

MODULE

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CARING FOR OURSELVES & EACH OTHER

This section is comprised of three lessons that focus on:

1. establishing group commitments that support a culture of care in the training environment, and
2. discussion of the integral nature of organizational support for staff wellbeing and strong individual self-care practices.

LESSON 1: Group Commitments

LESSON 2: Organizational Support for Self-Care

LESSON 3: Cultivating Resilience in Ourselves

- A Self Care Revolution
- Common Terms
- Ways We Can Care for Ourselves



OBJECTIVES

Trainees will be able to:

- Describe the group commitments that will maintain a safe and brave learning space that promotes learning and sharing
- Use group commitments to manage and learn from possible conflict or disagreement that may occur during the training



MATERIALS

- Training agenda [if you choose to create one]
- Flipchart paper or dry erase board and markers
- Pens/pencils and paper for each trainee
- Organizational statements/policies that demonstrate agency commitment to staff care
- Computer with screen and projector, internet, and audio
- Copies of article “Activist Burnout is Real” [link in lesson 3]
- Copies of “Filling Your Coping Bank” handout [at the end of this module]



POINTS TO CONSIDER

◦ A safe and brave space is critical to learning

Maintaining a safe environment for participants in training on sexual violence and advocacy is paramount to their learning experience and is a perfect example of what good advocacy looks like. Your group will agree upon commitments that will support a safe and brave learning environment. In a brave space, challenging issues may be discussed and we may experience strong feelings or reactions, but the group maintains care and respect for one another. By making these commitments, you and the group are honoring the participants’ self-defined needs, respecting their agency, and garnering their trust: all elements of advocacy.

- **Make space for trainees to show up authentically**

Within any group, there are always people who are more or less comfortable speaking up, especially with topics as complex as sexual violence and advocacy. There are many cultural dynamics that also contribute to a person's sense of comfort in speaking up. It is important that the group commitments honor the various ways that individuals are able to participate in the training.

- **Refer back to commitments throughout training**

Consider and practice ways to reinforce the group commitments throughout training (and beyond). Have the commitments posted through the entirety of the training.

- **Intervene when necessary**

Prepare to intervene, when needed, in a non-shaming way, such as:

- “I hear your perspective on that. Let’s see if there might be another way to look at it.”
- “I appreciate your contributions. Let me share our program’s perspective on that issue.”
- “I hear that you have some concerns/questions/thoughts that you want to bring — let’s set up some time for the two of us to talk in private.”

- **Welcome questions of clarification and vocalizing thoughts**

Participants may need help in asking for help as the training progresses. Suggest that they consider stating: “I need to vent/or express my emotions about this” or “I need help understanding what was being said or how that connects with sexual violence” or “I am not sure what I need. I just know that something is going on while we are covering this.” Trainers may want to write these phrases on flipchart paper to keep posted throughout the training sessions to encourage trainees to share what comes up for them throughout the training sessions.

LESSON 1: GROUP COMMITMENTS

Write the four basic group commitments (below) on a flipchart or dry erase board.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Creating a safe and brave learning environment is critical to learning and sexual violence and advocacy. Participants come to this topic with a range of feelings and expectations. It is important that group commitments are set to ensure an open and respectful training environment.

Share the four fundamental group commitments:

- Show up and engage fully
- Communicate respectfully, honestly, and from your own experience
- Respect the integrity and privacy of the group
- Take care of yourself

Discuss each of the four commitments and invite trainees to share what each commitment means to them. Trainees may share things like:

- **Show up and engage fully**
 - Come on time
 - Attend all sessions
 - Arrive ready to learn
 - Prepare to give ample time to this training
 - Listen actively
 - Participate in discussion
 - Prepare for the classes as required
 - Turn off electronics; only access during breaks if needed

- **Communicate respectfully, honestly, and from your own experience**

- Use I statements
- Speak from the heart
- Speak one at a time; let others finish their thoughts before you begin speaking
- Check in with yourself to make sure you are not monopolizing discussion or refusing to participate in discussions
- Be open to appropriate challenges
- Consider that your perspective may be limited to your cultural, ethnic, family, or community experience and it may not contain the entire truth
- If you have a question, voice it; others may have the same question
- Bring any concerns directly to the group or the trainer rather than engaging in unhelpful conversations outside of the group
- Take care to voice concerns in a constructive manner and not in blaming language
- Demonstrate that you understand the perspective of others even when you may disagree
- Share as much or as little as you would like to about yourself and lived experiences
- Don't make assumptions
- Don't expect people from marginalized groups to represent whole communities of people

