

SUPERVISORY GUIDE
**Creating a Trauma-Informed
and Disability Inclusive Workplace**
PART 2: ONBOARDING NEW STAFF

Created by MASS Collaboration:
Movement for Access, Safety, and Survivors



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To request this manual in alternate formats, contact disability@barcc.org.

About the MASS Collaboration (Movement for Access, Safety and Survivors)

The MASS Collaboration is a collaboration between:

- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
- Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL)
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
- MBTA Transit Police

The goal of our collaboration is to create lasting systemic change within and between our organizations. Our improvements will help survivors/victims of sexual violence with disabilities in the Boston area receive accessible, safe and empowering responses and services that promote healing and justice, as they define it for themselves.

We are committed to understanding the barriers that survivors/victims with disabilities experience. We are also committed to building on our existing strengths to address gaps and improve our responses and services.

Vision Statement

The MASS Collaboration envisions Boston as a city in which the culture within and between victim services, criminal justice, transportation, and disability advocacy and service systems promote the healing, empowerment, and safety of people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence. Survivors/victims with disabilities will receive equal, responsive, safe, barrier-free services from compassionate professionals, staff, and volunteers who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with supporting survivors/victims with disabilities.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to change the culture within and between all collaborating organizations to enhance services to promote healing, empowerment and safety for people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence.

We will accomplish this by incorporating the voices of survivors/victims with disabilities to:

- Build formal and informal connections between our organizations;
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of professionals, staff, and volunteers;
- Enhance and develop policies and protocols based on best practices and current research about serving survivors/victims with disabilities to increase access to safe, responsive services.

Intro to this Guidance Document

Our collaboration has been working since 2011 to make changes in our organizations to improve response and services for survivors with disabilities. As we've explored how to create sustainable change within our organizations, we've identified that supervisors play a critical role in ongoing support of staff who may be working with survivors with disabilities. Additionally, we talked about the importance of inclusion of survivors with disabilities in this work, including as staff at our agencies.

BARCC and BCIL discussed how rape crisis centers and independent living centers can create workplaces that are welcoming to staff who identify as survivors with disabilities and also who work with survivors with disabilities. Some of the major themes raised by BARCC and BCIL in the needs assessment and throughout the course of our work include:

- Support with the emotional impact of work including vicarious trauma
- Staff safety and assistance with navigating boundaries
- Support with problem-solving with client/consumer work
- Inclusion of employees with disabilities in victim-services

We also identified that creating a workplace that is inclusive of survivors with disabilities results in a workplace that is more inclusive of all staff who bring with them different learning, communication, and work styles. This guidance document on Creating a Trauma-Informed and Disability- Inclusive Workplace was written from those discussions.

This document includes 4 manuals:

- Part 1: Hiring
- Part 2: On-boarding
- Part 3: Supervision
- Part 4: Boundaries and Safety

The goal of this guidance document is to provide information for how agencies, and in particular executive leadership, human resources and supervisors can create a disability-inclusive and trauma-informed workplace. It is best used along with in-person, interactive training to allow executive leadership, human resources, and supervisors the opportunity to practice skills and discuss challenges and ideas with each other. In addition, information in this guidance document can be useful for advocates assisting survivors with disabilities with employment issues.

***Please note that this document is not meant to provide legal guidance or advice.**

Part 2: On-Boarding

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Learning Objectives

By the end of using this manual and subsequent training HR staff and supervisors will be able to:

- Define ableism and identify how ableism presents in the workplace
- Identify several examples of reasonable accommodation
- Create a safe space for staff to feel comfortable requesting accommodations
- Document accommodation requests
- Create a safe space for staff to discuss the impact of work, including vicarious trauma
- Support staff with identifying the work environment that is most likely to lead to staff success
- Support staff with establishing a workplace self-care plan to prevent burnout and vicarious trauma

During the initial period of employment Human Resources staff and supervisors play an important role in setting up new employees for success at the agency. This is a key time to communicate how your agency is inclusive of survivors with disabilities and supports staff who are doing work that may have an emotional impact on them. Each agency should set up protocols to determine which tasks are completed by HR and which tasks are completed by supervisors. The important thing is that every employee gets the same information.

