

**SELF-CARE:  
A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH TO  
VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH**

by

**Patricia (Trish) A. Pilotte**

BSW, University of Northern British Columbia, 2007

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF EDUCATION  
IN  
COUNSELLING

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2010

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### Acknowledgments

The successful completion of this project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Therefore, I wish to acknowledge and express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Assistant Professor, Dr. Linda O'Neill without whose calm, compassionate demeanour, and helpfulness, patience, and invaluable guidance and support, this degree would have remained just a dream.

Deepest gratitude and much appreciation is also due Associate Professor, Dr. Corinne Koehn, a member of the supervisory committee who unselfishly sacrificed her personal time to edit this work in a timely fashion and who, throughout my time at UNBC, encouraged me to expand and hone my public speaking abilities to where I am now contemplating workshop delivery.

Warmest regards and heartfelt thanks are accorded to the Acting Chair of the Psychology Department, Associate Professor, and member of the supervisory committee, Dr. Sherry Beaumont, without whose expertise in the realm of positive psychology and willingness to go above and beyond the mere imparting of that knowledge to a sharing of life philosophies, planting the seed for this work and fostering its growth.

The standards of excellence and collaborative energies of this supervisory committee was stellar and that, when combined with the humour, hard work, and humanity of each member, propelled this work to be all that it is and for that, I will be eternally grateful.

An extra-special thank you and a heart full of gratitude is extended to Gregory John Brown for his endless pep talks, sense of humour, supportive offerings, and linear way of looking at life that kept me on track and reasonably sane during my entire academic journey. His numerous contributions, friendship, and unyielding faith in my abilities will always be fondly remembered and forever cherished.

Last, but by no means least, I wish to extend deep appreciation and heartfelt love and gratitude to my family, friends, and colleagues. To my sister Leona for her perseverance in our Word Twist games; Thomas, for listening to my rants, raves and for his companionship; Mellhina, for her uplifting phone calls from Heaven on Earth; Duncan, for opening the academic doorway; Chrissie, Barb, WayWay, and Bob for their friendship and continual belief in my ability to do the 'do' and to the many others whose words of wisdom, humour, and never-ending encouragement helped when all felt insurmountable and unachievable.



### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my daughter, Cassandra, and my son, Jean-Francois for whom life is just beginning and to my parents, Sheila and Tony whose lives sadly ended before its completion.

As all lives begin, all lives will end; this is indisputable. Remembering that it is what we do with the time in between these events that matters most and how we choose to orchestrate our journey that really makes the difference for each of us.

Know that it is never too late to start on the path to fulfilling lifetime dreams – as is evidenced by this final submission.

### **Self-Care:**

#### **A Positive Psychology Approach to Vicarious Traumatization and Personal Growth**

Drawing on the constantly used metaphor that depicts one putting on the oxygen mask first because unless one is able to breathe, one cannot be of assistance to other passengers, I posit that helping professionals must not just acknowledge the self-care movement but embrace it and start living it. Helping professionals, especially counsellors and more specifically students and trainees, are more susceptible to mental and emotional “dis-ease.” I believe that “knowing” of self-care is quite simply not enough and that “doing” self-care is a personal and professional obligation. By taking care of our mental and emotional well-being and living a healthy and balanced life, helping professionals really are taking care of those near and dear as well as those with whom we work.

Continually faced with personal and professional challenges to worldviews, healthy ways of being, and ability to sustain positivity, the helping professional must take all available precautions to minimize the likelihood of permanent damage to their psyches. The focus of this project is to provide a unique way of protecting oneself while fostering the opportunity for personal growth not only before, but also during and after experiencing vicarious traumatization (VT).

A counsellor’s ability to be empathic and to demonstrate empathy, genuineness, warmth, and trust for a client is paramount in establishing a safe therapeutic environment, which in turn is necessary for a successful intervention (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006; Sexton, 1999). Empathically bearing witness to heart-wrenching narratives and participation in re-enactments, visualizations, and the recalling of traumatizing events

may increase the vulnerability of counsellors to the effects of VT (Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Saakvitne, 2002; Trippany, White Kress, & Wilcoxon, 2004).

