



COMMUNITY  
HEALTH CARE  
ASSOCIATION  
of New York State

# Community Care Corner

Health Center Staff Wellness Resources



## **Trauma-Informed Toolbox Strategy Session: Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) & Vicarious Trauma (VT)**

Whitney L. Marris, LMSW  
The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care



# Possible Impacts of the Work







# Doing the Work

Possible Impact	Description
Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)	Experience of trauma-related symptoms in a worker as a result of witnessing the trauma/adversity of another; typically quick in onset.
Vicarious Trauma (VT)	Development of negative changes in world view as a result of the cumulative impact of witnessing trauma/adversity over time.
Burnout	Feelings of hopelessness, fatigue, and being overwhelmed from excessive workloads and unsupportive work environments; develops gradually over time.
Compassion Fatigue (CF)	Experiencing the combination of STS, VT, and/or burnout.

*(Krause & Green, 2015)*

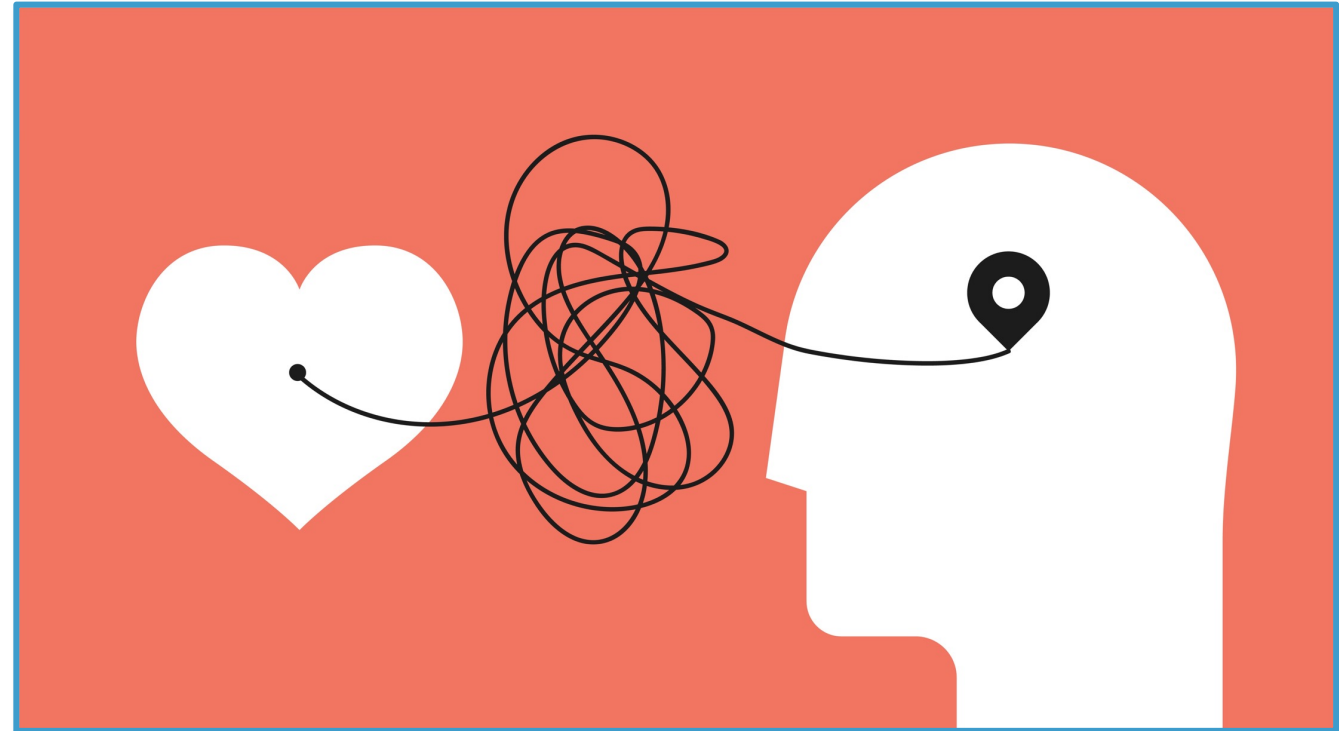
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*The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.*

*- Rachel Naomi Remen*

# Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

- Nightmares
- Feeling angry or cynical
- Misplaced feelings of guilt
- Intrusive thoughts of the event
- Increased psychological arousal
- Isolation from family and friends
- Feeling detached, numb, apathetic



*(Bride, 2011; Hammond, 2020)*

# Signs of Vicarious Trauma (VT)



- Loss of meaning and hope
- Decreased capacity for decision making
- Difficulty regulating/managing emotions
- Difficulty accepting or feeling okay about yourself
- Excessive worry about potential dangers in the world
- Challenges managing boundaries between self and others
- Somatic complaints (i.e., headache, stomachache, fatigue, etc.)