Two big concerns that survivors with disabilities may have are ableism in the workplace and whether a workplace is trauma-informed, including being vicarious trauma-informed.

Ableism in the Workplace

Ableism may not always be obvious. **Because we live in an ableist society, unconscious bias can impact workplace norms and values.**

One way this can show up is valuing certain skills or attributes over others. For example, workplaces may value employees who can produce the most, the most quickly, who have strong interpersonal skills, who work a lot of over time or take little sick and vacation time, just to name a few examples. Conversely, unconscious bias can result in employers having low expectations for the ability of people with disabilities and not providing feedback and opportunities for growth. A common bias is to hire people with disabilities in entry level jobs, but not promote or hire people with disabilities in management or other leadership roles. It is important for everyone in the organization, including supervisors to examine potential biases.

Because of ableism people with disabilities may be concerned with requesting accommodations or letting their employer know that they have a disability. They may fear discrimination or that other employees will view accommodations as favoritism or an excuse. People with invisible disabilities in particular may have concerns that their colleagues will view them as lazy because they don't "look like someone with a disability." Also, people with disabilities that make it harder to read social cues may be perceived as being rude. Because of these stereotypes and assumptions of what disability looks like, people with "invisible disabilities" such as learning, mental health disabilities, or chronic illness can often be misunderstood, overlooked, and not accommodated.

Read these think-pieces written by employees with disabilities about navigating workplace environments:

- I struggled with mental health issues at work – here’s how I’d support colleagues myself
<http://metro.co.uk/2017/10/10/i-struggled-with-mental-health-issues-at-work-heres-how-id-support-colleagues-myself-6969710/>
- How does mental illness affect my work performance?
<https://cpr.bu.edu/resources/reasonable-accommodations/jobschool/how-does-mental-illness-affect-my-work-performance/>
- 5 Things I Look for in an Employer as a Person with Chronic Illnesses
<https://themighty.com/2016/04/chronic-illness-and-employment-what-i-look-for-in-an-employer/>
- What it's like having dyslexia in the workplace - and how you can help
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/work/what-its-like-having-dyslexia-in-the-workplace---and-how-you-can/>
- 7 Things the Autistic Person in Your Workplace Needs from You
<https://medium.com/@AshleaMcKay/7-things-the-autistic-person-in-your-workplace-needs-from-you-d99d351b543f>

It is important to note that ableism, as all oppressions, impacts all people. It may impact survivors who have similar concerns about disclosing needs they might have such as taking work time for counseling or medical appointments. Survivors may also be concerned that if they take breaks due to concentration challenges or triggers, that they may be viewed as inefficient or lazy. Even disclosing survivor history to employers in order to gain appropriate accommodations can be difficult because of stigmas placed on survivorship, such as not being ‘well’ or ‘healed’ enough, etc. Ableism may impact staff generally who may be concerned that if they disclose vicarious trauma or receive support for vicarious trauma they will be seen as not capable.

 **Reflect**

What is one way that ableism shows up in your workplace?
How can you address this in your workplace?

Impact of our Work

Working at nonprofits that support people who have experienced trauma and oppression and advocate for societal and systems change is deeply meaningful and draws people who care deeply and are mission driven. This work exposes staff to the traumatic experiences of the people they serve, including trauma caused by oppression, such as ableism. Staff also confront the reality of inadequate resources and inequitable systems. Regardless of the role of staff this exposure can have an effect. Different impacts on staff include burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma.

Burnout

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress continues, you begin to lose the interest and motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is physical and emotional exhaustion and numbness that affects people in the “caring” professions. In the literature, sometimes compassion fatigue is differentiated from vicarious trauma and sometimes it is described as another term for vicarious trauma.

