

# Professional Ethics, Vicarious Trauma and Self-Care for Advocates

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*Breathe*

# Professional Ethics

# *Learning Objectives*

- Define boundaries and ethics
- Explore the reason and purpose for boundaries in advocacy work
- Apply the ethical compass to our advocacy work

“The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings.”

~ Jane Addams

~ Albert Schweitzer

# Boundaries

*Boundaries ensure that the focus of the relationship is on the survivors healing.*



# Pro Tip

*Release your attachment to the survivor's choices.*



## Poll Question

What do we create  
boundaries  
around?



# What do we create boundaries around?

- Personal Relationships
- Money
- Communication
- Social Media
- Intimate Relationships
- Physical Interactions
- Alcohol (drugs)
- Confidentiality

# What are Ethics?

Ethics - a set of moral principles: a theory or system of moral values

# What are Ethics?

Ethics - a set of guidelines that help us make decisions

# Professional Ethics

Professional ethics are based on standardized principles across a field/company/nonprofit.

Sample Ethical Code: NASW

- *Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.*
- *Social workers challenge social injustice.*
- *Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person*
- *Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.*
- *Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.*
- *Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.*

# Advocate Ethics

- Focus on the victim's wishes
- Advocate for the victim
- May help victim with a variety of issues
- Honesty
- Must stay within the realm of their responsibilities  
*(Do not practice law or counseling)*
- Respect boundaries



# Why are Ethics Important?

Advocacy has its foundation in grassroots activism. A commitment to ethics help give it legitimacy.

- Safeguards the reputation of the work that you are doing
- Protects the public from exploitation and abuse
- Furthers the competent and responsible practice of your role



# Ethical Compass

Does this action upset our balance of power?

Poll Question

What is an  
appropriate tip?

# Vicarious Trauma



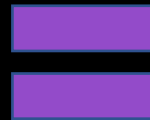
# *Learning Objectives*

- Understand the terminology of vicarious trauma
- Compare & contrast vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout
- Identify warning signs of vicarious trauma and burnout

**Vicarious:** Experiencing or taking on someone else's experiences through empathy



**Trauma:** A deeply distressing or disturbing event



**Vicarious Trauma:** The emotional residue of exposure that those have from interacting with people as they are hearing stories of trauma and become witnesses to the pain fear and terror that trauma survivors have endured

# *Who is at risk?*

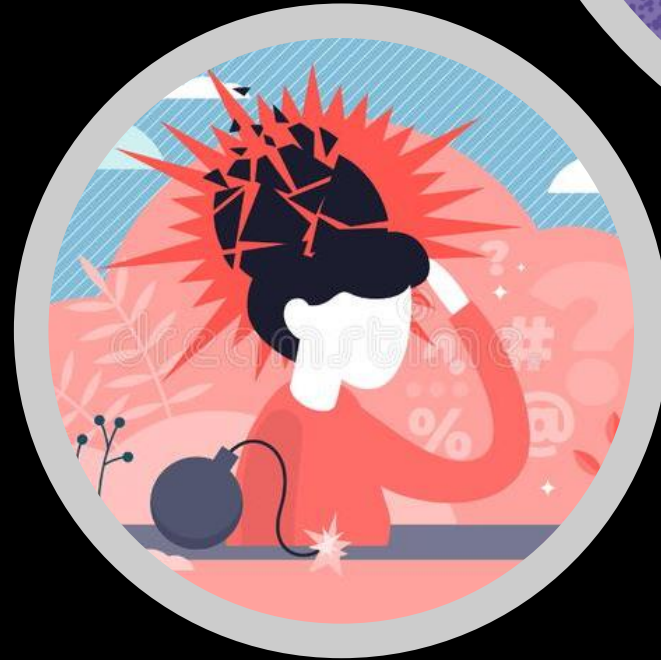
- Anyone who interacts with people experiencing trauma and have some knowledge of the traumatic event
- Includes
  - Therapists/Counselors
  - Social Workers
  - Advocates
  - Educators
  - Healthcare Professionals
  - Law Enforcement
  - Legal services staff
  - Caretakers
  - Anybody with indirect exposure to trauma

# Vicarious Trauma

## “The cost of caring”

Signs you may be experiencing Vicarious Trauma...

- Physical and psychological symptoms often associated with trauma, also known as Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Emotional attachment to a survivor’s decisions
- Overidentifying with a survivor’s story
- Difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries
- Overly preoccupied with thoughts of a survivor outside of the workplace



# *Social Workers*

- A study\* of social workers who worked directly with clients experiencing trauma found that:
  - 70.2% experienced one symptom in the last week
  - 55% met the criteria for one symptom cluster
  - 15.2% met the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD



# Compassion Fatigue

- Empathic strain and general exhaustion resulting from caring for people in distress
- Emotional detachment and numbness
- Social withdrawal
- Intrusive negative thoughts
- Secretive self medication



# *Long-term consequences*

Vicarious  
Trauma



Prolonged  
Stress



Burnout

# *Burnout*

**Burnout** is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.

Signs you may be experiencing burnout...

