

Vicarious Trauma Plan Guide

Strategies to address work-related trauma exposure for Children's Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Teams

For more information or technical assistance in implementing strategies in this guide, please contact:

Karen Hangartner
Deputy Project Director
Southern Regional Children's Advocacy Center
khangartner@nationalcac.org
256.327.3754

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There is broad recognition that Children’s Advocacy Centers’ (CAC) staff and Multidisciplinary team (MDT) partners work in highly trauma-exposed work environments and that the exposure may affect the individual professionals and the organizations in which they work. CAC leaders often struggle to find ways to support staff and team members and mitigate the negative impacts of doing this work. This guide will provide some tips on how to implement strategies to enhance professionals’ resilience.

Many of the strategies and all of the resources in this plan are applicable for MDTs, especially regarding training and assessment. However, there are special considerations regarding supervision, policies and procedures, and organizational culture. CAC leaders may not be able to influence supervision practices or the organizational culture in MDT partner agencies; however, you can increase awareness of vicarious trauma and its’ effect on organizations.

This guide will explore four domains:

- **Training & Assessment**
- **Supervision**
- **Policies & Procedures**
- **Organizational Culture**

TRAINING & ASSESSMENT

Training

A comprehensive approach to addressing work-related trauma exposure should include regular training opportunities for professionals. This should be more than a one-time or even an annual training. Senior leaders and supervisors should explore ways to include conversations and information about the impact of this work in all trainings and meetings for staff and MDT members, in addition to formal trainings on the topic. Below are listed some training materials and videos which are available online, many of which are free of charge. In the resource section of the guide are several short videos from the Headington Institute that would be easy to add to any meeting. Consider a wide range of training topics that provide a holistic approach to wellness, including yoga, mindfulness, workplace ergonomics, nutrition, etc.



Assessment

Organizations should also provide opportunities and encourage staff to complete regular individual assessments as well as organizational assessments. Below are individual and organizational assessments that are free of charge.

Training Resources

- Building Resiliency in Child Abuse Organizations
<https://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspBldgResiliencyChildAbuseOrgs.cfm>
- The Resilience Alliance: Promoting Resilience and Reducing Secondary Trauma Among Child Welfare Staff
http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/resilience_alliance_training_manual.pdf
- National Children’s Advocacy Center
Ask the Expert: Jon R. Conte, Ph.D.
Managing Vicarious Trauma
<http://www.nationalcac.org/online-training/ate-vicarious-trauma-part2.html>
- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress-reduction/>
- TEND
<http://www.tendacademy.ca/resources/>
- Figley Institute
<http://www.figleyinstitute.com/>

Assessment Resources

Individual

- Professional Quality of Life Scale
<http://www.proqol.org/>
- Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale
<http://academy.extensiondlc.net/file.php/1/resources/TMCrisis20CohenSTSScale.pdf>

Organizational

- Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organization Assessment
<http://www.uky.edu/CTAC/node/234>

SUPERVISION

Often supervisors are truly stuck in the middle. They may be providing support for their staff, while receiving little or no support themselves. Things to consider relating to supervision:

For CAC staff:

- Vicarious trauma (VT) informed supervision means creating time and space for staff to gain greater awareness and understanding of the effects of working in a trauma exposed workplace. This means spending part of supervision talking about cases, administrative tasks, etc. and spending time discussing the impact of this work.
- Provide training for supervisors to equip them to use this type of supervision. See sample questions below that might be helpful.
- Supervisors need to know how to recognize the signs of vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress among staff.
- There should be a clear written protocol on the process for accessing help and support for staff who are experiencing secondary traumatic stress (STS).
- Create formal support network specifically for supervisors and senior leaders.
- Include discussions about the impact of this work in formal performance evaluations, while assuring staff that disclosing VT/STS will not negatively affect performance appraisals.
- Note that staff might need increased supervision in times of crisis, personal or professional.