Vicarious Trauma or Secondary Trauma

Vicarious trauma is a range of reactions and changes in worldview that is caused by exposure to other people’s traumatic experiences.

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Space

Universal Design

It is important for leadership in agencies to examine how ableism may be embedded into organizational structures and practices and work towards a universally accessible and vicarious trauma-informed workplace. A universally accessible and vicarious trauma-informed workplace includes:

- Universally accessible office space, including being clear that your agency is welcoming to service animals.
- Recognizing and valuing a range of skills and abilities that include efficiency, creativity, critical thinking, big-concept thinking, detail-oriented skills, relational skills etc.
- Being open to different learning, communication, work styles, and pace.
- Focusing on outcomes and giving flexibility for how outcomes are reached.
- Offering flexible work options such as flexible scheduling and remote work options such as working from home or an alternative location (e.g. coffee shop) when it is appropriate for the job.
- Managing staff workload and encouraging use of vacation time, sick time, and comp time.
- Encouraging a culture of self-care both at work and in staff personal life.
- Creating a culture of interdependence which recognizes that everyone in the workplace needs some support from someone else. For example, staff might ask a colleague a question around formatting a PowerPoint, ask for help carrying a large package, or want help from a colleague with problem-solving or chatting about a hard day. Some staff may need assistance with aspects of personal care, including support putting on a coat, assistance with eating a snack, or emergency assistance with toileting. During on-boarding agencies should be upfront about expectations around their culture of support, the types of assistance that staff might request and any related policies.

For more information for supervisors about how to balance a culture of support with boundaries around personal care go to **Part 4: Boundaries and Safety**.

These aspects of a universally accessible and vicarious trauma informed workplace create an environment that offers opportunities for people of all abilities and supports staff who may be impacted by their work.



What are the ways my organization is universally accessible and vicarious trauma informed?

What can my organization do to improve our universal design (being accessible and vicarious trauma informed)?

When on-boarding new staff talk about the ways in which your organization strives towards universal design.

Pro-Actively Talk about Accommodations and Vicarious Trauma

Talking to all staff about accommodations is beneficial to everyone because although some staff do not need accommodations as required by the ADA, all staff will likely have supervisory approaches or work adjustments that will help them perform at their best. Similarly, talk to all staff about the impact of their work. Working in victim services, disability services or other social service or advocacy organization can result in burnout, compassion fatigue, and/or vicarious trauma. Let new staff know that your agency recognizes this and provides support to staff to prevent and address these work risks. By talking openly about the different ways your agency supports staff, you are communicating to all staff, including survivors with disabilities, that you welcome conversation about these topics.

Tools to Help Start the Conversation

If you don't usually talk to all staff about accommodations and/or vicarious trauma now is a good time to start with new and current staff. It can be helpful to talk about these topics in both HR orientations and initial supervision sessions, so that staff hear the same messages more than once.

“Let the person with the disability lead the ‘disability’ conversation.”

–Person with Disability

To help with these conversations, we've created templates of handouts that you can adapt and give to all staff.

[They can be found in the appendix.](#)

- Template handout to adapt and give to staff about accommodations at your agency. (pp 27-28)
- Template accommodation request form -adapted from BCIL's form. (pp 29-31)
- Template handout to adapt and give to staff introducing the topic of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma and letting staff know that supervision is an appropriate place to get support. (pp32-33)
- Self-assessment for burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma can be found here <http://www.proqol.org/>. You can offer to review findings with your supervisee if they find it helpful, or it can be a resource they use independently.
- Online resources for vicarious trauma. (p.34)

In addition, the following are some tools that supervisors can use to work with supervisees to create a work environment that helps them do their best work. These conversations may bring up specific accommodation needs. The key to creating a welcoming environment is to present these conversations as a team effort that you and your supervisee will navigate together. This communicates that you value your employees' perspectives.