Defined as a process involving profound and permanent changes in the core aspects of the counsellor's self (Adams & Riggs, 2008; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Saakvitne, 2002; Trippany et al., 2004), VT reflects on neither the therapist nor the client with respect to inadequacies. Simply stated, it is best conceptualized as an occupational hazard (Sommer, 2008).



## **Chapter One – Purpose and Rationale**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to provide a beneficial process by which those in the helping professions can develop a personally customized self-care plan (PCSCP).

Through developing and maintaining their PCSCP, opportunity is provided for not only mitigating the effects of VT, but also in transcending personal growth beyond mere recovery to an awareness of self that will benefit the counselling student, trainee, and even more seasoned professionals in their lived experience.

Counsellors at all levels of experience may choose to arm themselves with a mechanism that converts adversity into opportunity through reflective meaning making that may result in personal growth. Although VT can happen to any counsellor working with trauma survivors, current research indicates that students in a counselling program and counselling trainees may be more susceptible to the effects of vicarious trauma (Adams & Riggs, 2008; Cunningham, 2004). Adams and Riggs (2008) also found that higher levels of VT symptoms correlated with participants having less than two semesters of applied experience.

To address this potentiality, I believe it is crucial that counselling students, trainees, and other helping professionals initially invest in preventative strategies such as a personally customized self-care plan (PCSCP) that may help to create a protective buffer (Neumann & Gamble, 1995; Sommer, 2008). Creating a PCSCP during the earlier stages of their helping careers, practitioners may also experience enhanced self-awareness resulting in personal growth.

Through the lens of positive psychology, I will connect how a PCSCP constructed with the empirically researched “Values in Action” (VIA) Survey, which incorporates “six Core Virtues” and “24 Character Strengths” in its results, may prevent and/or mitigate the effects of VT. Furthermore, through participation in didactic components and self-selecting from a series of “action-oriented, hands-on” exercises or creating others, participants may be apt to accept self-care as more than just something to talk about and more of a “must have” in their therapeutic toolkits.

By creating their own self-care plan and by participating in educational opportunities on what VT is and is not, beginning counsellors especially may develop the knowledge base needed to identify the symptoms of VT in themselves and their fellow practitioners. Participants would be encouraged to explore how it may affect their ability to be present with their clients, and to “mine” for the personal growth opportunities that may transpire should one experience VT. The proposed process utilizes a tri-dimensional approach catered specifically to student/trainee counsellors.

### **Rationale**

A crucial element of this process expands the students’/trainees’ knowledge base with respect to understanding what VT is while honing their ability to recognize the symptoms in themselves and fellow practitioners. In a literature review of counsellors who had and were enduring vicarious traumatization, Sexton (1999) put forth four recommendations. Firstly, Sexton recommended that therapists develop the ability to recognize salient themes and self-reactions that could result in countertransference. Secondly, he suggested therapists understand when their individual somatic signs of distress become evident. Thirdly, Sexton recommended therapists become attuned to



early indications of the onset of VT in themselves. Lastly, he recommended therapists “self-confess” feelings and experiences pertaining to their own trauma-related life events.

Core to the process is the ability of student/trainee counsellors to invest in the generation of a personally crafted and customizable self-care program integral with the construct of personal growth. The primary elements of the PCSCP incorporate positive psychology interventions focused on utilizing “positive character traits,” experiencing “positive subjective states,” and engaging with ‘enabling institutions’ (Peterson, 2006).

Along with the psycho-educational component, a pamphlet that allows participants to select and experience numerous ‘hands-on, action-oriented’ exercises will be available. While each exercise addresses specific core virtues and character strengths, the proposed psycho-educational course will provide the opportunity for the exercises to be completed framed within an approach directed solely from the participant’s perspective. I believe that working through the exercises will significantly enhance the learning experience and may not only provide the opportunity for participant “buy-in” and an acknowledgement of the importance of self-care in their personal and professional lives, but may also motivate the participants to generate their own PCSCP.

The final element of the process, a continuance of the student/trainee counsellors’ personal growth, anticipates the development of confidence to accept that one is suffering from vicarious traumatization, recognize its influence on client-counsellor interactions, and work towards mitigating its effects. The underlying motivation for electing to utilize this particular process rests in positing that personal growth may transpire at some point prior to, during, or after VT.



