Vicarious Trauma is known by many names

- Compassion fatigue
- Burnout
- Secondary trauma
- Traumatic counter-transference
- Indirect trauma
- Co-victimization
- Contact victimization

The definition we use takes into account that exposure to people who have experienced trauma can have both positive and negative effects

- Many people gain a sense of personal satisfaction from their work.
- Many people also feel a strong sense of empathy for those with whom they work and can take on the feelings, symptoms or behaviors of those in our care.
- The traditional definition of vicarious trauma has been limited to those who hear the disclosures of victims or who are exposed to crime scenes or other evidence.
- But we should also recognize the traumatizing effects of being caught in reenactments with clients or being the targets of their aggression and anger when they act out their pasts.

Although there may be some upside to this exposure in the form of strengthened relationships, appreciation for one's own life circumstances, spiritual connection to the work or other benefits, there is more typically a cost to helpers or those who are in some way exposed to the trauma of others.

- No time, no energy
- Disconnection
- Social withdrawal
- Sensitivity to violence
- Nightmares
- Cynicism
- Despair and hopelessness
- Diminished self-efficacy
- Changes in identity, worldview, spirituality

Causal Factors: There are some external factors that contribute to the risk for vicarious trauma

- Biological – what makes us good workers also makes us more vulnerable:
    - Empathy
    - Emotional reactivity
    - Ease in connecting emotionally to others
    - Tendency to mimic the facial expressions of others
- Psychological – exposure to the harsh realities of the painful realities of the lives of other people can shatter beliefs about fairness and justness in the world

- Social – victim blaming in our society, taboo subjects make it difficult to access support from others (seeing our clients as sick or bad rather than injured.)
- Organizational – lack of supervision and support, high caseloads, low pay
- Moral causes – therapy, health care and helping work is no longer sacred, our health care systems often limit the amount of time for treatment and dictates the price.

Risk Factors: There are also individual factors that can make workers more vulnerable to the effects of this exposure.

- The first is a past history of trauma – as we know from the ACES study, this is very likely the case for most workers in our field.
- The last is too many negative clinical outcomes – we know that most programs do not have the kind of positive outcomes we hope for.
- Overwork
- Poor respect for boundaries
- Less experience
- Too much exposure
- So, we can safely assume that most of our human services workforce has some vulnerability for vicarious trauma.

Protective Factors: There are also factors that help protect against vicarious trauma.

- The best and most effective factor against VT is social support – by colleagues, family members, friends and loved ones.
- Supervision
- Resolution of one's personal issues
- Strong ethical principles of practice
- Knowledge of theory
- On-going training
- Awareness of the potential and impact of VT

Discussion Questions:

1. What is rewarding about your work?
2. What are the things that make you feel most vulnerable to VT?
3. What are your warning signs of stress?
4. What does the stress feel like in your body?
5. What are the external signs that people who work with you might notice?
6. How might someone best intervene with you if he/she sees these signs?

Self-Care Plan: Self-Care Plans are different from Safety Plans in that they are to be practiced regularly and proactively rather than as an in-the-moment intervention.

This Self-Care checklist will help you create a way to take care of yourself each day. Use your answers to these items to create a Self-Care Plan. You should keep your Self-Care Plan and refer to it often to make sure that you are caring for yourself.

Physical Self-Care
___ Eat regularly and healthy foods
___ Identify and take part in fun physical activities
___ Get regular medical care for prevention and illnesses
___ Take time off when needed
___ Get massages
___ Get enough sleep
___ Take time to care for your appearance
___ Take vacations
___ Take day trips or mini-vacations
___ Make time away from telephones and social media
___ Other:

Psychological Self-Care
___ 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 expert or in charge
___ Decrease stress in your life
___ Say "no" to extra responsibilities sometimes
___ Other:

Emotional Self-Care
___Stay in contact with important people in your life
___ Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself
___ Love yourself
___ Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places and seek them out
___ Allow yourself to cry
___ Find things that make you laugh
___ Other:

Spiritual Self-Care
___ Make time for reflection
___ Spend time with nature
___ Find a spiritual connection or community
___ Identify what in meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
___ Meditate
___ Pray

___ Sing
___ Other:

Workplace or Professional Self-Care
___ Take a break during the workday (e.g. lunch)
___ Make quiet time to complete tasks
___ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
___ Set limits with others
___ Balance your day
___ Arrange your work space so it is comfortable and comforting
___ Other:

Balance
___ Strive for balance within your work-life and workday
___ Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play and rest