Vicarious Trauma, Burnout and Solutions for Self-Care

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Introduction

- Vicarious Trauma
- Burnout
- Tips for Self-Care
- Interviewing best practices
Learning Objectives
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- Review basic concepts to help us understand the impact of trauma
- Use this information to gain a better understanding of survivor behaviors and responses
- Explore ways to sustain your work and well-being by understanding trauma exposure response
Vicarious Trauma

What is it?
“Taking on society’s biggest challenges can make self-care seem trivial, even self-indulgent. We willingly subordinate our own needs to those of the work and the world at large, often feeling gratitude for the opportunity to do so, then wonder why we’re so exhausted.”
Vicarious Trauma

“Sharing the suffering of another human being brings one into some type of sacred space.”

“When we open our hearts to hear someone’s story of torture, loss, devastation or betrayal, our cherished beliefs are challenged and we are changed.”
Vicarious Trauma

Mental, emotional and physical **depletion** resulting from exposure to the traumatic experiences of others

Vulnerability to VT comes from empathy

Can emerge suddenly, delayed (hours, days or weeks later), or cumulative (built-up over time)
Vicarious Trauma

Physical Symptoms

- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating
- Chronic fatigue
- Somatic symptoms: chronic headaches, indigestion, chest pains etc.
Vicarious Trauma

General Emotional Symptoms

• Over identification w/ clients
• Feeling vulnerable
• Feeling disillusioned by humanity
• Loss of confidence of good in the world
• Irritability (easily angered, depressed, aggressive)
• Fear, denial, depression, anxiety
• Hopelessness, helplessness
• Changes in identity, world view, spirituality
• Increased sensitivity to violence.
Vicarious Trauma

Additional Symptoms

- No time or energy for oneself
- Disconnection with loved ones
- Cynicism
- Loss of pleasure
- Re-experiencing distress of event
- Formation of phobias
- Avoiding specific thoughts, feelings, activities
- Numbness
- Substance abuse.
What determines level of risk?

- New to field of trauma
- Personal trauma history
- Family history of mental disorder
- Personal cumulative and acute stress issues
- Cumulative stress from DV events
- Genetic factors
- Personality traits
- Limited coping skills
- Limited support systems
Burnout
**Burnout**

Depletion or exhaustion of a person’s mental and physical resources attributed to his or her prolonged yet unsuccessful striving toward unrealistic expectations, internally or externally derived.

The collection of symptoms of emotional exhaustion. The gradual and progressive process with key features of physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced achievement, and detachment.
The Burnout Cycle

- Compulsion to prove oneself
- Working harder – to meet high personal expectations and “buckle down.”
- Neglecting their needs – no time for anything but work; dismiss sleep, eating, seeing friends as unimportant.
- Displacement of conflicts – something not right but can’t figure it out
- Revision of values
- Denial of emerging problems
- Withdrawal – reduce social contacts to minimum
- Obvious behavioral changes – feel increasingly worthless
- Depersonalization – No longer perceive own needs.
- Inner emptiness – “Leisure time is dead time.”
- Depression – indifference, hopeless, exhausted.
- Burnout syndrome – Total mental and physical collapse.
Solutions for VT & Burnout
Addressing VT & Burnout

- The most important strategy in your personal life to manage vicarious trauma is to have one!

- Self-Care
  - Discuss the following:
    - How do you define self-care?
    - What are your attitudes about self-care?
    - What have you learned with respect to your own needs regarding self-care?
Addressing VT & Burnout

The ABC’s

• A – awareness of vicarious trauma and burnout
• B – balance within work, and between work and other aspects of life
• C – contact with trusted friends, colleagues, community.
Addressing VT & Burnout – a multi-pronged approach

Personal Life

• Make personal life a priority
• Personal counseling
• Leisure activities/physical, creative, spontaneous, relaxation
• Spiritual well-being, gratitude
• Nurture every aspect of your life
• Health
• Intellectual self-care
Addressing VT & Burnout – a multi-pronged approach

**Professional**

- Supervision/consultation - regularly
- Balance and a variety of tasks
- Normalize CT, secondary stress and burnout reactions
- Multidisciplinary case conference – decreases professional isolation
- Mentoring new professionals
- Varied work duties, work-free periods
- Support for continuing education
Tips for Working with Clients
Tips – Working with Clients

- Beware of over-identifying
- Manage client expectations
- Manage your own work expectations
- Avoid rescuing behavior
- Give client tasks (e.g. write 1st draft of Declaration, f/u with potential witnesses)
- Be cognizant of a client’s reaction to you and your reaction to the client.
Thank you!

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