- [This promoting staff success questionnaire found on p. 35 should be discussed by a supervisor and supervisee together,](#) so that you can learn how to best support your supervisee's work, learning and communication styles. It is important to use this with all staff; and not just staff with known disabilities. This questionnaire allows all staff to bring up a range of needs which may also include an accommodation request.

“I have Asperger’s and sometimes miss social cues. It helps me if you are direct with me.”

–Manager

While discussing accommodation needs of supervisees, supervisors should also consider whether to share needs that they might have. For example, “It helps me remember to have information in writing and broken down into bullet points. In supervision, it’s helpful if we can write down what we discuss.” or “I use a screen reader, so you need to send me information electronically in advance rather than through a paper handout.” This can model that requesting accommodations or sharing learning/work style needs is accepted in the agency.

- [This self-care tool on pp. 38-40 can be used by supervisors to help supervisees.](#)
 - Create plans for self-care to prevent burnout or vicarious trauma when they start, and
 - To set a welcoming tone for talking about self-care when experiencing high stress, burnout or vicarious trauma.

This is a tool that supervisors should continue to re-visit with supervisees. Remember that while staff providing direct services are the most likely to hear stories of trauma from clients/consumers, any staff can be impacted. For example, development staff may hear stories about trauma and oppression from donors or as they put together compelling stories for a grant or donor newsletter. It’s important to create space to talk about vicarious trauma for all staff.

Even with these tools it may take time for staff to share a need for accommodations. We’ll talk more in **Part 3: Supervision** about having on-going conversations and checking-in about accommodation needs.

 **Reflect**

What might you say to introduce the topics of accommodations and impact of our work to your supervisee?

What are some ways you could check in with your supervisee if you suspect they may be approaching burn-out?

Providing Accommodations

Accommodations could be looked at broadly as any adjustment to support employees' success. Each employee brings with them unique skills, learning styles, and work styles. Everyone has different needs in the workplace to work at their best. Every employee may have periods in their life where they may need accommodations (e.g. changes in work schedule to manage childcare schedule, external stressors requiring workload adjustments).

While agencies should look at accommodations generally, it is important to know that agencies have legal responsibilities to provide reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“If they [the workplace] finds your requests for special equipment, language assistance, or environmental changes difficult, you know you may be in for trouble even if they invite you in.”

–Person with Disability

What is the ADA?

The ADA is a civil rights law that makes it illegal to discriminate against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, etc. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. The ADA does not specifically name all of the impairments that are covered. Some health conditions, such as migraines, may or may not fall directly under the ADA, but it is best practice to provide the most support possible for the staff person and look at what accommodations can be provided.

What is a Reasonable Accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the job application process, to perform the essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities. While many accommodations do not cost money, it is important for inclusive agencies to budget for accommodations to be purchased for employees.

Some examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- Modified work schedules (for example, if a staff member indicates that they would be able to focus more at the beginning of the week than end of the week, an accommodation could be discussing workload to have work that requires more focus at the beginning of the week.)
- Allowing additional time to complete tasks
- Paying attention to supervisees' learning styles (i.e. offering role plays, providing visual aids, etc.)
- Writing down weekly job expectations

- Additional supervision time to prioritize tasks
- Providing interpreters, mentors, professional organizers
- Providing assistive technology, such as LED reducers for those who have difficulty looking at screens for a long period of time, screen readers, etc., and
- Making the workplace readily accessible and usable by people with disabilities.

“My bipolar disorder makes it difficult to predict when I will be most well and able to bring my best self to work. Having a more flexible schedule helps me to manage my mental health disability while still doing my best work.”

–Survivor with Disability

Survivors with disabilities who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may have needs due to PTSD symptoms, concentration challenges, being triggered by subject matter of work, loud work environments or large groups of people-to name a few.

