

# Managing Vulnerability: Integrating Ethical Principles in Trauma Treatment

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## Disclaimer

The content provided in the following presentation is to be used for educational purposes only and should not be considered as an alternative to legal advice. It is advised that viewers and participants of this presentation seek legal counsel for any specific matter that is associated with your respective ethical concern and scope of practice.

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## Trauma Work is...



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Trauma Work is...

- Stressful
- Demanding
- Difficult
- Complex

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Inherent Risks in Trauma Tx



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Inherent Risks in Trauma Tx

- Limited trauma curriculum in graduate school programs
- Risk of retraumatization of the client
- Vicarious traumatization of the therapist

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### Client Risk Factors



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### Client Risk Factors

- Interpreting as to whether or not a client (or parents) have fully given informed consent
- Revisiting and processing of traumatic memories

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### Therapist risk

- Competence- pace & direction as it relates to delivery of interventions (particularly from novice therapists)
- Attitude- complacency; distracted, minimizing the impact of the traumatic experience ("I've heard it all," "Everyone is the same.")
- Overlooking contextual events and triggers associated with the client (homicidal; suicidal ideation)

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## Therapist Negligence

- Client abandonment
- Clients are more at risk for crisis, developing alcohol and drug addiction, and presenting violence toward self and others
- Litigation in the event of suicide/homicide
- Licensure/certification board investigation

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## Informed Consent



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## Informed Consent

Counselors have an obligation to review in writing and verbally with clients the rights and responsibilities of both counselors and clients. Informed consent is an ongoing part of the counseling process, and counselors appropriately document discussions of informed consent throughout the counseling relationship.

ACA, 2014, p. 4

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### Informed Consent: Contents

- Purpose, goals, techniques, procedures, limitations, potential risks, and benefits of the service...
- Counselor qualifications
- Credentials
- Relevant experience
- Approach to counseling

ACA, 2014, p. 4

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### Informed Consent: Contents

- Continuation of services upon the incapacitation or death of the counselor
- The role of technology
- Fees & billing
- Crisis support
- Confidentiality (including limits of)
- Rights & responsibilities of the counselor and client

ACA, 2014, p. 4

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### Vicarious Trauma

COUNSELORS AND OTHER PRACTITIONERS

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### Vicarious Trauma

- Vicarious Trauma- refers to the cumulative effects on a counselor due to engaging in therapeutic relationships with trauma victims.

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### Vicarious Trauma

- Intrusive thoughts and imagery associated with the client's story
- Generalized manifestations may include suspiciousness, issues with intimacy, safety concerns, cynicism, irritability, anxiety, depression and pessimism
- Somatic complaints- headaches, sweating, fatigue and irregular heartbeat

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### Risk Factors for vicarious trauma

- The therapist's personal experiences
- The amount of exposure to traumatic material
- Empathic involvement???
- Blurred boundaries between client and therapist

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## Vicarious Trauma: Conceptualized

The clarity of professional boundaries may be blurred as the therapist's sense of responsibility becomes heightened due to the vulnerable state of the client and the client's admirable emotional risk-taking in engaging in the therapeutic process.

-Mallouf, 2013, p. 52

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## Therapist motivations for blurred boundaries

- Desire to be the "rescuer"
- Desire to be needed
- Other unaddressed/unresolved emotional needs of the therapist

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## Cultural Factors to consider

- Some cultures prohibit the acknowledgement and/or discussion of trauma related concerns.
- Encourage autonomy, fostering the right to control the direction of one's life.

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### Vicarious Trauma Case

Ashley is a 33 year old counselor working at an adolescent mental health treatment facility. Ashley has been employed for 6 years and has become the team leader of the female co-occurring unit. Most of the adolescents of Ashley's unit are teenage sexual trauma survivors that use alcohol, and other illicit substances as a form of coping. Needless to say, many of these presenting issues are not foreign to Ashley. Ashley's latest case however consists of her treating 14 year old Emily.

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### Vicarious Trauma Case cont.

Emily has been removed from her home by DHS/CPS because of repeated sexual abuse over a 5 year period by her father and other family members. Emily who has been blind since birth, uses other sensory descriptors during counseling which triggers Ashley's own detailed perception of the abuse Emily endured and survived.

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### Vicarious Trauma Case cont.

More recently, Ashley has become aware of her general feelings of distrust of men, particularly those men who have any association with her 2 children. Ashley presents repeated intrusive and graphic thoughts of her daughter as being the girl sexually abused in Emily's narrative. Ashley also has become overly protective of her daughter to the point where her daughter feels that Ashley is smothering and controlling. Ashley has also presented intimacy issues with her husband as she has struggled to engage with him emotionally or sexually.

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### Vicarious Trauma Case

What are the ethical and/or clinical concerns presented with this staff member?

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### Comparison to Secondary Trauma

#### Secondary

- \*Reaction based on the exposure to traumatic material
- \*Not related to the counselor's life experiences
- \*Similar to PTSD symptoms (intrusive recollections, dreams, hypervigilance, etc. but not as generalized).

#### Vicarious

- \*Reaction based on the exposure to traumatic material
- \*Not related to the counselor's life experiences
- \*Transformation of the counselor's psychological functioning, including a shift in schematic activity (e.g. views of self, others, & world (Trippany, White-Kress, & Wilcoxon, 2004)

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### Burnout & Counselor Self Care



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## Burnout

- Burnout-Refers to the a generalized state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that counselors experience with long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.
- The general psychological stress of working with difficult to treat clients.

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## Counselor Self Care



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## Balance in Session



Create a safe place for both the client & counselor.

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## Balance in Session

"The key to self care is finding balance between being vulnerable so that the clinician can be present and available to client's intense pain and taking reasonable steps toward protecting his/her own sense of integrity in the face of what can be an assault on that integrity, sense of faith, and worldview" (Burke et al., 2006, p. 290).

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## Personal Self Care Plan

- \*Take breaks during the workday
- \*Listening to music
- \*Clinical supervision and/or psychotherapy
- \*Counselors in recovery: identify personal vulnerabilities for intrusive memories and/or anxiety
- \*Obtain a referral for individual counseling
- \*Spiritual Self Care- (e.g., meditation, mindfulness practices, finding a spiritual community)
- \*Get plenty of sleep
- \*Exercising
- \*Maintain a balanced diet
- \*Refrain from alcohol and/or drugs

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## Counselor Self Care

Taking good care of you means the people in your life will receive the best of you rather than what's left of you.

-Carl Bryan

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### Questions or Comments?

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