- Poor attitude towards co-workers, agency and clients
- Losing your “why”
- Continued exhaustion
- Decreased performance and productivity





# *Trauma informed workplace*

- Every person we encounter has likely experienced direct or indirect exposure to trauma within their lifetime.
- Trauma informed practice should not end with how clients are served
- Professionals in the victim-services field can also benefit from a trauma informed practice within their place of work.
- Agencies should prioritize policies to help prevent and address vicarious trauma and burnout in the workplace.



If your place of work is currently not using trauma-informed practice to address vicarious trauma and burnout...

**Advocate for it!**

# Self-Care

# *Learning Objectives*

- Explain self-care.
- Analyze why we don't practice self-care.
- Describe the consequences of poor self-care.
- Classify & evaluate self-care strategies.
- Create a personal self-care plan.

Photo Credit :<http://rebloggy.com/>

# *What is Self-Care?*

- ***Intentional*** activities and practices meant to reduce stress and maintain physical, psychological, and emotional health.



Photo Credit : <http://thebodyisnotanapology.com/>

# *Self Care v. Self Soothing*

- ***Self Soothing*** - Self soothing techniques help you calm and relax when you are feeling overwhelmed both physically and emotionally. They help you to “regulate” so that you can feel like yourself again. They get us through the present moment.

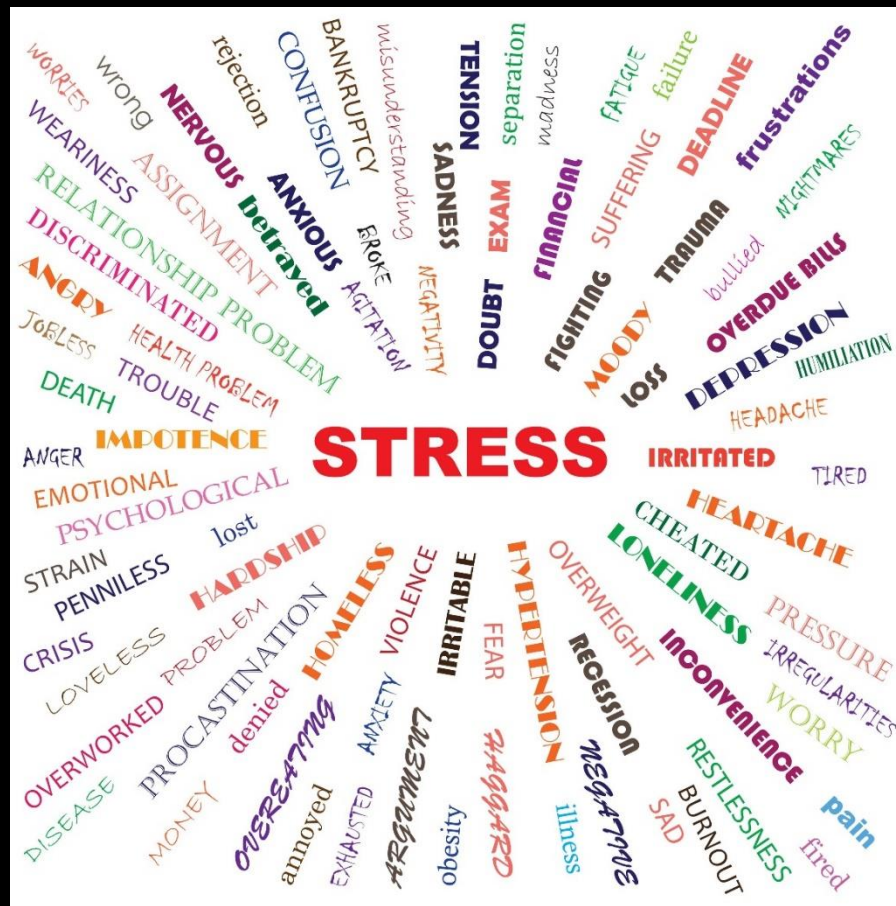


# *Why Don't You Practice Self-Care?*

- Feel selfish.
- Have too many other people to take care of.
- Not enough money.
- Too busy!

Photo Credit : <http://thebodyisnotanapology.com/>

# Consequences of Poor Self-Care





# *Personal Life*

- Damage to relationships
- Loss of self-esteem
- Isolation

# *Health*

- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Weigh loss or weigh gain
- Sleep Disturbances
- Weak Immune System

# *Workplace*

- Poor morale
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of concentration or focus
- Absenteeism
- Lateness

## Poll Question

What are some of your self-care and self soothing techniques?

# Self-Care Strategies

## The "Three R" Approach

<http://www.wheaton.edu/~media/Files/Centers-and-Institutes/HDI/DSEC-RecognizingPreventingBurnoutinYourself.pdf>

- **Recognition:** *Watch for the warning signs.*
- **Reversal:** *Undo the damage by managing stress and seeking support.*
- **Resilience:** *Build your resilience to stress by taking care of your physical and emotional health.*

# Self-Care Action Plan

Self-care used in everyday life is **maintenance** self-care.

