

SELF - CARE

FOR HUMANITARIAN HELPERS

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Objectives

- Define Vicarious Trauma and get buy-in for the importance of self-care!
- How trauma affects our brains/bodies
- Signs/symptoms of vicarious trauma
- How to **cope** during stressful situations and **transform** from them

Vicarious Trauma

- ❖ Process of change that happens over time because you care about other people who have been hurt and you feel committed and responsible to help them
- ❖ Over time this process can lead to changes in your physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being
- ❖ Change is cumulative and ongoing:
there are opportunities along the way to protect and care for yourself while doing the work

Workers/Volunteers

- ❖ We have many different roles: advocating for a cause, directly serving individuals and families, providing logistical support, etc
- ❖ All of us are working together to say *"I'm here to help. There is hope."*
- ❖ Our commitment to the cause or individuals allows us be good at helping AND puts us at high risk for feeling responsible for the outcome
- ❖ We often have high, almost unrealistic, expectations of ourselves and others we work with, which can lead to feeling burdened, overwhelmed, and even hopeless

Working with people who have arrived through the resettlement process opens your heart and mind to the worst parts of human experience: violence, war, deprivation, torture, etc



And it can be difficult to remember that there are examples of the best parts of human experiences: survival, resiliency, love

Five Basic Human Needs

Feel Close to Others

Feel of Value (Self-Worth)

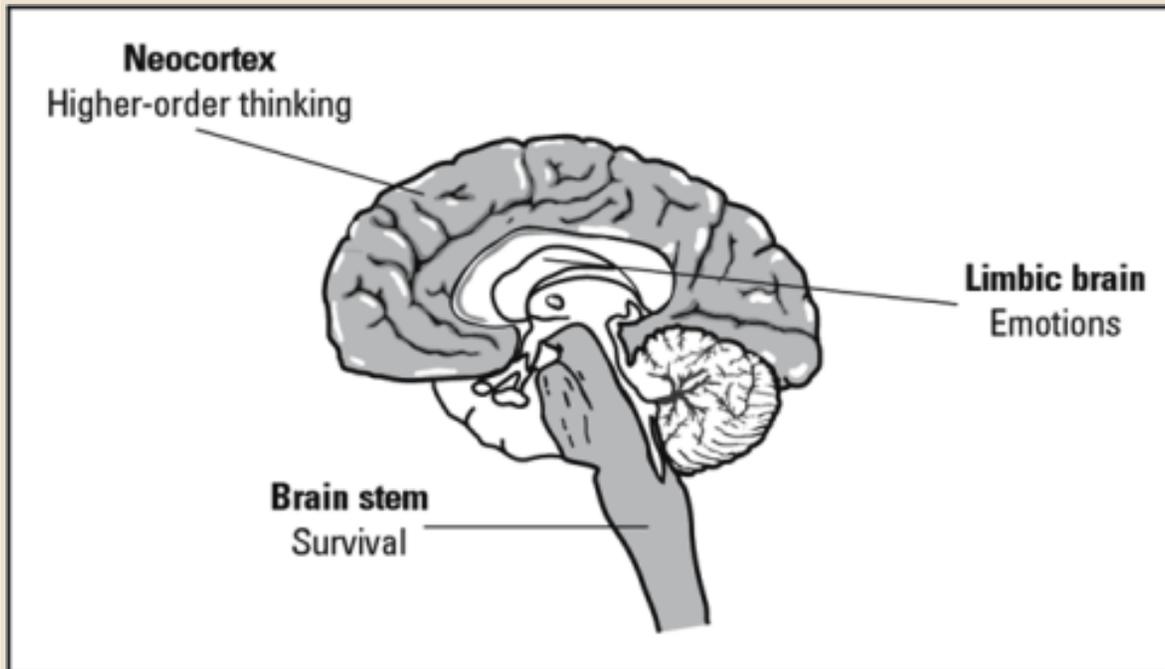
Feel Safe

Feel Some Control Over Our Lives

To Trust



Quick science lesson!



Neocortex (Primate Brain)

- Language
- Abstract Thought
- Imagination
- Logic
- Reason
- Analyze
- Decision Making

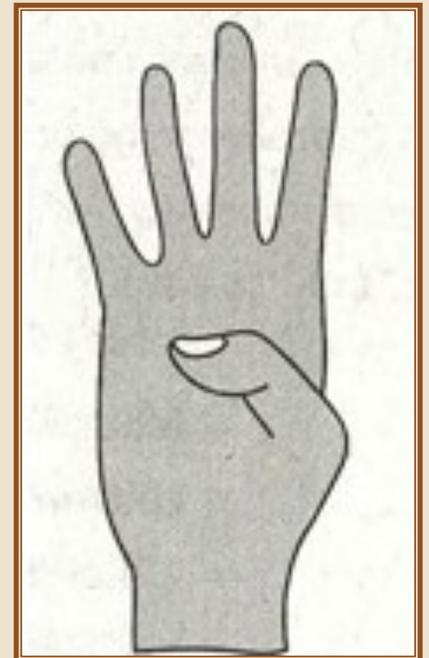
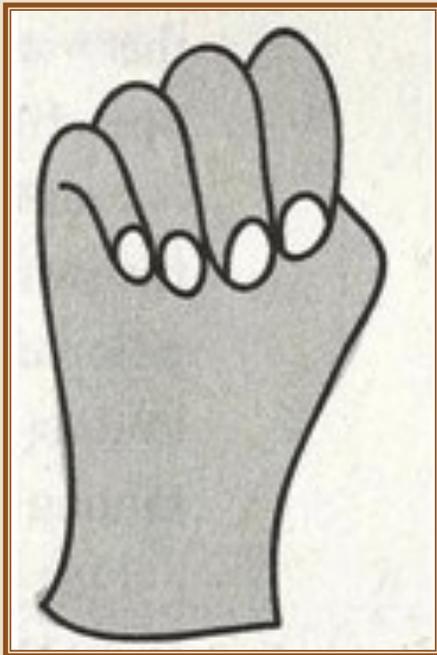
Limbic Brain (Mammalian Brain)

