UNDERSTANDING & ADDRESSING
VICARIOUS TRAUMA:
REFLECTION QUESTIONS WORKBOOK
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ONLINE TRAINING **MODULE FOUR**

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The information contained in these modules is provided solely for educational purposes. The self-examination exercises and scales on this website are not intended to be used as diagnostic or treatment tools. Any concerns you might have about mental health issues should be discussed with a qualified mental health professional. If any of the material in this module raises concerns for you, please contact the Headington Institute staff or other appropriately qualified mental health professionals.

What is vicarious trauma?

Looking at the definition, what questions do you have about vicarious trauma?

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What are some ways that you have changed over time because of your work?

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What sort of problems or people do you find it especially easy to empathize with?

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What are some ways that caring about people who have been hurt affects you?

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How does *your* sense of commitment and responsibility to your work help you?

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Are there ways in which your sense of commitment and responsibility to your work might hurt you? How?

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What are two ways you feel your work has had a positive influence on the way you see the world, yourself, or what matters to you (your sense of meaning and purpose, hope and faith)?

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What are two ways you feel your work has had a negative influence on the way you see the world, yourself, or what matters to you (your sense of meaning and purpose, hope and faith)?

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Risk factors for vicarious trauma?

What are three "individual risk factors" that may be placing you at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma at present?

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What are three things in your life related to you as an individual that you feel help protect you from vicarious trauma? We can call these "individual protective factors."

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What are three situational risk factors that may currently be placing you at risk for vicarious trauma?

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Jot down any thoughts about new ways you may understand some of your past experiences as a result of what you have read. What was the situation? How did you respond? How did others involved respond? What is your new understanding?

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List three cultural risk factors that may currently be placing you at increased risk of experiencing vicarious trauma.

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List three cultural protective factors that may currently be helping protect you from vicarious trauma.

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How have you experienced the culture of humanitarian assistance and/or your organization? How do the values of your organization feel consistent with your own personal values? How do they feel inconsistent? How has this affected your own experience of vicarious trauma?

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Signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma

Write down any signs of VT that you have experienced this week.

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Think back over the last couple of years. What are your early warning signs of vicarious trauma (i.e., the first signals that warn you that you're struggling in this area)?

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Consider asking people you are close to (your spouse, family members, or close friends) the following:

- What have you noticed about the way I behave and appear to feel when I'm under pressure?

- In what ways do you think my work has impacted me during the last week/month/year?

- From your point of view, how does this most impact you/other people whom you care about?

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If you have struggled with vicarious trauma in the past, or feel you may be struggling with it now, what are some ways your vicarious trauma may impact your work?

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What are some ways that colleagues' vicarious trauma has affected you?

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Think about your own "early warning signs for VT" that you identified earlier. How might these impact your family, your colleagues, and your work?

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What Helps: Addressing vicarious trauma

What are three activities you do regularly or enjoy doing that can help you cope with vicarious trauma?

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Why do these activities help you in coping with vicarious trauma (Hint, think about how these activities can help counteract your risk factors for vicarious trauma, or address your specific signs of vicarious trauma).

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What are three activities you do regularly or enjoy doing that could help you transform vicarious trauma on a deeper level?

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What are three activities you do regularly or enjoy doing that could help you transform vicarious trauma on a deeper level?

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What do you think the difference is between a coping and a transforming activity? Could something help you cope and be transformational at the same time? How?

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The ABC's: Three important themes

Spend some time reflecting on how you're feeling (physically, emotionally, and spiritually). How did you feel when you woke up this morning? How do you feel now? Are you aware of anything out of the ordinary? If so, what might that be related to?

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What is your opinion of the statement that "pain is inevitable but suffering is optional"? Do you see this as relevant to your experiences of vicarious trauma? If so, how?

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Complete this sentence five times, in five different ways: "I sometimes find it difficult to balance _____ with _____." (Hint, think about demands, responsibilities, and desires across different people, roles, and situations in your life).

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What are two issues or themes around which you most frequently feel as if you struggle to find balance?

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What are two communities that are important to you? How do they "feed you" and help you feel supported and connected?

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What makes you feel connected spiritually? (Hint, remember that your spirituality is connected to your deepest sense of meaning and purpose. It can be related to a faith in God, nature, humanity, or something else).

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Working protectively

Take some time to make some notes or discuss the answers to each of the sets of questions in items 1 through 5 in this module: .

1. Why do you do this work?

2. Do you know what you're doing in your work, and why?

3. How do you measure success in your work?

4. What can you control in your work? .

5. What are the costs and rewards of this work, and how are you personally changing?

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Which of these sets of questions do you feel like you struggle the most with (maybe you don't know the answers to those questions, or the way you normally think about work in that area is unhelpful). Why?

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Which of these question areas do you feel you are strongest in? Why? How does your thinking in that area help protect you from vicarious trauma?

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Which of these work practices do you already do well? How?

- Changing some of the things that bother you

- Intentionally making choices when you can

- Connecting with (or disconnecting from) people

- Trying something different at work

- Writing about your experiences at work

- Finding ways to retain or regain perspective during the day

- Investing in professional networks and relationships with colleagues

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Which of the practices above do you not do so well? Why are these hard for you?

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What other healthy working habits can you think of that may help you lessen and manage vicarious trauma in your job?

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What can organizations and managers do?

What are some things your organization already does well to support its staff and help reduce the risk of vicarious trauma?

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Are there some practical things you can think of that your organization could do better to support staff and reduce the risk of vicarious trauma:

- During recruitment?

- During orientation?

- During employment?

- Upon leaving the organization?

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If you are a manager, what are some things you do well to help lessen the impact of vicarious trauma on your staff? If you aren't a manager, what does your manager do well?

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What are some things you as a manager (or your manager) could do better to help lessen the impact of vicarious trauma?

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