“Teachers, counselors and administrators may recognize the cumulative stressors they face, but they don’t always realize that their symptoms are a common reaction to working with traumatized children—and that these symptoms have a name.”

Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Jessica Lander, September 26, 2018
Learning Objectives

1. Describe the difference between burnout and vicarious trauma.
2. List three indicators of vicarious trauma for individuals and three indicators at the organizational level.
3. Identify two resources to address vicarious trauma.
4. Describe three strategies that you can use in your school/work to prevent vicarious trauma and promote vicarious resilience.
VICARIOUS RESILIENCE

= Process of positive growth and empowerment that comes through working with clients who are coping with and overcoming adversity (Engstrom et al, 2008)

- Recognizing people’s capacity to heal
- Reaffirming the value of the work you do
- Gift of HOPE

The Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL Version 5 2009) measures compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue


Linda Chamberlain PhD, MPH
Vicarious resilience is only possible if skills and strategies are implemented by organizations and individuals to protect themselves.

Take a moment to think about the most rewarding moment you’ve had at your job—those moments that keep you coming back.
Soft Belly Breathing

“Self-care isn’t complementary or alternative — it’s fundamental for good health.”

James Gordon, MD
Georgetown University Medical School
The Center for Mind-Body Medicine
www.cmbm.org
Having a prevention plan for vicarious trauma is the first step to becoming trauma-informed.

Vicarious Trauma -- the natural consequences resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by another.

Linda Chamberlain PhD, MPH
Key Points about Vicarious Trauma (VT)

• It’s not new but...
• Predictable and preventable
• Because of advances in several fields of research that are now intersecting, we know more than ever before about best practices & simple tools

More than half of all U.S. children have experienced trauma in the form of abuse, neglect, violence or challenging household circumstances and more than 35% have experienced more than one traumatic event (CDC data)

*This data does not include medical trauma, bullying and other sources of trauma

Linda Chamberlain PhD, MPH
Things we’ve learned about vicarious trauma (VT). . .

Workers in helping fields are profoundly can be affected by the work they do, whether it is by

**direct exposure to traumatic events**
(e.g. police, emergency medical services)

or

**secondary exposure** through working with others who have experienced trauma
TEACHER WELLNESS

When Students Are Traumatized, Teachers Are Too

Trauma in students' lives takes an emotional and physical toll on teachers as well. Experts weigh in on the best ways to cope.
Resources for Teachers

• **Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma, Usable Knowledge, Relevant Research for Today’s Educators**, Jessica Lander, 2018, Harvard Graduate School of Education
  
  https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/09/helping-teachers-manage-weight-trauma

• **When Students Are Traumatized, Teachers Are Too, Teacher Wellness**, Emilina Minero, 2017, George Lucas Educational Foundation
  
  https://www.edutopia.org/article/when-students-are-traumatized-teachers-are-too

• **Brain-Body Strategies and Tools to Promote Resilience and Prevent Vicarious Trauma** for school staff
  
  drlindachamberlain@gmail.com (email)
Why is it important to address vicarious trauma?

• Vicarious trauma can affect:
  • Your work, your colleagues, the overall functioning of organization, and quality of assistance being provided to those you are working to help.
  • Your physical, mental and behavioral health
  • The way you act and interact with people you care about

• Addressing vicarious trauma will reduce staff turnover and absenteeism leading to improved quality of services
If we are to do our work with suffering people and environments in a sustainable way, we must understand how our work affects us.

Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2008
Burn-Out

• Result of stress and frustration caused by toxic work environment
• Contributing factors include:
  • Unrealistic demands, heavy workload
  • Poor management, inadequate support
• Feelings of depersonalization resulting in negative, cynical attitudes towards work/clients

Changing job/work environment usually provides immediate relief
Compassion Fatigue

• Profound physical, emotional and mental erosion that takes place when helpers/caregivers are unable to refuel and regenerate

• Emotional depletion → nothing left to give

• Signs include:
  • apathy
  • ↓ listening and communication
  • overly critical
  • loss of passion for career

Mathieu, 2012

Some researchers make a distinction between compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma
## Vicarious Trauma (also called Secondary Traumatic Stress)

### DEFINITION

Profound shift in world view that can occur in helping professionals when working with others who have experienced trauma

- Transformation of our view of ourselves, others, and the world as a result of exposure to the suffering of others
- Symptoms may be similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

### INDICATORS

- Unexplainably irritable, angry, numb
- Inability to focus
- Feeling hopeless, isolated
- Sleep problems
- Self-medicating with food or other substances
- Blaming others
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Constantly worrying about students after school hours

Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009; Figley, 2015; Mathieu, 2012; Bard & Kracen, 2006
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Rapid pulse/breathing; headaches, impaired immune system, fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological/Emotional</td>
<td>Feeling no one understands you, powerless-can’t make a difference, fearfulness, disillusionment, “can’t bounce back”, don’t enjoy things you used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Irritability, sleep/appetite changes, isolating from friends/family, self-medicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Cynicism, pessimism, intrusive thoughts and images, preoccupation with clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>↓ quality/quantity of work, low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>↓confidence, negative attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Detached/withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication; ↑ conflict, impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Absent/tardiness, poor follow-through, overwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Content from *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit* (Office for Victims of Crime, 2017); *What About You?* National Center for Family Homelessness, 2008)
Contributing Factors include:

**Personal**
- Trauma history
- Social isolation/
- Poor support system
- Major co-occurring life stressors
- Close identification with those being assisted

**Organizational**
- Lack of control over workload
- Lack of professional support system
- Inadequate orientation & training for position
- Poor supervision
- High prevalence of trauma among service population

Working with children

Mathieu et al, 2012; Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Slattery & Goodman, 2009
Differences Between Burnout and Vicarious Trauma

- Burnout is the exhaustion of our bodies, minds and motivation due to prolonged and unaddressed work stress
  - Can occur in any occupation
  - Unaddressed burnout can increase the risk of vicarious trauma
  - Does not distort our view of the world as is the case with vicarious trauma

There’s danger everywhere I look
I can’t trust anyone anymore
Nothing I do will make a difference
The Brain On Stress: “Downstairs”

Cortex

Prefrontal Cortex

HEALTHY HEALERS PROJECT Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC)

Linda Chamberlain PhD, MPH
Stress is Physical

- Complicated cascade of physical and biochemical responses
  - Brain releases excessive cortisol and adrenaline that put the body into full alert—↑ heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and flood of emotions
  - Biologically translates into mental and physical symptoms and takes cortex off-line

Excessive stress occurs when demands made exceed organism’s reasonable capacity to fulfill them in absence of support and resiliency skills
Physical health problems
Ulcers, stomach problems, asthma, allergies, obesity . . .

Depressed immune system

Chronic inflammation

Self-medicate
Behavioral & mental health issues
Depression, anxiety disorders...

STOP

HPA AXIS

BRAIN

STRESS

COPING AND RESILIENCY SKILLS

Linda Chamberlain PhD, MPH
New field that examines interaction between brain, body, immune system and hormones that influence health across lifespan

Most stressors today are emotional (vs. physical threats)

Body mounts stress response & we can become trapped in fight/flight alarm status

Emotional stress is translated into physical symptoms → *diseases of adaptation* (Hans Selye)
Sit in quiet place if possible
Close your eyes
Focus on your breath coming in and out
Notice what’s happening in your body
Working down from top of your head, notice how your jaw, then your neck, your shoulders are feeling at this moment (when you have time to, work down your body—arms, stomach, calves, toes)
Keep following your breath, and if your mind wanders, gently bring it back to this moment
Take three deep breaths through your nose
Slowly open your eyes

http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/activities/3-minute-relaxation
Organizational Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

- Widespread cynicism and pessimism
- Lack of communication and frequent miscommunications
- Increase in interpersonal conflicts
- High rates of absences or tardiness
- Ethical or boundary violations
- Unexplained reductions in productivity/service delivery
- Increase in client complaints
- High rates of staff turnover
- Negative atmosphere/low morale
- Less energy & motivation..not willing to go extra mile
Organizational Self-Care Check List

activity 3.3 The Organizational Self-Care Checklist

Instructions: Check off everything your organization currently does to support self-care.

