

Responding to and Preventing Vicarious Trauma

A – B – C

One simple tool to help moderate the impact that working with trauma can have is the A-B-C method (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Awareness

- Being attuned to one's own needs, limits, emotions, and resources.
- Heeding all levels of awareness.
- Practicing mindfulness and acceptance.

Balance

- Seeking balance among activities, within one's personal life and professional life, as well as the balance between the two.
- Inner balance allows attention to all aspects of oneself.

Connection

- To oneself, to others, to something larger.
- Communication breaks the silence of unacknowledged pain.
- Offsets isolation, increases validation and hope.

A – B – C, 1 – 2 – 3

A limitation of the ABC method is that it focuses on the individual. To expand this perspective so that wellness goes beyond the responsibility of the individual, consider each of these concepts at three levels: individual, organizational, systemic.

Awareness

1. Individual – see above points re awareness
2. Organizational – what organizational issues are influencing you? How does the organization support your awareness, normalize responses, etc.?
3. Systemic – what systemic issues are influencing your wellness

Balance

1. Individual – see above points
2. Organizational – organizations need to accept people's limits, create a culture where balance is encouraged
3. Systemic – know you can't change everything and it isn't your job to do so; raising the issue of balance in our interactions with others

Connection

1. Individual – see above points re connection
2. Organizational – organizations can foster connections, create intentional opportunities for support (e.g. a go-to person when need to talk)
3. Systemic knowing you are part of a bigger community that is working for change – doing more social action

A – B – C, 1 – 2 – 3 was developed by Barb Peck at the *Victoria Sexual Assault Centre*, based on the work by: Pearlman, L.A. & Saakvitne, K.W. (1995). *Trauma and the therapist: Countertransference and vicarious traumatization in psychotherapy with incest survivors*. New York: W.W. Norton).