*(Headington Institute, 2008; Office for Victims of Crime, n.d.)*



*(The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care, 20210)*



”

*You are not responsible for  
being down, but you are  
responsible for getting up.*

- Jesse Jackson



# Resilience

The ability of an individual, family, group, or community to cope with and/or adapt to change, challenges, adversity, and/or trauma.



(SAMHSA)

# Factors of Resilience

## Intrapersonal

- *Emotional:* expression of difficult feelings
- *Cognitive:* finding meaning in the event and avoiding catastrophic changes to worldviews
- *Coping:* active, problem-focused coping (rather than emotion-focused coping or disengagement)



## Interpersonal

- *Social Support:* availability and utilization of social support resources



# The ABCs of Addressing STS & VT

## Awareness

- **Develop** skills to notice what stress reactions look and feel like for you, and when they are more likely to arise
- **Engage** in self-regulation strategies (e.g., deep breathing, moving around, drinking water, etc.)
- **Respect** others' decisions, while also knowing what is right for you
- **Accept** your own feelings with compassion
- **Be realistic** with yourself and others

the  
**ABCs**  
of addressing  
STS & VT



# The ABCs of Addressing STS & VT

## Balance

- **Create** predictable routines, including regular physical/mental breaks!
- **Limit** your intake of news, media and other sources of information
- **Practice** reframing and look for opportunities in challenges
- **Communicate** expectations/boundaries (e.g., when you need space, when you will be available, etc.)
- **Maintain** healthy habits (eat well, sleep enough, stay hydrated, get some movement in)
- **Take time** to engage in creative/enriching activities (e.g., reading, writing, meditation, art-making, etc.)

the  
**ABCs**  
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# The ABCs of Addressing STS & VT

## Connection

- **Make** intentional time to connect with colleagues, friends, and family
- **Initiate** contact with patients and the community (e.g., email/messages, letters/postcards, calls)
- **Notice** what is working/going well, capacity, strength & success
- **Find** opportunities for humor and laughter
- **Anchor in** your connection to meaning in the work

the  
**ABCs**  
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# Trauma-Informed Considerations for VT & STS



## *Health Center/Leadership Level Actions/Considerations*



### Safety

- Check in/debrief often
- Provide access to ongoing supervision
- Encourage & model use of wellness strategies/resources
- Help others establish a consistent work-to-home transition
- Demonstrate intentional respect for diversity
- Maintain sufficient resources



### Trustworthiness

- Normalize & invite open communication about stress
- Encourage routine with flexibility for autonomy
- Let others know what to expect & what is expected of them
- Acknowledge the health center's responsibility to supporting leaders/supervisors as they manage the impact of VT on their reports



### Choice

- Give options wherever possible
- Highlight need for flexibility during this time
- Acknowledge even small choices available
- Devote priority and resources to different opportunities to engage in sustaining practices



### Collaboration

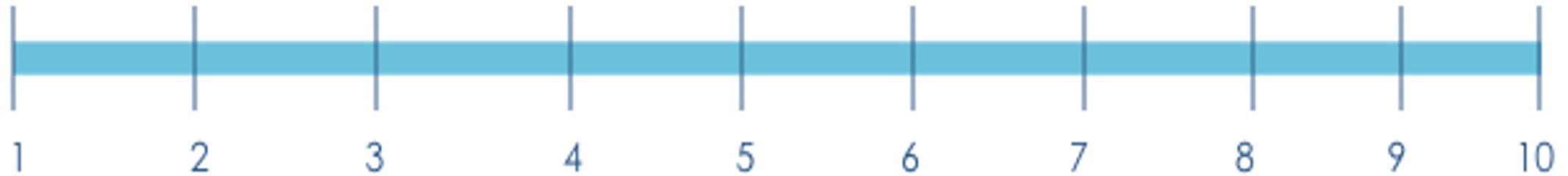
- Encourage & facilitate formal & informal opportunities for connection
- Seek ideas & feedback
- Treat others as experts of their own experiences
- Emphasize teamwork and alignment with broader health center mission/values
- Support staff to manage change



### Empowerment

- Notice what's working
- Foster a realistic sense of hope
- Recognize the strength it takes to be present
- Providing training & education about trauma & the impacts of the work
- Highlight for staff moments of success and values alignment of the important work done

# How well are you doing at practicing your ABCs?



*1 = not well*

*5 = half-way there*

*10 = very well*

**What will it take to get just one point higher on the scale?**







# Additional Resources on STS & VT

- Office for Victims of Crime – [The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#)
- Health Care Tool Box – [Self-Care and Secondary Trauma for Providers](#)
- Champions of Wellness – [The Relationship Between Secondary Trauma and Distress](#)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network – [Using the STS Core Competencies in Trauma-Informed Supervision](#)
- National Clearinghouse on Family Violence – [Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma](#)
- SAMHSA – [Coping with Stress and Compassion Fatigue](#)
- Secondary Traumatic Stress Innovations and Solution Center