- **Respect the integrity and privacy of the group**

- Remember that you are all studying a challenging and emotional topic; give others the space and support you would expect to receive
- Assume “best intentions” from the trainer and other group members but feel free to ask for clarification
- Keep group conversations that reveal personal information to yourself, don’t share those with family or friends
- Consider the pact the group has made to be in training together before you make statements about any member or the group as a whole to outsiders

- **Take care of yourself**

- Be clear with yourself and the trainer if the topic is causing you pain and stress
- Identify and use ways you can ease the burden of this information on yourself
- See to your physical and emotional needs as training sessions occur; if you need to exit the room or take a break, please do.
- Identify and inform your personal support system about the training you are doing and help them be ready to support you when and if you need support
- Ask for clarification if a point is unclear to you — you deserve to have questions or concerns answered or discussed

Discuss:

- *What additional commitments would trainees add?*
- *How does the group feel about these commitments?*
- *Is there anything else that would be helpful to create a safe and brave space for learning?*

LESSON 2: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR CARE AND RESILIENCE



OBJECTIVES

Trainees will be able to:

- Describe organizational supports for staff wellbeing
- Explain why organizational support for staff wellbeing is essential
- Explain key terms and concepts related to the impact of this work and self-care
- Identify resilience-building practices in trainee's own life



TIPS FOR PREPARATION

- Invite a staff member knowledgeable about the organization's commitment and practices to support staff wellbeing to be a guest facilitator for this session. Coordinate talking points and share logistics of the session.



POINTS TO CONSIDER

- **Acknowledge organizational support is an essential piece to staff self-care**

Organizations have a critical role to play to maintaining healthy, engaged, and supported staff. Through thoughtful policies and procedures and a visible commitment to staff wellbeing, organizations can send a strong message about how they value staff. Organizations can also reinforce that experiencing vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue isn't a personal failure, but rather something that can happen in helping professions that is the joint responsibility of organizations and individuals.

- **Demonstrate awareness of the cumulative impact of direct and vicarious trauma**

Many advocates have direct experiences with sexual violence. Many may also experience other forms of oppression related to identities they hold. Organizational policies and procedures should be attentive to the cumulative impact of various forms of trauma and reflect supportive resources and accommodations for staff.

- **Remember that discussion of self-care without attention to an organization's role is only half the conversation**

It's essential that advocates have awareness of their own personal practices support wellbeing and resilience. However, an agency has the responsibility to prioritize resources that demonstrate a commitment to staff wellness and reduce all organizational barriers for staff to practice self-care. Starting conversations about staff wellbeing and self-care with the organization's commitment to supporting staff demonstrates an organization that embodies core aspects of trauma-informed care and deeply values its staff.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

- **Invited Speaker: Our Organization's Commitment to Staff Wellness**

During this session, the invited speaker from the organization has an opportunity to discuss the impact of this work on staff, including both the positive and negative. Often the more difficult parts of the impact of this work are the focal point of conversations around self-care and advocacy work, however, it is also advantageous to discuss positive attributes of advocacy, as there are many. Examples include: belonging to a tight-knit community, building meaningful relationships with colleagues, feeling like one is making a difference, and healing power of activism.

The speaker should convey agency resources, policies, and structures that proactively support staff wellbeing as well as those that are responsive to staff in need. Written copies of relevant policies should also be provided to trainees. Encourage the speaker to cover the following, reflective of agency policies and relevance for this particular group of trainees.

- Organizational commitment to trauma-informed care, including the care for staff and volunteers
- Organizational statement/values that reflect commitment
- Supportive supervision practices for staff and volunteers*
- Debriefing opportunities for staff and volunteers*
- Resources available for staff and volunteers*
- Cross-training available for staff and volunteers*
- Leave time, flexible scheduling, or other time-related benefits*
- Grievance procedures for staff and volunteers*

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- Formal and informal opportunities to be in community with staff and volunteers [potlucks, staff dinners, celebrations, and other practices and rituals that build support and camaraderie]*
- Other perks or benefits of being a staff or volunteer [gym memberships, store discounts, free meals, etc.]*
- Support available for staff and volunteers who are survivors*
- Professional development and other continued learning opportunities for staff and volunteers*

**Offer and customize as relevant. Often policies may be different based on staff or volunteer status. It is important this section is tailored to the trainee cohort and that trainees who are or go on to be employed by the agency be made aware that there will also be additional agency orientation and related information provided.*

The speaker should answer any questions that trainees have and invite trainees to share any examples of other ways that organizations have worked to support staff wellbeing that trainees are aware of.