It is anticipated that by exploring aspects of positive psychological thinking, experiencing the positive impact of implementing a PCSCP early in one's career, being able to identify the onset of VT, and experiencing beforehand some of the positive psychotherapeutic intervention strategies, student/trainee counsellors will become invested in establishing and adhering to their own customized self-care plan.

## Chapter Two – A Literature Review

Whether a first responder to a natural disaster, an emergency worker, an intermediate caregiver, or a care provider working in either an outpatient or inpatient setting, all have the potential to suffer from some form of secondary trauma or secondary traumatic stress (Trippany et al., 2004). Secondary trauma or secondary traumatic stress, frequently labeled as compassion fatigue, refers to a set of symptoms that parallel those of the diagnostic criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Acute Stress Disorder as laid out in the Anxiety Disorders section of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

In general, traumatic experiences are defined as an “exposure to a situation in which a person is confronted with an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to self or others’ physical well-being” (Trippany et al., 2004, p. 31). Encountering clients whose emotional narratives may include domestic violence, physical or sexual assault, school or work-related violence, childhood sexual abuse, and natural disasters is a frequent occurrence for counsellors although they may never work in an environment where crisis is the primary focus (Sommer, 2008; Trippany et al., 2004).

From being thought of as an unconscious infection to a contagion labeled soul sadness, McCann and Pearlman (1990) assert that for some therapists, doing psychotherapy with trauma survivors can result in a permanent disruption to their “cognitive manifestations of psychological needs” known as cognitive schemas (p. 137).

McCann and Pearlman (1990) in their seminal research on trauma coined the phrase “vicarious traumatization” (VT) to identify the altering effect to cognitive



schemas that may be experienced by therapists who worked with trauma victims.

Research into the construct of VT initially referred to such trauma as a countertransference reaction, compassion fatigue, or burnout. Subsequent research revealed however, significant differences between and among the above-mentioned constructs and VT (Adams & Riggs, 2008; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Trippany et al., 2004). Vicarious traumatization, when distinguished from such constructs may be more easily understood.

### **What Vicarious Traumatization is Not**

**Countertransference.** An immediate emotional response by the counsellor to a client's issue or concern resulting from the lived experience of the counsellor, countertransference is specifically related to client/counsellor interactions during the counselling sessions (Trippany et al., 2004) and although it needs to be addressed, it is not likely to alter the counsellor's worldview. Research indicates that if a counsellor is suffering from VT, "the related disruptions in cognitive schemas become part of the counsellor's unconscious personal material that may then result in countertransference reactions toward the client" (p. 32).

**Compassion fatigue.** First acknowledged in the nursing profession, compassion fatigue is identified as the cumulative buildup of primary traumatic stress over time and can be debilitating in that it affects the counsellor's ability to be empathic (Sommer, 2008). Primary, secondary, and vicarious traumatization can actually add up to or be very much a part of the overall spectrum of compassion fatigue.

**Burnout.** Identified as a gradual and cumulative buildup that results in emotional exhaustion and chronic tedium in the workplace, burnout is linked to workplace



conditions (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). In counselling, burnout is related specifically to a feeling of being overloaded secondary to client problems of chronicity and complexity and ultimately leads to depersonalization of the client, inadequate client support, inferior service delivery, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment and job satisfaction by the service worker (Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Trippany et al., 2004).

Burnout and VT are clearly distinguished from each other through a consideration of several dimensions. Symptoms are observable reactions verses more covert changes in thinking, while the amount of exposure to trauma survivors varies greatly. In addition, the relevant populations involved in the service provision are not aligned, and the former focuses on symptoms while the latter focuses on theory (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). However, both VT and burnout share similar behavioral, emotional, and physical symptoms, are frequently characterized by a commonality in work-related issues, interpersonal problems, and a general decrease in esteem, as well as concern for clients.

Burnout can occur in persons within many professions, builds gradually and cumulatively as a result of emotional exhaustion, relates to chronic tedium in the workplace, and is linked to workplace conditions. VT on the other hand, occurs within professions dealing specifically with trauma victims and is characterized by an abrupt and sudden onset of symptoms.

