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In this knowledge digest I summarise resources that address the topics of:

- vicarious trauma / compassion fatigue

- trauma-informed design

Vicarious Trauma

This fact sheet by The American Counselling Association gives information on how to identify signs of 'vicarious trauma', also known as compassion fatigue; secondary traumatic stress and secondary victimization.

Vicarious trauma should not be confused with "burnout". It associated with the "cost of caring" for others. It is the emotional residue of exposure that first responders, ESTA call takers and others who hear traumatic stories and bear witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror of others.

Teater, M. and Ludgate, J. 2014. Overcoming compassion fatigue: A practical resilience workbook. PESI Publishing and Media.

This is a simple language book, more like an extended toolkit packed with info, tools, scales and measures to help you, or help others, identify and respond to vicarious trauma.

Some features that could be of use: a chapter on cognitive behavioral approaches; self assessment tools for detection; strategies and acts for intervention, and all importantly, a chapter on prevention.

The chapter on prevention has lots of useful tools and examples for identifying factors that sustain and deplete oneself; how to leave work at work; how to manage stress and do self care (including Green Cross Academy of Traumatology's guidelines for ethics and standards for self -care).

The prevention chapter also outlines the intriguing idea of 'vicarious resilience' or how to build positive transformation and empowerment by observing and helping others.

Trauma Informed Design

This article by Neha Gill (Dec 2019) looks at the why and how of trauma-Informed design. Though general, it is important in emergency management workplaces for buffering workers

from stress, which is detrimental to health when it accumulates. This is because trauma-informed design is about creating physical spaces (like workplaces) to promote safety, wellbeing and healing. It is important because "the environment has an impact on attitude, mood and behaviour and so, affects identity, worth and dignity".

In general, this literature converges on the idea that you need to make workplaces home-like. This means reducing and removing "adverse stimuli and environmental stresses and actively engaging individuals in a dynamic, multisensory environment, supporting self-reliance, providing and promoting connection to the natural world, creates private spaces for individuals who need time out/time away from others".

Factors to Consider:

- The physical environment promotes a sense of safety, calmness and productivity

- Staff incorporate an understanding of trauma-informed design to provide trauma-informed services and care?

- Facilities and physical space-related responsibilities are incorporated into programming and staff goals?

- Does the organization maintain physical spaces and environments to ensure consistent trauma-informed care?

How to incorporate trauma-informed design new and existing spaces:

- Think about spatial layout: Spaces with clear sightlines and few barriers create a sense of safety and calmness.

- Create visual interest with detail but not overcrowding. An appropriate quantity of objects, symmetry and regularity in their arrangement alleviates stress and promotes well-being.

- Avoid deeply hued warm colours that may arouse negative emotions. Cool colours have a calming effect.

- Furniture should be durable and easy to clean, and its arrangement should enhance safety and promote a positive relationship with staff and other beneficiaries at the organization.

- Natural light makes rooms appear less crowded, and lower levels of illumination mitigate perceived crowding and the resulting stress and discomfort.

- Plants perform an important biophilic function by connecting occupants to the natural world, which has been found to reduce stress and pain, and to improve mood.