Operationalizing the Talk 2.0: Building Our Roadmaps to Address Vicarious Trauma for Staff

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Describing VT

Vicarious Trauma happens when we accumulate and carry the stories of trauma—including images, sounds, details—that we hear and witness, which then impact our bodies, minds, and our worldview.

-adapted from the Joyful Heart Foundation
Types of Vicarious Trauma

**Acute VT**
- Response to a specific story/details that feels new in some way
- Similar to immediate response of trauma victims (intrusive thoughts, nightmares, hyperarousal)

**Cumulative VT**
- Response to many stories/details over time, not a specific story/details
- Similar to response of survivors to repeated trauma (changes in frame of reference, worldview, difficulty managing emotions)
Is it Burnout… or Vicarious Trauma… or Both?

**Burnout**

Burnout can occur in any kind of workplace, when resources are limited, workloads feel unmanageable, expectations feel unrealistic, etc.

**Vicarious Trauma**

Vicarious trauma, on the other hand, is a unique, and is an inevitable effect of working with trauma survivors.
• Please complete the self assessment (Professional Quality of Life Scale).
• This is private and we will not ask you to share specific responses.
Negative Myths About VT: How would you debunk them?

“"I’m the only one who feels this way. There must be something wrong with me.”

“If I took better care of myself, this wouldn’t happen.”

“We’re supposed to be able to handle this stuff. I just need to be stronger.”

“If I talk about it, I might lose my job.”
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<th>Obstacles to safe VT discussions</th>
<th>Ways to address obstacles and increase safety for VT discussions</th>
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| Taboo, stigmatized—no one talks about VT | • Debunk negative VT myths  
• Discuss VT as an inevitable part of our work  
• Discuss VT in group meetings  
• Talk openly about your own VT and how you manage it |
| Feels too intrusive or intimate | • Open the door, let supervisee walk in  
• Build trust over time  
• Bring up in response to specific cues, not as a general supervision topic |
| Supervisor concerns about boundaries and what disclosures might result from asking | • Focus on how VT is impacting the staff person’s work  
• Frame VT discussions in the job context  
• Continue to hold staff accountable for performance  
• Be familiar with your role |
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<th>It can be helpful when supervisors...</th>
<th>It’s not the supervisor’s responsibility to...</th>
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<td>• Share information about VT and strategies for managing it</td>
<td>• Process or uncover the roots of the worker’s vulnerability to VT (e.g. past or current traumatic experiences)</td>
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<td>• Help worker identify whether VT is happening and identify which elements of VT are occurring</td>
<td>• Take over for worker when worker is struggling with VT</td>
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<td>• Help worker identify potential techniques for managing VT</td>
<td>• Fix the VT</td>
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<td>• Identify ways worker can still do the job</td>
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This work impacts us... in negative AND positive ways.

Notes from one program
Closing

THANK YOU!

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