### **Vicarious Traumatization**

A counsellor's ability to be empathic and to demonstrate empathy for clients is paramount in establishing a therapeutic relationship. Establishing good rapport with a client is also necessary for a successful intervention. Counsellors, who empathetically bear witness daily to heart-wrenching narratives and participate in re-enactments and

visualizations of traumatizing events, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of VT.

“The client or survivor experiences the trauma; however, VT is not about the survivor, it is about the counselor [and] it is best conceptualized as a sort of occupational hazard” (Jenkins & Baird, 2002, p. 52).

VT may be defined as the transformative effect upon the helping professional that results in changes to the core aspects of the therapist’s “self.” Significantly challenged, cognitive schemas, identity, memory, and belief systems often become severely changed (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Trippany et al., 2004). The therapist’s personal balance is lost and invasive and intrusive horrors penetrate and take hold. Waves of agony and pain bombard the therapist’s spirit and seep in, draining strength, confidence, desire, friendship, calmness, laughter, and good health. Confusion, apathy, isolation, anxiety, sadness, and illness are often the result (Saakvitne, 2002).

McCann and Pearlman (1990) not only coined the term vicarious traumatization but also developed the constructionist self-development theory (CSDT) founded in the premise that individuals understand and rationalize their surrounding life experiences by constructing realities based upon the development of cognitive schemas including “beliefs, assumptions, and expectations about self and the world” (p. 137). Counsellors, who are subjected repetitively to a client’s re-enactment and re-telling of traumatic experiences, may alter perceptions as a mechanism of self-protection against the effects of interacting with the clients traumatic experiences.

Trippany et al. (2004) posit the onset of vicarious traumatization to be a normal adaptation by the counsellor. I believe that the recognition and enhancement of the points of positivity in one’s life (by focusing on an individual’s core virtues and character



strengths) leads to a reduction in the concentration on the negative aspects in one's life (the formation of false perceptions as their reality). This I interpret to be a form of positive psychotherapy embedded in an individual's personally customized self-care plan.

**Symptoms of VT.** In the counselling arena, VT is related to a specific client's traumatic experience, extends beyond the sessions, and subsequently affects all aspects of the life of the counsellor. According to Adams and Riggs (2008), the symptoms of VT include a preoccupation with the client's traumatic event, avoidance and numbing of events, an increase in negative arousal, and lowered frustration and tolerance levels. Other VT symptoms include intrusive thoughts of clients' material, a dread of working with certain clients, a decrease in a subjective sense of safety, a feeling of therapeutic impotence, a diminished sense of purpose, or a decreased functioning in a number of areas in both personal and professional realms.

**Susceptibility to VT.** An important component to preventing VT is acknowledging individual susceptibility and personal vulnerabilities. Unrealistic expectations for oneself as a professional and/or the unfounded beliefs about the value of stoicism or non-responsiveness that leave the individual feeling ashamed and silenced about her/his feelings may contribute to increased risk of VT. Student/trainee counsellors will also often undergo feelings of shame at their sense of incompetency and will be reluctant to seek appropriate supervision and support (Adams & Riggs, 2008).

Disregarded self-care plans or other personal coping strategies that do not help or carry heavy costs (e.g., addictions, numbness, and isolation) may also increase one's vulnerability to VT. Sommer (2008) further supported the importance of self-care when



she concluded, “self-care is as important to the professional practice of counselling as theoretical orientations and technical applications” (p. 68).

Recently, Adams and Riggs (2008) concluded that the symptoms of vicarious traumatization in students and trainees are correlated heavily with personal issues and training experiences. Cunningham (2004) explored the risks associated with exposure to trauma cases in the classroom, and offered recommendations for establishing a safe learning environment to minimize the potential for VT. Given this research, it is imperative that not only beginning counsellors learn to identify, prevent, or mitigate the effects of VT but that seasoned counsellors, practicum supervisors, educators, and administrators be just as informed.