Accommodations for PTSD include:

- Flexible scheduling to allow time for counseling and appointments
- Allowing calls to medical providers during work hours
- More frequent breaks and backup coverage as needed
- Telecommuting options
- Partitions or closed doors for increased privacy
- Reducing clutter and distractions in the workplace
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Written as well as verbal instructions
- Assigning a mentor

Agencies should set up a process for requesting accommodations, determining whether a request is reasonable, and providing reasonable accommodations. One way that an agency could set this up is by asking staff to fill out a form requesting accommodations. [A template of the form is in the appendix on pp29-31.](#)

When Does an Accommodation Become an Undue Hardship?

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, it is not necessary to provide an accommodation if doing so would cause an undue hardship. Undue hardship means that an accommodation would be unduly costly, extensive, substantial or disruptive, or would fundamentally alter the nature or operation of the business.

If your agency determines that a request is an undue hardship, you must try to find another accommodation. An example would be working out a schedule where someone works from home part time, if an employee who must be in the office part-time requests to work from home full-time.

If the accommodation request would be a hardship because of financial reasons, you must also give the applicant or employee with a disability the opportunity to provide the accommodation or pay for the portion of the accommodation that is an undue hardship.

Language examples:

“The agency cannot afford to provide a wider elevator. We are able to provide an office on the first floor of the building. We can also talk with HR about other accommodations we can provide. Does this feel like an option for you?”

“I’m very sorry that we’re not able to offer X equipment. I have found Y and Z as alternatives that are more affordable. Would you mind looking into Y and Z to see if they will work for you?”



***You can get support for specific situations
through the Job Accommodation Network (JAN):
<https://askjan.org/> | Phone: 1-800-526-7234***

Concerns about Accommodations

Staff receiving accommodations or being provided with a leave of absence may have concerns about perceptions or questions they may receive from other staff. For example, staff who are allowed to work more frequently from home may be worried that other staff will see them as lazy or receiving favoritism. You can use the following [tool in the appendix on pp. 26-37 with staff to discuss concerns and come up with a communications plan.](#)

Documentation of Accommodations

Your agency will need to document accommodations requested and provided to demonstrate that it is following ADA regulations for providing reasonable accommodations. This documentation may also be helpful for staff requesting accommodations to have. For example, it can ensure that the agency as whole is supportive to the staff person. People with disabilities may have concerns about documentation, however, so be transparent about what is being documented and who will have access to the information provided. In addition, it is helpful to frame writing down the accommodation as positive and mutually beneficial to help staff feel more comfortable with this process.

Check with HR or your administrator regarding your agency's process for documenting accommodations.

Document the following:

- The request
- When it was made
- What accommodation was provided
- If the requested accommodation was not provided, why, and what was done in its place

You do not need to document the disability or details about the disability.

Example:

_____ requested a more flexible work schedule. We decided that they will work from home on Tuesdays and Thursdays and can take breaks as needed when working from the office on other days. This was proposed to the program director who agreed that we would try this for 2 months.

If you are not able to provide the accommodation, document what you and your supervisee decided to do instead. It is also important to document that you had a discussion about accommodations along with the outcome of that discussion.

Example:

_____ requested to stop working with clients due to a disability. Because of the nature of their job as an Advocate, meeting with clients is an essential job function. We had a discussion about potential accommodations and decided together on the accommodation to reduce _____'s caseload to 10 clients. We will check in on April 26, in two weeks, to assess if this accommodation is helping.

APPENDIX

- Template handout to communicate that you're welcoming to requests for accommodations p. 27
- Template form for requesting accommodations p. 29
- Template handout about impacts of our work p. 32
- Worksheet for supervisors and supervisees for creating successful work environments p. 35
- Worksheet for communicating about accommodations or leave of absence p.36
- Worksheet for Supervisors and Supervisee for creating self-care plan and addressing burnout or vicarious trauma p.36

TEMPLATE Accommodations at Agency

(Agency name) values creating an environment in which staff can ask for what they need to succeed in their positions. Providing workplace accommodations is one way that we can ensure this. Below is more information about accommodations and using supervision to discuss what is needed for your role.

What accommodations can I request?