Self-care used in crisis situations is **emergency** self-care.

Strategy to avoid burnout: implement maintenance self-care and plan for emergency self-care.

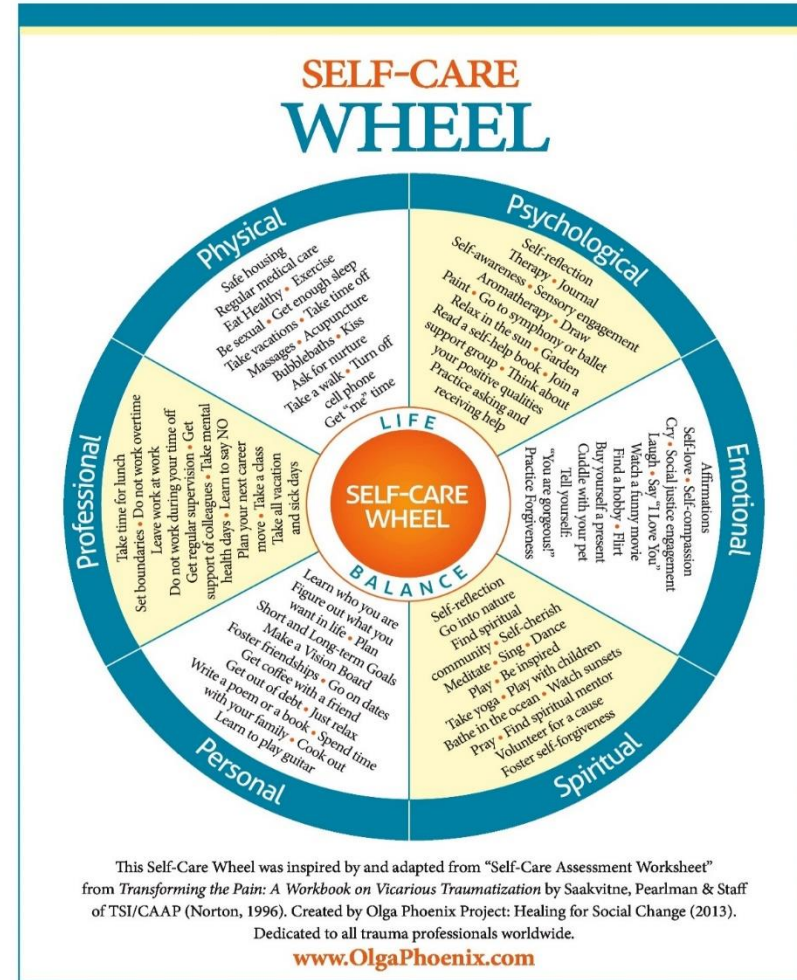
- 1. Problem:** Identify the problem - the thing that is largely contributing to your burnout or is manifesting as your burnout
- 2. Goal:** Set a goal to slow or halt burnout
- 3. Strategy:** Develop a strategy to meet the goal
- 4. Techniques:** Establish specific techniques; what works, and what doesn't.

# *Self-Care during a Pandemic*

- Be gentle with yourself, and with those around you
- Set personal boundaries regarding masks and social distancing and communicate them with others.
- Limit social media and COVID-19 coverage intake
- Set a routine to help build consistency
- Reach out to support networks
- Focus on controlling the things that you can
- Create healthy habits and stick to them
- Develop a self-care toolkit

# Self-Care Wheel

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Personal
- Professional





# *Physical*

- Eat a balanced diet
- Find an exercise you enjoy
- Get enough sleep
- Get regular medical care
- Learn to recognize your body's warning signs
- Take time for intimacy
- Pamper yourself

<https://pixabay.com/photos/game-remote-gamer-video-2294201/>



# *Psychological*

- Find creative outlets.
- Participate in therapy.
- Practice mindfulness and positive thinking.
- Take time for yourself.



# *Emotional*

- Spend time with friends, family, or pets.
- Find a hobby that makes you happy.
- Recognize your hard work.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Release your emotions: laugh, cry, etc.





# *Spiritual*

- Enjoy nature and natural beauty in life.
- Find a spiritual community.
- Meditate.
- Practice self-reflection.
- Volunteer for a cause.



# *Personal*

- Create a budget.
- Develop a skill.
- Get organized.
- Make time for building relationships.
- Set short- and long-term goals

Photo Credit : <http://inhabitat.com>

# *Professional*

- Chat with a coworker.
- Do breathing exercises.
- Go for a walk.
- Plan for professional development.
- Set reachable goals.
- Stretch at your desk.
- Take sick days and vacation days.
- Take time for lunch!





# *Caution!*

- Excessive caffeine intake
- Excessive intake of alcohol
- Overindulgence in unhealthy foods
- Use of illegal drugs
- Excuses for misbehavior

# Your Personal Self-Care Wheel



- What are you already doing?
- What could you do *in the next 7 days* to improve?

# Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault & the Sexual Assault Legal Institute

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