Not having specifically researched the gender or cultural implications for those who suffer from VT, I suspect that there may be a difference, not only in the symptomology, but also in the interventions chosen. For example, helping professionals from Eastern cultures may not identify with depression or cognitive distortions and may choose to address their vicarious trauma with different interventions and exercises that are more in alignment with their worldview. Adult males may not be as concerned for their personal safety as women and hence may be affected differently under the duress of VT. Perhaps future research will shed more scientific knowledge on correlations between vicarious traumatization and gender, culture, or other socioeconomic considerations.

### **VT strategies.**

*Individual.* In their study of issues faced by psychotherapists in their professional development, Neumann and Gamble (1995) posit that pro-active strategies utilized by

both therapists and their employers can be helpful in maintaining empathy, creativity, and hope in the counsellor/client relationship. One would anticipate that counselling student/trainees might choose to employ a mixture of strategies that include individual, educational, and organizational strategies that may accomplish just that.

One strategy often used by practicing counsellors focuses on their individual coping style (Bober, Regeher, & Zhou, 2006; Lerias & Bryne, 2003). Creating and maintaining a self-care plan is of paramount importance in an individual's ability to cope with the day-to-day challenges faced on both a personal and professional front. Although Schauben and Frazier (1995) found the most commonly utilized positive coping strategy was to seek adequate emotional and social support as well as appropriate supervision, I hypothesize that a PCSCP can also be a useful addition to any coping strategy.

*Educational.* Sommer (2008) in her study of vicarious trauma and education, consistently summarized educational strategies wherein she stated, "Educators have an ethical obligation to inform counsellors regarding the dangers inherent in working with clients who are traumatized" (p. 65). Going one step further, Sommer concluded, "counsellor educators have an ethical responsibility to provide specific training in this area (VT) to prevent potential harm to clients and counsellors" (2008, p. 62).

Educational strategies are not confined to the realm of academic institutions. Employers of counsellors and those who supervise counsellors also have a two-fold responsibility. First, they must provide the training specific to the understanding, recognition, and mitigation of vicarious traumatization. Equal in importance, they themselves must enhance their individual knowledge of VT through the same specific training. Both the APA and the ACA Code of Ethics have recognized this critical need



resulting in the implementation of several standards to address this deficiency (See ACA Code of Ethics, 2005).

*Occupational.* Often agencies work out of the misguided belief that feelings are unprofessional and have no place in the workplace, and counsellors are merely employees “doing” and not “feeling.” This shortsighted and unrealistic view increases the vulnerability of the helping professional within the organization and for the organization as a whole. These impractical ways of thinking endanger the helping professional, the clients, and the organization through employment attrition, absenteeism, and professional misconduct. Richardson, in her guidebook on vicarious trauma speculated that the psychology and physical state of the people working in any organization could be severely influenced by the culture of the organization (2001).

The individual’s working environment has a profound effect on her or his vulnerability to VT. Agency policies and expectations significantly influence a helping professional’s ability to prevent or at the very least, mitigate the effects of VT. A working environment that contributes positively to this goal provides “clear guidelines, structures, well-defined roles, and policies that enhance practitioner well-being” (Richardson, 2001, p. 25).

A mutually respectful culture that the practitioner feels a part of, with time-related benefits such as self-care days, enhanced holidays and an extended healthcare plan, encourages those who are cognizant of vicarious trauma and its symptoms to exercise more care in their day-to-day responsibilities. Supportive supervision, peer consultation, debriefing and personal therapy may support a counsellor through difficult periods.

I believe that formulating a PCSCP is the core element of any protective strategy and may preserve empathic abilities, creativity, and hope while fostering personal growth.

### **Choice Theory and the Personally Accountable Person**

Choice theory is founded in an understanding of the cognitive workings of the mind, while its complement, reality theory, focuses on the skills for interfacing with these cognitive workings of the mind (Wubbolding & Brickell, 2007). While complex in theory, in practice I interpret these theories to mean that individuals are responsible for their emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral reactions to events in their lives. The manner in which one manages their emotions, and hence their attitudes, is reflected in their behavior. A positive approach to controlling one's behavior permits a rational response regardless of the situation. In this context, those individuals who live by this construct I will refer to as "Personally Accountable Persons."