For MDT:

- TEND's *The Business Case for a Comprehensive Organizational Health & Workplace Wellness Program* may help enlighten partner agencies to the importance of addressing work-related trauma exposure. You may find it here: <http://www.tendacademy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/BusinessCase-2015-08-19-print.pdf>. This resource is also invaluable for Boards of Directors.



- Offer specialized training for supervisors of MDT partner agencies.
- It is also helpful to have meetings with MDT supervisors to discuss systemic issues that may be causing unnecessary stress for team members and to ensure that supervisors are holding MDT members accountable to team ground rules in order to avoid horizontal bullying.

Supervision Resources

Fisher, P. (2015). *Building resilient teams: Facilitating workplace wellness & organizational health in trauma-exposed environments*.

Vicarious Trauma: What Can Managers and Organizations Do?

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/366/resilience-man-building-resilience>

Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators

http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/sts_cw_final.pdf

Vicarious Trauma

http://www.headington-institute.org/files/vicarious-trauma-handout_85433.pdf

Understanding and Addressing Vicarious Trauma: Reflection Questions Workbook

http://www.headington-institute.org/files/vt_reflections-workbook_85636.pdf

Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals

http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/secondary_traumatic_tress.pdf

Sample Questions to Promote Reflection in Supervision

- What client/case has been the most difficult for you recently?
- Why do you think that case was particularly difficult?
- Why did you get into this field?
- What excites you about your work?
- What client/case has been the most inspiring for you recently?
- Why?
- What motivates you to do this work?
- How have you changed since you began this work?
- How has your identity as a professional grown and developed?
- Are there things/activities/hobbies you used to enjoy that you no longer do?
- What are aspects of your job where you feel most competent?
- What aspects of your job duties are most challenging for you?
- Is there professional training you would like to access?
- Who are the professionals who inspire you?
- Tell me about your support system outside of work.
- What is the most effective strategy you use to take care of yourself in doing this work?
- Is there something I can do to better support you?
- Is there something this agency can do to better support you?

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Few organizations have formal policies and procedures related to VT/STS. Many organizations have informal ways of building resilience of staff, i.e. staff and MDT appreciation lunches, meeting for happy hour, team awards, etc. However, rarely are those practices imbedded into a comprehensive organizational approach. By incorporating some items below as a part of a holistic approach, organizations can begin making the shift to being secondary trauma informed. Some suggestions:

For CAC staff:

- Create a value statement. It might read something like this:
 - a. It is assumed this work will impact us in profound ways.
 - b. We seek to provide an environment that acknowledges:
 - i. *Our employees are our most valuable resource.*
 - ii. *The well-being of our employees is paramount.*
 - iii. *Acknowledging the impact of this work without worry of stigma or shame is important to mitigate the negative aspects of working with victims of child abuse.*
 - iv. *Discussing the negative impacts of this work will not influence performance appraisals.*
- Include information about the impact of this work in the hiring/screening process. Include questions about self-care in the interview.
- Include strategies for mitigating the negative effects of this work in new employee and MDT orientations.
- Be sure mental health benefits are included as a part of the benefit package. If you use an EAP, make sure the EAP is educated in VT/STS.
- Offer adequate time off so staff can re-charge.
- Offer flex time where possible.
- Develop formal policies and referral processes for symptomatic employees.
- Create a crisis plan for high profile or particularly difficult cases.

For MDT:

- Create a MDT statement regarding VT/STS. It might read something like this:
 - a. *It is assumed this work will impact us in profound ways.*
 - b. *There is a unique understanding among MDT members of how this work might affect professionals that others in our specific disciplines may not understand.*
 - c. *Our MDT is a place where professionals can acknowledge how this work affects our MDT and us as individuals without worry of stigma or shame.*
 - d. *We cannot do our best work if we are experiencing the extreme negative effects VT/STS.*
- Incorporate information about VT/STS into the formal MDT orientation process.
- MDT ground rules are important for team functioning. Keep ground rules visible during meetings to remind members of agreed upon norms.
- Develop and display a purpose statement for the MDT. Keeping the “why” of the team’s purpose visible is protective for team members.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The path to creating VT/STS-informed organizations requires an organizational shift. Here are some strategies, in addition to the suggestions above, to begin the process.