Training and Education
- The organization provides education to all employees about stress and its impact on health and well-being.
- The organization provides all employees with education on the signs of burnout, compassion fatigue and/or vicarious traumatization.
- The organization provides all employees with stress management trainings.
- The organization provides all employees with training related to their job tasks.
- Staff are given opportunities to attend refresher trainings and trainings on new topics related to their role.
- Staff coverage is in place to support training.
- The organization provides education on the steps necessary to advance in whatever role you are in.
- Other: ________________________________

Support and Supervision
- The organization offers an employee assistance program (EAP).
- Employee job descriptions and responsibilities are clearly defined.
- All staff members have regular supervision.
- Part of supervision is used to address job stress and self-care strategies.
- Part of supervision is used for on-going assessment of workload and time needed to complete tasks.
- Staff members are encouraged to understand their own stress reactions and take appropriate steps to develop their own self-care plans.
- Staff members are welcome to discuss concerns about the organization or their job with administrators without negative consequences (e.g., being treated differently, feeling like their job is in jeopardy or having it impact their role on the team).
- Staff members are encouraged to take breaks, including lunch and vacation time.
- The organization supports peer-to-peer activities such as support groups and mentoring.
- Other: ________________________________

http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf
School leadership should consider ways to appreciate staff both publicly and privately – not just by recognizing great work, but also by acknowledging that the work is difficult. Schools should connect school staff who might be experiencing secondary traumatic stress [vicarious trauma] with resources and make clear that symptoms are not a sign of weakness, but an indicator that they might need support because they work in a challenging profession.

Lander, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2018
Essential Elements of Trauma-informed System to Promote Worker Resiliency

- Recognize exposure to trauma is a risk of the work your staff do
- Recognize impact of vicarious trauma on workforce
- Understand that trauma can shape the culture of organizations in the same way that trauma can shape the world view of individuals
- Awareness that trauma-informed organizations are less likely to re-traumatize the clients/families they serve
- Develop capacity to translate trauma-related knowledge into meaningful action, policy & improvements in practice

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2011
System Level Supports

• School-wide approach to trauma-informed schools
  • Creates supportive, caring culture for staff & students
• Peer Groups to Reduce professional isolation
  • Dedicated time to work together, check in with each other, share and process experiences
  • Training to develop coping and resilience skills for staff and students
  • Wellness-Accountability Buddy system to support and keep you accountable to your wellness goals

Minero, 2017 *When Students are Traumatized, Teachers Are Too*
Lander, 2018 *Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma*
Low-Impact Debriefs: Preventing Retraumatization

• There’s a contagion factor to sharing gory details
• May see talking about trauma as normal part of work—become “desensitized” to it but research shows otherwise
  • Negative impact of cumulative exposure whether we are aware nor not
• Two types of debriefing
  • informal (ad hoc, talk to colleague etc.)
  • formal (structured, scheduled) debriefing
4 Steps for Low Impact Debriefing

1. Increased self awareness—
   Become aware of the stories you tell and the level of detail. What details do I need to share?