You and your supervisor can talk together about your needs and how we can work together to meet these needs. Some examples are:

- Assistive software, like screen readers
- Equipment such as noise-cancelling headphones or audio amplifiers for meetings
- Ergonomic furniture
- Different types of communication based on learning style (i.e. visual aids, etc.)
- Writing tasks together in supervision
- Work schedule or location adjustments

There are some requests that agency may not be able to provide, but we will discuss together different accommodations that we can provide to help you be able to fully do your work.

When can I request accommodations?

In order for agency to help, we need to know your accommodation needs. We know that needs may come up as time goes on and welcome you to bring up these needs as you become aware of them. To request accommodations (fill in agency protocol).

Will my request be kept confidential?

It is _____'s policy that accommodation requests are kept confidential. It is also agency policy that requests are documented. The people who have access to this documentation are _____.

What will be documented?

We will only document the accommodation request and steps taken to meet the request. We will not document the type of disability.

TEMPLATE (AGENCY) Accommodation Policy and Request Form

Staff Reasonable Accommodation Policy

(Agency) is committed to equal opportunity in employment for people with disabilities. (Include how your agency is specifically committed to this action). In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and state law, (Agency) will provide a reasonable accommodation to staff with disabilities so they can perform the essential functions of their jobs. Attached to this form is a definition of a reasonable accommodation to serve as a reference when staff are submitting reasonable accommodation requests.

How does staff submit a request for an accommodation?

Please fill out the form below and submit it to your supervisor and the human resources administrator. Oral requests will be accepted as well and may be followed by requests for you to provide further documentation. (Agency) will make all efforts to provide effective accommodations and to engage in discussions with staff to determine an appropriate reasonable accommodation.

What can staff do if they are not satisfied with the offered accommodation?

(insert agency protocol)

Where can staff ask for help with this process or form?

Any staff member needing assistance with this form or the reasonable accommodation process is encouraged to speak with agency leadership, including your supervisor.

Staff Reasonable Accommodation Request Form

Today's date

Staff person's name

Position _____

Supervisor _____

Please describe the reasonable accommodation you are requesting and the essential job function for which the accommodation is needed.

(Agency) may seek appropriate documentation of your request. A written response to your request will be provided.

(Agency)'s executive staff may review the accommodation in the future, based on any changes in your job duties, your disability, or any financial constraints. You may also request review of an accommodation.

This form and the information contained within it is confidential. It will only be used for providing a reasonable accommodation. It will only be reviewed by _____ and our legal counsel, if necessary.

Signature of staff member submitting accommodation

Attachment: Definition of Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable accommodation means any modification or adjustment to the work environment or circumstances under which a job performed. A reasonable accommodation is seen as necessary to enable an individual with a disability to perform that position.

There are many types of potential accommodations, which include, but are not limited to:

- making job facilities accessible to and equally usable by a person with a disability;
- modifying work schedules;
- modifying when and how an essential job function is performed;
- obtaining, maintaining or modifying adaptive job equipment or devices;
- reassigning non-essential job functions;
- permitting performance of job functions at alternative locations;
- allowing time off for ongoing medical reasons;
- allowing leaves of absence in accordance with (Agency)'s personnel policies;
- providing readers for people who have visual disabilities;
- providing interpreters for individuals who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.

TEMPLATE Handout to Share with Staff about Impact of Work

Talking about Impact of Our Work

The work we do support people who have been oppressed and advocate for societal and systems change is deeply meaningful and draws people like you who care deeply and are mission driven. (Agency) recognizes that while this work is rewarding, it can also be hard. You work within a society where there are unfair systems and not enough resources. You also hear about oppressive and traumatic experiences. This is true for all staff roles. It is normal to be impacted by the challenges of our work.

To support our employees, provide regular supervision as a space to talk about the ways in which you are impacted. Below is more information about different ways you can be impacted by your work, why it is important to talk about it, and how you can get support.