For CAC Staff:

- Address the physical safety of staff. Ensure that your building is secure and staff trained in what to do in the event of volatile parents/clients.
- Ensure the psychological safety of staff. Have MDT supervisors enforce ground rules of the MDT to prevent any horizontal violence or workplace bullying.
- Educate your board of directors on VT/STS to garner their support for policies and activities that create a supportive environment.
- Express value and appreciation for the work of staff.
- Create a debriefing process for particularly difficult cases.
- Examine workloads and diversify when possible.
- Create celebrations and rituals that reinforce the values and the mission of the CAC.
- Continually remind staff and MDT members of the mission, especially in times of crisis.

For MDT:

- While you may not be able to influence supervision policies of partner agencies, CACs may create MDT meetings that allow team members to gain insight and awareness of the effects of this work.
- Have a “check in” time at the beginning or end of each meeting.
- Have a VT/STS “moment” in each meeting. Share a small piece of information or coping strategy.
- Schedule regular formal trainings.
- Allow time for team members to share what strategies work for them to maintain their well-being.
- Create accountability to the ground rules of the MDT. Be clear that it is the responsibility of each team member to hold each other accountable.
- Provide training for the team on conflict and healthy conflict resolution.
- Express value and appreciation for the work of the professionals on the MDT.
- Define success and develop celebration rituals.
- Remind MDT members that our individual and collective well-being is a priority because kids need our best selves.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Printed Resources

Vicarious Trauma: What Can Managers and Organizations Do?

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/366/resilience-man-building-resilience>

Vicarious Trauma

http://www.headington-institute.org/files/vicarious-trauma-handout_85433.pdf

Understanding and Addressing Vicarious Trauma: Reflection Questions Workbook

http://www.headington-institute.org/files/vt_reflections-workbook_85636.pdf

Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals

http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/secondary_traumatic_tress.pdf

Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators

http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/sts_cw_final.pdf

Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout among Professionals Who Work with Maltreated Children

Professional Bibliography

<http://www.nationalcac.org/images/pdfs/CALiO/Bibliographies/vicarious-trauma-bib4.pdf>

The Business Case for a Comprehensive Organizational Health & Workplace Wellness Program

<http://www.tendacademy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/BusinessCase-2015-08-19-print.pdf>

Websites

Headington Institute

<http://www.headington-institute.org/>

TEND

<http://www.tendacademy.ca/>

University of Buffalo School of Social Work

Self-Care Starter Kit

<https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html>

Books

van Dernoot Lipsky, L., & Burk, C. (2009). *Trauma stewardship: An everyday guide to caring for self while caring for others*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Mathieu, F. (2012). *The compassion fatigue workbook: Creative tools for transforming compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization*. Routledge.

Fisher, P. (2015). *Building resilient teams: Facilitating workplace wellness & organizational health in trauma-exposed environments*.

Rothschild, B. (2006). *Help for the helper: The psychophysiology of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma*. WW Norton & Co.

Gilmartin, K. M. (2002). Emotional survival for law enforcement. *ES Press, PMB*, 233, 2968.

Fisher, P. M. (2001). *The Manager's Guide to Stress, Burnout & Trauma in Law Enforcement*. Spectrum Press.

Videos from Headington Institute

These short 3-5 minute videos are great to show for staff meetings or MDT meetings.

What is Vicarious Trauma?

Laurie Ann Pearlman

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/374/what-is-vicarious-trauma>

Transforming Vicarious Trauma

Laurie Ann Pearlman

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/432/transforming-vicarious-trauma>

Four Ways to Rebuild Responder Resilience

Jim Guy

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/440/four-ways-to-rebuild-responder-resilience>

Optimizing Your Self-Care Based On Your Coping Styles

Rick Williamson

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/447/optimizing-your-self-care-based-on-your-coping-style>

Understanding Allostatic Load

Dr. Don Bosch

<http://www.headington-institute.org/resource-index/397/understanding-allostatic-load>