2. Fair Warning
   What would I say to someone if I was sharing bad news? You better sit down. I’ve got some bad news...

3. Consent
   I need to debrief with you. Is now a good time?

4. Limited disclosure
   Start with the outer circle of your story and as you move in, decide how much of the graphic details you need to include. Check in with yourself—is this too much trauma information to share?

https://www.tendacademy.ca/low-impact-debriefing-how-to-stop-sliming-each-other/
William H. Seward Elementary School: Teachers’ Special Place

Alan Haskins, Principal
Focusing the mind on healing images can lead to physiological changes in the brain and body
Resource: Developing a Prevention Plan for Vicarious Trauma

• Organizational and Personal Self-Care Checklists

• Use checklists to brainstorm (page 37) about steps
  • During recruitment
  • During orientation
  • During employment
  • When leaving position

Self-Care Plans
No “One-Size Fits All” Strategy

• Stress is an individual experience→ what is stressful to a co-worker may not be stressful to you

• Mind and body are constantly influencing and altering one another
  • How you are affected by stress is not static

• Know your own triggers and warning signs
• Be aware of what you expose yourself to outside of work
• Set boundaries
• Avoid isolation
• Maintain relationships outside of work
• Build self-care into your routine – at work and at home
Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQol)

- Validated, 30-item scale designed to measure the negative and positive effects of helping others who experience suffering and trauma
  - Subscales for burn-out, compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction
  - Available in 25 languages

www.proqol.org
Heritage et al, 2018
Questions to Consider

As a result of the work you do:

1. How has my identify and personal beliefs about myself changed?

2. Have the reasons that I chose to do this work changed from when I started?

3. Am I use my strengths & resources to keep growing with the work or am I in survival mode?

4. Has my perception of things that are under my control changed since I started doing this work?

5. Think about a critical situation in the last few months that affected how your thinking/how you felt outside of work.
Buffer Zone from Work to Home

• *Do you have a daily transition ritual between work and home?*

• “Coming home ritual” creates a clear boundary between work and home life
  • Something that you do before you head home, on your way home or when you get home
  • changing into something comfortable, putting “work” clothes away
  • 10-minute quiet period to shift gears, go for a walk or run, stare at the birdfeeders...!
Self-Care and Balance

What About You?
A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others

activity 1.4 Self-Assessment Tool: Self-Care

Take some time to complete the checklist below. You need not share your answers with anyone – this is simply for self-reflection. Remember that no one strategy works for everyone. This activity just gives you a way to think about the possibility of self-care in many aspects of your life.

How often do you do the following? (Rate, using the scale below):
5 = Frequently 4 = Sometimes 3 = Rarely 2 = Never 1 = It never even occurred to me

Physical Self-Care
- Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast and lunch)
- Eat healthfully
- Exercise
- Lift weights
- Practice martial arts
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when you’re sick
- Get massages or other body work
- Do physical activity that is fun for you
- Take time to be sexual
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes you like
- Take vacations
- Take day trips, or mini-vacations
- Get away from stressful technology such as pagers, faxes, telephones, e-mail
- Other:

Psychological Self-Care
- Make time for self-reflection
- Go to see a psychotherapist or counselor for yourself
- Write in a journal
- Read literature unrelated to work
- Do something at which you are a beginner
- Take a step to decrease stress in your life
- Notice your inner experience—your dreams, thoughts, imagery, feelings
- Other:

Emotional Self-Care
- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life
- Treat yourself kindly (supportive inner dialogue or self-talk)
- Feel proud of yourself
- Reread favorite books, review favorite movies
- Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places
- Allow yourself to cry
- Find things that make you laugh
- Express your outrage in a constructive way
- Play with children
- Other:

http://508.center4si.com/SelfCareforCareGivers.pdf

• Physical
• Psychological
• Emotional
• Spiritual
• Workplace/professional

Linda Chamberlain PhD, MPH
What are the U.S. Armed Forces, the National Institutes of Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other systems doing for stress reduction that we need to know?
Mindfulness Training & the Adult Brain

- Mindfulness training correlated with increased cortical structures (gray matter) associated with attention, working memory, processing sensory input, affective regulation, empathy and EF (Holzel et al, 2008; Lazar et al, 2005; Luders et al, 2009)

- Daily meditation changed gray matter in brain regions associated with memory (↑hippocampus), sense of self, empathy & stress (↓amygdala) over 8-week intervention (Holzel et al, 2011)

Also see federal evidence review of 311 studies on health effects of mindfulness, Ospina et al, 2007