

POINT SOURCE YOUTH ON BEHALF OF OCFS PRESENTS:

WORKING WITH YOUTH AND NAVIGATING VICARIOUS TRAUMA

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Executive Summary

Vicarious Trauma (VT) is a common response experienced by many individuals supporting and providing aid to at-risk youth. Vicarious Trauma has a life-changing effect on service providers, affecting their views of the world, relationships, and connections with family, friends, and community. Because many of us, as service providers, can expect to be exposed to traumatic experiences, we should also prioritize taking space to heal after responding to the traumatic experiences of our client population to minimize the effects of vicarious trauma. This toolkit was developed from our 90-minute virtual training, produced on behalf of OCFS on “Working with Youth and Vicarious Trauma”. In addition to this toolkit, we recommend watching the recording for more information on Vicarious Trauma.

Speakers

Jaime Hunn, LCSW, Mental health therapist and senior employee wellness coordinator in pediatric healthcare

Ilyana Sori, LMSW, Social Work/Therapist, *Montefiore Medical Center-Wakefield Campus Child and Adolescent Outpatient Psychiatry Department*

Adriana Rodriguez-Baptiste, LCSW, HealingRootsTogether.com

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Office of Children
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The purpose of this resource is to provide information & guidance from experts in their field that is as updated and accurate as possible. It is not intended to give medical advice for individuals or organizations.

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**“It’s unrealistic for
you to operate at 110%,
100% of the time.”**

— Jaime Hunn, LCSW



Definitions

VICARIOUS TRAUMA: An interpersonal change someone experiences as a result of ongoing exposure to the traumatic experiences of others.

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS: Emotional distress, characterized by symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, after hearing about a traumatic event experienced by another person.

COMPASSION FATIGUE: Experiencing a decrease in fulfillment/optimism for helping others often as the result of the efforts being made exceeding feelings of success.

COMPASSION SATISFACTION: Feelings of fulfillment/optimism associated with helping ourselves or others.

TRAUMATIC GRIEF: Experiencing both trauma and grief at the same time.

CRITICAL SITUATIONS: Situations that require immediate response and often threaten the safety of one or more people.

COUNTERTRANSFERENCE: A service provider's reaction/projection onto the person receiving services.

PRESENTEEISM: The act of a person being physically present but not engaging in a productive manner.

SLIMING: The act of unnecessarily exposing someone to traumatic content without their consent.





Key Takeaways

1

Creating intentional space for teams to debrief can support healing for staff following stressful and traumatic events.

2

We feel the safest when we experience consistency and predictability; while we can't always expect consistency and predictability in our work, we can work to create consistent and predictable moments throughout our day (i.e. emotional check-ins before meetings, listening to music as we check our emails or drive into work, have a planned cup of tea every afternoon, etc.)

3

Be realistic about your capacity after experiencing a stressful event or traumatic experience. It's important to be willing to adjust your measure of success after being impacted by a traumatic experience.

“Vicarious trauma can lead to burnout. We consider burnout related to our job responsibilities — continuously feeling overwhelmed and this can be from lack of clarity, feeling stressed, or factors that make you feel like you can't do it anymore. Even if people are showing up, they might not be showing up in the way that they normally would and some people may be overproducing as well.”

— Ilyana Sori, LMSW





Q&A



What are some interventions for vicarious trauma, and what are some strategies to reduce the risk of VT: ([Adriana Rodriguez](#))

For Individuals:

1. **Get some Support:** Arranging meetings outside of lunch to speak about the different things taking place with clients, organizationally or otherwise. It is essential to lean on each other and authentically express yourself; you may not be the only one experiencing it.
2. **Create a Safety Plan** that clarifies your boundaries, triggers, risk factors, and interventions. Be sure to share this plan with those you have highlighted as support. It's important for you to know when you can't do something at your best capacity and be realistic about when you can get to it.
3. **Be Realistic with Yourself:** When an incident occurs or a case/youth becomes overwhelming, ensure you are realistic with what you are taking on, especially if you are not taking time off. It is hard to recognize this, so it is crucial to allow others to know how you show up when you are feeling sad, anxious, or overwhelmed with a situation. Having a supervisor that recognizes these changes is important as well. Those kinds of conversations can take place during supervision as well.

For Organizations and Supervisors:

1. **Create a Vicarious Trauma Structure:** Acknowledging as an organization that staff is prone to experience Vicarious Trauma due to the type of work they do is the first step. The second is creating a plan and process for staff to know how to address it and feel supported.
VT Spaces: Send a calendar invite so staff can spend some time together to process what happened ABC Awareness of one's self and emotions, Balance of work and Play C Connection to oneself and the larger world
2. **Internal Balance:** Organizations and supervisors should evaluate the workflow for their teams and the agency based on risk. Classifying by the level of risk (green, yellow, or red) and the interventions that staff can lean on when working with these types of risk levels. What do support and intervention look like for staff that have youth with an active suicidal plan or depression?





If you were to give a blueprint on how organizations can become more Vicarious Trauma-Informed, what would that blueprint look like? (Jaime/ Adriana)

1. **Check-ins and Communication:** It's important that management checks in on the manners in which spaces are being held and assesses if those spaces are meeting the need, not just for the client and agency but for the staff.
 - Identify areas of risk organizationally and interventions that can protect staff
 - Be aware of staff's safety plans and create Team safety plans that can help support them
 - Provide a mental health day for staff.
2. **Create a Community:** Open space for staff, without leadership, to openly express their feelings and internal views towards a case, client, workload, etc., and work out interventions, solutions, and support areas within themselves.
 - Have designated spaces — a no-work talk zone or breathing space. Sometimes we can unknowingly bring our work with us, and we really need a break



Four Actions You Can Take Now

1. **Develop, reference, and adapt your own safety plan** in order to recognize the warning signs that you're experiencing vicarious trauma. Share your plan with your support system, including your supervisor, in order to empower them with the tools necessary to recognize when and how to support you when you're in need.
2. To quote Ilyana Sori, **"Lean into your feelings."** The first step in knowing that we need to take care of ourselves is acknowledging and accepting the feelings that are coming up for us, without judgment.
3. **Establish safe spaces in the workplace** that protect us from unnecessary exposure to traumatic content.
4. Organizations should begin by **assessing how Vicarious Trauma-Informed they are**, as well as recognizing their current VT risk factors, followed by providing staff with training and reflective spaces to develop protective factors.





Additional Tips

- Supervisors act as caregivers, and it's important that they **normalize mental and physiological responses to trauma exposure** through our work, followed by supporting employees in accessing and utilizing adaptive coping skills.
- **ABCs of Supervision:** Awareness of one's own needs. Balance of work and play. Connection to one's self, others, and something larger.
- In the face of stressful situations, remind yourself to identify what is within and outside of your control. **Acknowledging your limitations** can decrease the stress associated with trying to be in control.
- Much of the work and conversations we have around our work can be stressful; **find opportunities to have fun** by creating unique terms to express what type of support you need and from who [i.e. queer soup (employees without leadership) or queer gazpacho (employees with leadership)].

Additional Resources

- [BluePrintThe Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#)
- [Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute](#)
- [NCTSN Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment](#)
- [The Trauma Stewardship Institute](#)



“It’s not our job to save people, because they have existed up until this moment without us; it’s our job to **guide them** and let them know where to access the resources.”

— Adriana Rodriguez-Baptiste