LESSON 3: CULTIVATING RESILIENCE IN OURSELVES



TIPS FOR PREPARATION

- A short TED Talk is recommended for viewing during part one of this session. Set up technology in advance and test out the clip to make sure it runs smoothly. This film is about 12 minutes long and requires video and audio.

Drowning in Empathy: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma

by Amy Cunningham

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=Zsaorjlo1Yc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsaorjlo1Yc)



- A short article is recommended reading during part three of this session. Print it out and have it available for trainees.

Activist Burnout is Real – And You Probably Need to Read These 4 Ways to Manage It

by Aliyah Khan

[https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/
05/dealing-with-activist-burnout/](https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/05/dealing-with-activist-burnout/)

Activist Burnout Is Real – And You Probably Need to Read These 4 Ways to Manage It

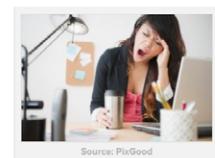
May 27, 2015 by Aliya Khan

I had a conversation the other day with a friend who told me that all she wanted was a small house by the beach, a job she loved, and a sense of peace.

But that sense of peacefulness, despite how ideal it sounds, sometimes feels out of reach for activists.

I, for one, am in a constant state of chaos.

I'm disheartened at the response of sexual assault on campus. I'm angry that people are being



Source: PixGood



POINTS TO CONSIDER

- **Normalize vicarious trauma and burnout and encourage trainees to continually check in with themselves.**

Providing advocacy for survivors of sexual violence can be a rewarding and powerful experience. It can also be frustrating, sad, exhausting, and draining. One of an advocate's most important tasks is to check in with themselves for signs of vicarious trauma or burnout and to not ignore them. Survivors of sexual violence deserve the best support we can give and that is not possible when we as advocates are stretched to the limit and unable to maintain our best attitudes and wisdom. When doing physical exercise or working out we are often warned by trainers that as we get fatigued, our good form suffers and we risk hurting ourselves. So, we make adjustments for our health and safety. That is a good metaphor for protecting our physical and emotional safety while doing this work. Knowing that we are stretched too thinly is one step. Knowing what to do to prevent that or to respond if that happens is the next important point.

- **Invite seasoned advocates to participate in the conversation.**

This session is a great opportunity for seasoned advocates to share their experiences with burnout, vicarious trauma, and how they have figured out how to best take care of themselves. Hearing from those who have been engaged in advocacy work over time can provide trainees greater connection with the organization, insight into the experiences of seasoned advocates, and can provide seasoned advocates with an opportunity to mentor and share wisdom.

“Our capacity for resilience can be cultivated. Like any other way of being, we can embody resilience more deeply, by making it a conscious embodied practice, rather than waiting for it to happen to us.” — Staci Haines [Haines, 2015, para. 4]

SELF CARE AND VICARIOUS TRAUMA

This session is a natural transition from the previous session about the organization's commitment to supporting staff wellness. During this session, the facilitator will explore the topic of self care and vicarious trauma with trainees and discuss its importance in the context of advocacy work.

Begin by showing this short TED Talk. Reassure trainees that there may be unfamiliar terms heard and that these will be defined after watching the clip.

- **Amy Cunningham – Drowning in Empathy: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsaorjlo1Yc>

GROUP DISCUSSION: POST-CLIP REFLECTION

- *What are you taking from the TED Talk?*
- *What were themes?*
- *What resonated?*
- *What didn't?*

Themes of Clip

- Advocates, along with other caregivers and emergency responders are empathetic individuals who are at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.
- Vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue can be identified and interrupted. Growth and healing are possible.
- It is important for us to care for ourselves so that we can continue to care for other people.

COMMON TERMS

It can be helpful to discuss common terms used in the context of self-care and advocacy work so that trainees have shared language to talk about these experiences. Consider writing these definitions on a flipchart, dry erase board, or prepare them on a handout for trainees.

