

Talking Points: Using the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit To Address Vicarious Trauma

Message:

We will use the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit to increase awareness about and comprehensively address vicarious trauma (VT) in _____.
(name of agency/organization)

What: Vicarious Trauma

- VT is the exposure to the trauma experiences of others.
- First responders are exposed to traumatic events every day, both directly and indirectly; these events have an impact on our physical and mental health.
- Research indicates that VT leads first responders to experience a general mistrust of the world and increased protectiveness of loved ones; it also puts them at risk for negative consequences, such as insomnia, depression, weight gain or loss, substance abuse, and problems with work, family relationships, and sexual intimacy.
- Practices that address the negative effects of VT may also be useful for addressing the effects of primary trauma.

Why: Address VT as an Organization

- Knowledge and understanding of the impact of VT on staff and organizations have increased significantly.
- Traumatic events and ongoing exposure to trauma can affect staff morale, teamwork, and internal and external relationships.
- The financial impact of not addressing VT is often significant.
- If left unaddressed, VT can result in increased staff turnover, time off, and substance abuse, and reduced levels of staff efficacy.

Why: Model Effective Leadership and Accountability

- We have an ethical duty to support our employees.
- Addressing VT will strengthen the workforce, improve services and relationships, and create a forward-thinking workplace culture.
- Accountability to our community increases when we address the needs of our employees.
- Addressing VT can reduce suicide, substance abuse, and stress in the family.
- Agencies and organizations must get ahead of the curve, be innovative, and use evidence-based strategies to address VT.

How: Steps We Will Take

- Use the Vicarious Trauma—Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG) to assess our current organizational strengths and needs.
- Use the resources in the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit to implement innovative, promising practices to address areas where we have gaps.
- Build, strengthen, and sustain strategic collaborations with community partners.
- Acknowledge VT openly to decrease stigma, encourage dialogue, and promote staff self-care and peer support.

For more information about vicarious trauma, visit <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>.

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