



## Sustaining Staff Working with Victims of Domestic Violence During COVID-19

The Wendt Center is committed to restoring hope for those impacted by trauma and believes healing is possible for all. We recognize the prevalence of domestic violence in our community, the potential increase during this crisis, and its impact on the adults, children, and families we serve. The Wendt Center has built strong partnerships with domestic violence organizations to ensure survivors receive the comprehensive services they deserve.

We, at the Wendt Center, see and acknowledge the efforts of domestic violence providers to keep all survivors safe during the COVID-19 crisis. The delivery of domestic violence services has had to change and adapt very quickly. Staff are being challenged to be creative in their efforts to safety plan and connect survivors with essential resources. Your hard work is ensuring that survivors are not alone during this vulnerable and potentially dangerous time. There is a collective strength within the community of domestic violence service providers. Self-care and resiliency practices are critical to helping sustain providers so they can continue to support others. The Wendt Center has compiled some information, strategies, and tools to help you as you navigate this uncertain time.

### Notice the Impact on Yourself

You, domestic violence service providers, may be experiencing a myriad of responses to the current situation. Normal routines, caseloads, and support resources may be interrupted. You may also be witnessing increased or intensified trauma responses by survivors. In addition to carrying the weight of supporting survivors, providers may be dealing with their own grief and trauma experiences. You are likely impacted both personally and professionally during this time.

Take a moment to notice how this crisis is impacting you. Here are some things to pay attention to:



## Foster Vicarious Resilience

Vicarious resilience is the experience of personal growth through witnessing the post-traumatic growth in clients. Just as service providers can experience a negative impact from the repeated exposure to traumatic stories (vicarious trauma), a positive impact is also possible. Consider why you remain in this profession despite the challenges it poses. There is hope in each story, and you are there to support and witness that hope.

## Ground Yourself

Before you provide support to a survivor, it is important for you to ground yourself. Grounding is a set of strategies and skills to help an individual center and orient themselves to the present moment. Being grounded allows one to make thoughtful decisions rather than be reactive. The following grounding techniques can be done just about anywhere.

- Breathing – Trace one of your hands with the pointer finger on the other hand. For each finger traced, breathe in as you move up the finger and out as you move down the finger.
- Muscle Relaxation – Tense up your body or a specific muscle on your body. Hold for three seconds. Release fully to a relaxed position. Repeat three times.
- Anchoring – Focus your eyes and brain on one object. For one minute, breathe slowly while focusing your entire attention on that object. Let all thoughts pass through as you do so.

## Create a Workday Routine

Identifying strategies to use before, during, and after work can be a helpful way to create a routine for yourself. Examples include:

### Before

- "Commute" to work with a walk or bike ride
- Do a feelings check-in - what feelings am I experiencing in this moment, how big are those feelings, where are those feelings in my body?
- Remind yourself why you do this work and the value of supporting survivors

### During

- After meetings, "shake off" the energy by stretching or dancing
- Take micro-breaks between tasks to drink water or breathe
- Acknowledge that you may not have all the answers, but you are doing your best to support survivors

### After

- Close the day out with intention by changing clothes, taking a shower, or spending some time outside
- Limit social media and news with traumatic content
- Reflect on a point in the day when you felt hopeful or fulfilled by your work.

## Connect with Supports

Remember, you are part of a strong, dynamic, resilient community of service providers. You are not navigating this situation alone. Connect regularly with your support network, both at work and outside.

- Create a check-in system with colleagues and ask how each other are doing. Acknowledge both the difficulties of this situation and the resilience you are holding.
- Share experiences, ideas, and challenges with co-workers and other service providers. Build off others' creativity and strategies for navigating challenges at work.
- Identify anything specific that may help you thrive at your job. Talk with your supervisor to explore what supports they can provide.
- Engage with family or friends: schedule a time video chat or talk with a loved one; watch a movie together (in person or virtually); play a board game; sing or dance together

## Practice Self-Compassion

Sometimes we are our own worst critic. It is important to be gentle with yourself during this time and practice the same compassion internally that you provide externally. Here are some suggestions:

### Express gratitude toward yourself

- "Thank you for working hard to keep survivors safe."
- "Thank you for showing up every day."
- "Thank you for being present even when it is painful."

### Identify your strengths and skills

- "I have a deep desire to provide support to others."
- "I am capable of sitting with people in their pain."
- "I am committed to the work that I am doing."

### Create a compassionate mantra

- "This is a difficult moment; I am doing the best I can."
- "I am choosing to be kind, patient, and gentle with myself."
- "What I am doing is enough, even when it doesn't feel that way."

### Reframe your thoughts

- Change "I am powerless." to "I may not be able to change everything, but I am providing critical support."
- Change "This is impossible." to "There is immense value each time I serve even one survivor."
- Change "I can never do enough." to "I am doing everything I can within my role and capabilities."

## Engage in Self-Care

In addition to the strategies mentioned above, it is important for providers to engage in regular restorative self-care practices. See the Wendt Center's "Coping Strategies for COVID-19" handout for additional ideas on taking care of yourself during this time.