- Relationships
- Emotions
- Memories
- Dreams

Brain Stem (Reptilian Brain)

- Maintaining Homeostasis
- Instincts
- Reproductive Drive
- Survival Responses:
 - Fight
 - Flight
 - Freeze
 - Cling

Flipping Your Lid



Signs/Symptoms: Physical

- ***Difficulty sleeping: Not falling asleep OR waking often***
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Exhaustion
- Headaches and/or migraines
- ***Getting sick more often***
- Body pain or general aching
- Increased accidents (Clumsiness)

Signs/Symptoms: Behavior

- ***Free-floating anger or irritability***
- Diminished joy towards things
- Dropping out of events
- ***Rejecting physical/emotional closeness***
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Going out to avoid being alone
- Overwork
- Talking to self
- ***Impulsivity***

Signs/Symptoms: Interpersonal

- Conflict with others
- ***Blaming others***
- Impatience
- Avoidance
- ***Difficulty setting boundaries***
- Withdrawal
- Isolation
- ***Lack of collaboration***
- Problems in personal relationships
- Cynicism
- ***Polarized language***

Signs/Symptoms: Values/Beliefs

- ***Negative perception of world***
- Loss of interest
- Apathy
- ***Blaming others***
- Detachment
- Hopelessness
- Inability to maintain positive sense of self or connection to self
- Disruption in needs, beliefs, and relationships: trust, safety, control, esteem
- ***Hypersensitivity OR insensitivity to emotional material***
- ***Questioning your world view or spirituality***

Return to the Definition

- ❖ Process of change that happens over time because you care about other people who have been hurt and you feel committed and responsible to help them
 - ✧ What are some ways that you have changed overtime due to this work?
 - ✧ What sort of problems or people do you find it easiest to empathize with?
 - ✧ What are some ways that this work has influenced the way you see the world, yourself, and what matters to you
 - ✧ How does your sense of commitment to your work help you? How does it hurt you?

Now, for the question you all
came into the room with:

What do I do??

Two Levels of Dealing:

- ❖ COPE with vicarious trauma:

- ❖ Identify strategies that can both help prevent VT from becoming severe and help manage VT during times when it is more problematic

- ❖ Escape: physically or mentally

- ❖ Rest: have no goal or timeline

- ❖ Play: activities that makes you laugh or somehow lighten your spirits

- ❖ TRANSFORM vicarious trauma:

- ❖ Identifying ways to nurture a sense of meaning and hope

- ❖ What gives life and work meaning and what installs or renews hope?

Coping Strategies

□ *Escape*

- Read a book
- Watch a movie
- Play video games
- Take a day off of work
- _____
- _____

□ *Rest*

- Lie in the grass
- Sip a cup of tea/coffee
- Take a nap
- Get a massage
- _____
- _____

□ *Play*

- Share funny stories
- Play with a kid
- Be creative
- Be active
- _____
- _____



Transform Strategies

- Remind yourself of the value of humanitarian work
- Stay connected with family, friends, and colleagues
- Deliberately pay attention to “small things”
- Mark transitions:
 - ▣ Celebrate joys
 - ▣ Mourn losses
- Take time to reflect:
 - ▣ Read
 - ▣ Write
 - ▣ Pray
 - ▣ Meditate
- Challenge cynical beliefs—*even if they’re your own!*
- Undertake growth-promoting (learning) opportunities



Cultivating Organizational Culture of Self-Care

- Please divide into two groups:
 - ▣ Managers/supervisors
 - ▣ Direct Service Providers

- What would help the organization I'm a part of foster self-care?

Cultivating Organizational Culture of Self-Care

- ▣ Mental health check in is standard item for 1:1 supervisor / direct report check in meetings
- ▣ Positive outcomes standard part of group meetings
 - Thank yous / victories.... Or One good thing
- ▣ Task structure: volunteer support to staff
- ▣ Staff led FUN COMMITTEE
- ▣ Rotating mental health days
- ▣ Evaluation criterion include self care
- ▣ Benefits that include counseling support

VT Action Plan

1. On your own paper: List your important risk factors for VT, and any signs or symptoms of VT that you are currently experiencing

ON THE POST CARD:

1. What are things that you can do to cope better with VT symptoms?
2. What steps can you take to bring renewal, hope, positive transformation into your life?

TURN IN THE POSTCARD

1. We won't read them
2. We WILL mail them to you in a few weeks



Remember, in this work there are examples of the best parts of human experiences: survival, resiliency, love

Taking care of yourself allows you to find those aspects and share in them

Resources

- Jbittersweet 30 Day Meditation Challenge:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4fRZU5oEMI>
- Printable Mandalas to color:
<https://printmandala.com/>
- Coloring pages for adults:
<http://www.coloring-pages-adults.com/>
- Boise Community Ed Classes:
<http://www.boiselearns.org/wconnect/pub/>

Resources

- Pearlman, L. A., & McKay, L. (2008). *Understanding & Addressing Vicarious Trauma*. Retrieved <http://www.headington-institute.org/home>
- Rothschild, B., & Rand, M. L. (2006). *Help for the helper: The psychophysiology of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- *Vicarious Trauma* [Handout]. (n.d.). American Counseling Association.