Self-Care

(Agency) wants to support you in a regular practice of self-care. One way we can support you is through supervision. Some example of ways that supervisors can support you are:

- Processing your work with you, including emotional impacts of your work
- Talking about your workload, and
- Supporting you with thinking about things you can do for self-care. This can include taking vacation time, using your sick time when needed, taking breaks during the work day, talking about what's rewarding about your work etc.

We encourage you to regularly do things that help your physical, social, and emotional well-being. These can help balance the stresses that this work can bring.

What to do if you experience reactions that are impacting your work or daily life

You might notice that over time you are experiencing the impact of your work in a way that makes it hard to do your work and/or impacts your life outside of work. This is normal. Some possible signs that you might be getting overwhelmed and need to make some changes include:

- Fatigue, sleepiness, or difficulty falling asleep;
- Getting sick more often;
- Avoiding work and interactions with consumers and colleagues
- Difficulty managing emotions;
- Feeling emotionally numb or shut down;
- Being easily distracted;
- Loss of a sense of meaning in life and/or feeling hopeless about the future;
- Feeling vulnerable or worrying excessively about potential dangers in the world and loved ones' safety;
- Lack of or decreased participation in activities that used to be enjoyable.

If you are experiencing any of these signs or other people have expressed concern to you about what you are saying or doing as a result of work stress, bring this up in supervision.

If it feels more comfortable, you can talk to HR. (Agency) wants to provide you with the support you need. Additionally, we have provided a vicarious trauma self-assessment and resources for vicarious trauma in the following pages.



The following resources have additional information about vicarious/secondary trauma including things you can do to help cope with the impact of hearing about trauma or other struggles that your consumers/clients talk to you about.

- ProQOL (Professional Quality of Life) Assessment

<http://www.proqol.org/>

Take a quiz to help see how you're doing. This quiz has sub-scales for compassion satisfaction, burnout and compassion fatigue.

- The Joyful Heart Foundation

<http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/learn/vicarious-trauma>

Read more about secondary/vicarious trauma, how to identify it, and things that could help you feel better.

- The Trauma Stewardship Institute

<http://traumastewardship.com/>

The Trauma Stewardship Institute provides workshops and consultation to organizations on the topic of secondary/vicarious trauma. Information about the book Trauma Stewardship is also available.

- The Headington Institute

<http://www.headington-institute.org/overview>

Receive free online training on secondary/vicarious trauma.

- Free Self-Help Apps from the VA (available for everyone)

Mindfulness Coach

http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp_mindfulness_coach.asp

Grounding yourself in the present moment can help you cope better with unpleasant thoughts and emotions. The Mindfulness Coach app will help you do this.

TOOL: Discussing What Staff Need to Promote Success

The following questions can help supervisees and their supervisor address accommodations and supervision needs. By having this conversation about how the workplace and supervisor can support a successful work environment, staff needs, and accommodations can be addressed successfully. These questions should be shared with staff universally. It is recommended to give these questions to supervisees ahead of time, so they can prepare for a larger conversation.

1. What do you need in your work environment to be able to do your work most successfully? (e.g. fragrance free, ergonomic furniture, quiet space, use of a screen reader)
2. Is there anything you need regarding your work schedule in order to be able to most successfully do your work? (e.g. if possible, more focused work provided at beginning of week, later start time, able to rest in the middle of the day, routine and time to plan if there will be a change in schedule)
3. What can we do to balance completing your tasks and maintaining your well-being?
4. Are there current tasks that you would like more support or support to be given in a different way?
5. What helps you best learn new information and skills? (e.g. information broken down into bullet points, information written down, visuals/pictures, information provided in audio)
6. How would you describe your communication style? (e.g. very direct, small talk before getting down to business) What is your preferred method for communication? (e.g. verbal, in writing)
7. What is the best way for me to provide feedback to you?

