

Vicarious Trauma

Self-care while caring for others

By Steven Wilson, Ed.D.

In 1990, Congress officially established the first full week of October as mental illness awareness week for mental health advocates in the nation to call attention to mental illness and its impact on our communities.

This year, MIAW is observed October 3-9.

This awareness extends to practitioners and therapists on the front lines of combatting mental illness and the very real need for self-care, while caring for those who need help.

"Vicarious trauma is something we don't talk about enough in helping professions," says Dani Green, vice president of counseling programs at Best Point Behavioral Health by The Children's Home. "It's very real and I think it's important this week to recognize and bring awareness to the topic."

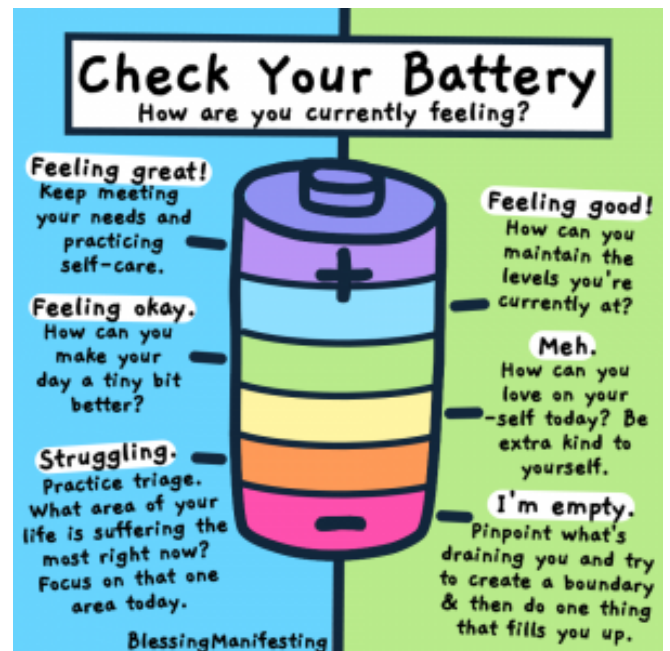
Green said vicarious trauma is trauma that negatively impacts someone who is regularly exposed to the stress of listening to victims recount their personal ordeals, reviewing case files, or responding to, cases of abuse, neglect, or victimization. It includes seeing, or directly hearing about, the aftermath of violence and how it affects clients, children, or other people who have been hurt or exploited.

"It's a career hazard very common in social and victim services, law enforcement, military, emergency medical and fire services and other first responder, high-risk, or victim advocacy work," Green said. "It's vital we recognize it and be cognizant of it within ourselves and our colleagues."

Pam McKie, chief operating officer at The Children's Home, said the national awareness week is a perfect platform to remind mental health professionals, social workers, and others in allied or caring professions to take care of themselves as well as the clients entrusted to their care.

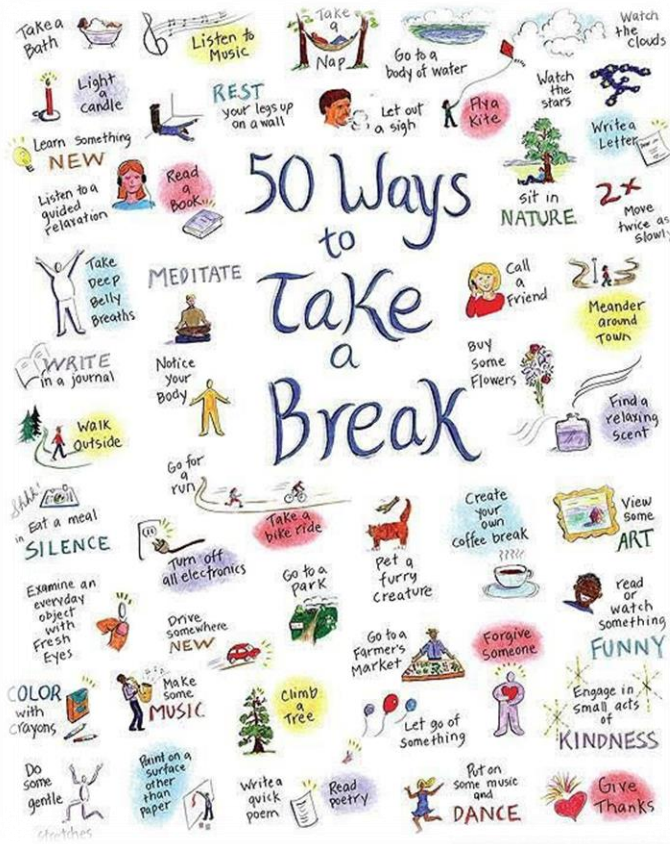
"Mental health is something we should discuss all the time," said McKie. "This year, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has called for a theme of 'together for mental health' and I truly believe a mindset of 'togetherness' can help remind ourselves to take care of one another as we care for those who need our help.

McKie said supervisors at all levels should be aware of the signs of work-related trauma exposure. **See Page 2**



Some suggestions for supervisors are:

- 💡 discussing vicarious trauma as part of supervision;
- 💡 encouraging, protecting and recognizing the need for down time;
- 💡 remaining cognizant of colleagues possibly withdrawing or isolating;
- 💡 where possible, creating time and space at work for reflection through reading, writing, prayer, and meditation
- 💡 having the moral courage to suggest a coworker to seek therapeutic and professional assistance, when appropriate



“Sometimes we have to ensure we care for the caregiver,” McKie said. “I hope everyone takes a moment this week for an operational pause and reflects on the realities of vicarious trauma and the wellness theme of ‘together for mental health.’”

Photos illustrating a “together” theme may be sent to pr@tchcincy.org.



Associate Principal – Transition, at the Heidt Center of Excellence by The Children’s Home Caitlyn Lynch says every Sunday her family gets together for a family activity. This past weekend, they welcomed in the Halloween season by making “Monster Cookies.”

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