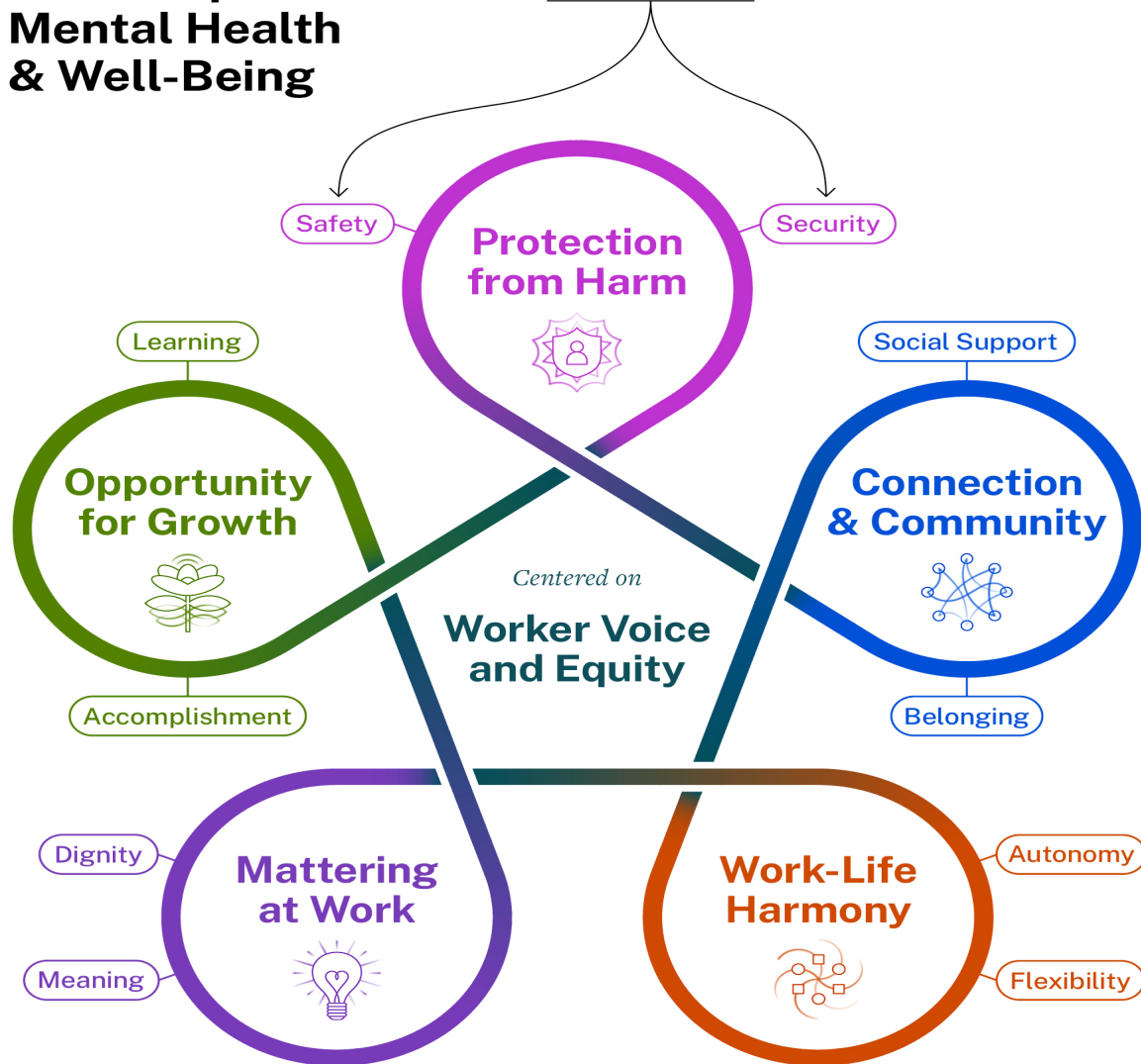
Components

Creating a plan with all workers to enact these components can help reimagine workplaces as engines of well-being.

Protection from Harm
- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community
- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work
- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth
- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

Office *of the* **U.S. Surgeon General**

You Are Stressing Me Out! What Can I Do?

Identify your own trauma responses

What are they, what do they look like, and how do they show up for other people in your life?