TOOL: What to Share with Others about Accommodations

Experiences can feel differently to different people. Some people with disabilities want to share about their disability or accommodation needs to educate others. For some, disclosing information about disability or accommodations can feel uncomfortable and difficult. For example, a staff member may fear being viewed as not working hard enough if other staff notice they arrive late in the morning each day. Helping your supervisee decide what they want to share and how they may respond to questions about disability or accommodations can ease these reactions. This tool can be used to help guide a discussion in supervision to support your supervisee in deciding what they would like to share with other staff.

Guiding Questions:

- Do you have any concerns about staff noticing that you are receiving accommodations or are going/coming back on leave? If so, what are they?
- Would it be helpful to inform others at the agency about your accommodation needs? Who would it be helpful to inform?
- What information do you want to share? You can be as vague or detailed as feels comfortable to you.

Examples of what you could share:

- Thanks for your concern. I'm feeling much better at work with a more flexible schedule.
- I have a learning disability, so working from 9-5 is quite difficult for me, it works much better for me to break up my day.
- You may notice I leave early each day. This is an arrangement I've worked out with my supervisor due to my disability.
- I have been having a few health challenges I'd rather not go into detail about.
- I just wanted to let you know that I will be working from home on the weekends, so you may notice some inconsistency with my schedule.
- I don't always pick up on cues like the tone of your voice. Please be direct with me.

Preparing what you would like to share ahead of time can help this feel less uncomfortable. Below write what you might prefer to say:

What, if anything, would you like your supervisor to share with others?

TOOL to Support Supervisors with Staff Self-Care

Introduction

This is a tool to help supervisors support supervisees with self-care and management of burnout or crisis. The intent is to normalize the impact of the work we do and also prevent (and if needed, address) burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. There is no single solution or plan that will work for everyone, so it is encouraged that it is developed to meet the needs of both staff and supervisor. If you need guidance, reach out to HR.

1. Preventative Self-Care

Preventative self-care works best when things are going well, and you are working with staff to maintain self-care in order to prevent burnout, compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma. This includes proactively planning regular use of vacation time, scheduling routine health care appointments, and any other activity that contributes to the overall health of staff that can be planned in advance.

Providing Support can include:

- Regularly checking in about workload balance
- Helping staff process and problem solve around their work
- Helping staff process emotional impact of their work, when applicable
- Highlighting work successes
- Supporting staff with professional development
- Encouraging use of comp time when applicable
- Encouraging regular use of vacation time
- If staff generally have difficulty with taking comp time or vacation time help staff plan for time-out
- Discussing self-care generally with staff

Guiding Questions can include:

- What is keeping work manageable for you?
- What are you doing for self-care during your workday?
Outside of work?
- What is a success in your work week?
- What is most meaningful to you about your work?

2. Stress Management

This is generally when the workload, work/life, or life is operating at a higher volume or stress level. Without taking time to rest, restore energy, and return to work, staff will likely reach burnout. While not always easy to bring up, supervisors should bring it up right away if they feel their supervisee is being stretched too thin, so that you can make a plan together to address stress before full burnout approaches.

Providing Support can include:

- Talking with staff about what can most help them during this time
- Outlining urgent tasks vs. tasks that can be completed at a later time
- Discussing temporary adjustments to workload
- Coordinating with colleagues/team for coverage support
- Discussing any concerning behavior or language and offering other ways of processing the impact of stress in ways that respects coworkers, consumers/clients, and the workplace. (e.g. EAP, counseling etc)
- Discussing if flex time or remote work (if possible, with the role) could help
- Planning with staff to take a personal day or vacation day(s) soon to
- rest, reconnect with their support network, rejuvenate their energy, etc.
- Checking in to see if strategies are helping and reminding staff to let you know should they experience burnout or crisis

Guiding Questions can include:

- In past times when you've felt stress, how does stress affect you?
- What has been helpful for you in the past after a stressful time?
What are accommodations we could set up now? (e.g. check-in during super busy times, discuss self-care plan, plan around important deadlines as much as possible, etc.)
- What plan could we set in place if you experience burnout?