Self-care

Self-care is a sustained and intentional practice in one's life to preserve wellness and maintain wholeness.

Vicarious Trauma

"Vicarious trauma is a process of change that unfolds over time. It is not just your responses to one person, one story, or one situation. It is the cumulative effect of contact with ... people who are struggling" (Pearlman & McKay, 2008, p. 7). Vicarious trauma can manifest in difficulties related to one's holistic wellbeing [it affects our hearts, bodies, and minds].

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to identify with another person, to understand and feel another person's pain and joy. Empathy doesn't mean feeling exactly what someone else is feeling. Everyone is unique. Everyone has their own personal history, personality, and life circumstances. You cannot ever feel exactly what someone else is feeling. But to a certain extent [and more effectively in some cases than others], when you care, you can relate to other people's experiences, reactions, and feelings (Pearlman & McKay, 2008).

Burnout

The experience of long-term exhaustion and diminished interest in one's work

Resilience

Resilience in the context of advocacy work is the capacity to sustain strength, hope, and purpose over the long-term, while extending love and care to those we serve. It allows us to honor and attend to our own concerns and needs, while simultaneously connecting to, and being present with, the concerns of others (Seaborne, n.d.). This is sometimes also known as compassion resilience or vicarious resilience.

Compassion Fatigue

"Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper." [Dr. Charles Figley, Professor, Paul Henry Kurzweg Distinguished Chair, Director, Tulane Traumatology Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA]

**GROUP DISCUSSION:
EXPLORE HOW THESE TERMS RESONATE WITH TRAINEES**

- Are trainees familiar with these terms?
- Is anyone comfortable sharing about experience with vicarious trauma or burnout?
- Is anyone interested in sharing about their experience with compassion resilience?

WAYS WE CAN CARE FOR OURSELVES

ARTICLE & REFLECTION

This third and final part of this section focuses on inviting trainees to think about their own self-care practices to build resilience and effectively notice and respond to vicarious trauma and burnout.

Provide trainees with a copy of “Activism Burnout is Real...” article to read individually.

- **Activist Burnout is Real –
And You Probably Need to Read These 4 Ways
to Manage It by Aliyah Khan**

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/05/dealing-with-activist-burnout/>

GROUP DISCUSSION: DEBRIEF THE ARTICLE

Consider using the following questions:

- How well do you know your own signs of burnout or vicarious trauma?
- What has helped bring awareness of signs in the past?
- What strategies can you put in place to practice early awareness?

FILL YOUR COPING BANK

As mentioned in the article, awareness of practices that help us to cope and build resilience is key to managing the impact of this work. Using the “Coping Bank” handout, invite trainees to think of some of their own resilience-building strategies. Everyone’s strategies are likely to be different; it helps if trainees get specific about what works them individually.

INDIVIDUAL & PARTNER REFLECTION

Provide trainees ten minutes to reflect on their own methods for building resilience, using the handout or other resources of your choosing. After individual reflection is complete, invite trainees to spend a few minutes talking with a partner about their resilience-building strategies. Trainees may consider reflecting with a partner on the following questions:

- *What are any rituals or practices you have to build resilience?*
- *Is there anything new you're interested in integrating into your practices?*
- *What helps you feel supported to practice self-care?*

GROUP DISCUSSION: SHARING ABOUT RESILIENCE-BUILDING STRATEGIES

Invite trainees to share any bits of reflection or wisdom that arose from individual reflection or partner discussions.

References

Haines, S. K. [2015, August 12].*Resilience* [Blog post]. Strozzi Institute.
<https://strozziinstitute.com/resilience/>

Pearlman, L. A., & McKay, L. [2008]. *Understanding & addressing vicarious trauma* [Module four]. Headington Institute. https://headington-institute.org/files/vtmoduletemplate2_ready_v2_85791.pdf

Seaborne, K.[n.d.].*What is compassion resiliency* [Blog post]?
<http://kirstieseaborne.com/what-is-compassion-resiliency/>

Coping Bank

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING
RESILIENCE



What are rituals or practices that support your self-care and resilience? Try to be specific.

**Resilience can be
built by taking care
of our whole selves**

Connection
Nourishment
Pleasure
Movement
Relaxation
Community
Reflection
Learning
Rest