Adopt REAL self-care: exercise, music, breaks in the day, attending planned appointments

Predict and Prepare

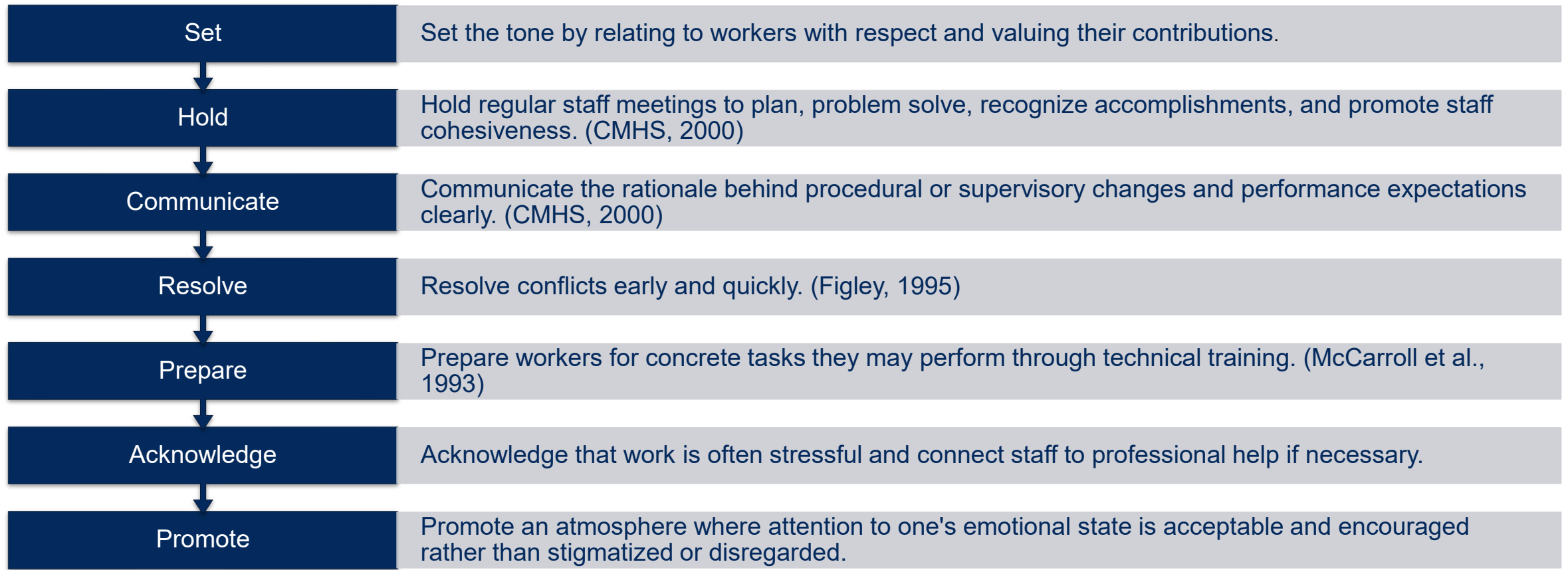Be clear about your roles and how you plan to implement them

Step back, take a beat, breathe

Make yourself connect with friends and family

More Ways To Support Each Other

Set	Set the tone by relating to workers with respect and valuing their contributions.
Hold	Hold regular staff meetings to plan, problem solve, recognize accomplishments, and promote staff cohesiveness. (CMHS, 2000)
Communicate	Communicate the rationale behind procedural or supervisory changes and performance expectations clearly. (CMHS, 2000)
Resolve	Resolve conflicts early and quickly. (Figley, 1995)
Prepare	Prepare workers for concrete tasks they may perform through technical training. (McCarroll et al., 1993)
Acknowledge	Acknowledge that work is often stressful and connect staff to professional help if necessary.
Promote	Promote an atmosphere where attention to one's emotional state is acceptable and encouraged rather than stigmatized or disregarded.

Remember to Acknowledge the Positive

@Linkedin

- Compassion Satisfaction

- Vicarious Resilience

- Vicarious Transformation

My success stories are…

I am grateful for…

The meaning I find in my work is…

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"*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation…*"

- Audre Lorde, feminist, civil rights activist, writer, poet

Making a Difference | Finding Fulfillment | Building Resilience

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Questions?

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Evaluation QR Code

https://www.research.net/r/CTA_NCJCVT_Apr2024

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