Choice theory is a construct that can be utilized in the therapeutic combat against emotional dependency, i.e. relying on another for emotional security and stability (Hoogstad, 2008). Contrary to the belief that an external motivation can "make you do something," behavior is a "self-choice." Although we may not be able to control our physiological or subsequent emotional responses to events, we are capable and accountable for making a conscious choice of what behavior or action we will take and how long we will feel the emotional response we experienced. When one resorts to blame of others for how they are in this world, they enter into a victim mentality.

In this mode, identifying the perpetrator, situation, or circumstance for what went wrong is of initial importance. Subsequently, blame is assigned, culpability is verified, the victim is exonerated, and an expectation that things will be made right results. The



victim mentality justifies being upset and rests the onus outside the self for the consequences, thereby condoning a negative attitude and behavior. Thus, any thought, statement, or action denying accountability reveals the victim mentality. Being aware of existing in this realm and making a conscious choice to accept personal accountability for one's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors is fundamental to existing as a personally accountable person.

The personally accountable person lives by the credo that everything that may happen, is happening, or has happened generates an opportunity for personal growth. One may choose then to dwell in the positive end of the spectrum opposite to the victim pole even though in reality one is constantly fluctuating back and forth along the continuum. Simplistically, if one is aware of being negative, one has the choice to be positive. Awareness permits choice; choice permits not only determining one's reaction or behavior, but also the opportunity for personal growth.

I believe that the construct of choice theory is in alignment with many of the elements of positive psychology interventions, and that personal growth after traumatization can happen when cognitive thinking and acceptance of accountability have been transformed into concrete actions. In this way, self-awareness, choice theory, and personal accountability may be additional complementary elements of a self-care program that may counteract some of the effects of VT.

### **Positive Psychology**

According to Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005), positive psychology is the scientific research-based study of human flourishing by discovering what makes life most worth living. It uses an applied prescriptive approach to optimal human functioning

through personal growth, i.e. the development and enhancement of self and encompasses broadly the study of “positive emotions,” “positive character strengths,” and “enabling institutions” (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008). Positive psychology seeks to discover what is right with individuals as well as what is going wrong. Although it focuses on building strengths and wellness rather than on remedying weakness and pathology, researchers are currently seeking to understand both happiness and suffering, their interactions, and to validate through research interventions that minimize suffering and maximize happiness (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Seligman et al., 2005).

Positive psychology has its roots founded in the works of humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow who both strove to understand the full range of the human experience. They recognized that applying the medical model was restrictive in that, although it provided benefit to the client at the same time could prove to be detrimental to the client in a different aspect (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Within the medical model, the full experience of humans is dichotomized into negative and positive elements with the traditional focus being on resolving one’s problems in life through interventions focused primarily on the negative.

Rogers and Maslow presented an alternate paradigm to the medical model that theorized that people are “intrinsically motivated towards development, growth, and socially constructive behavior” (Joseph & Linley, 2006, p. 333). Viewing the human experience in a unitary sense with both negative and positive experiences lying on opposing sides of a continuum brought validity to the hypothesis that decreasing the negative affects increased positive affects, and the counter-intuitive hypothesis that increasing positive affects would decrease negative ones.



According to Peterson (2006), positive psychology has three major foci: positive subjective states such as happiness, positive traits such as character strengths, and positive institutions such as schools or businesses. Applying the practical applications that are embodied in the “toolbox” of positive psychotherapy across all domains of life is relevant to everyday people independent of race, culture, gender, age, social or economic standing, or any other demographic. Current research in the field of positive psychology indicates that utilizing strengths and mining positivity in the business, educational, organizational, coaching, and therapy domains results in larger gains than by concentrating on resolving problems (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2003; Seligman, Veraul, & Kang, 2001; Staats, Hupp, & Hagley, 2008).

### **Positive States**

It is my understanding that positive states of being can be defined as those times that “we are one with all things” and are totally “into” what we are doing without thought to time, effort, or reward. I believe that by creating and maintaining a self-care program, counselling students/trainees have an increased likelihood of enjoying such states more often. Examples of such states are flow, joy, and savouring and I believe that when we become “centered on self” and self-reflect to the point where we are self-aware, we may have more opportunity to experience positive states of being.

**Flow.** The model of flow is centered in the experience of self, as opposed to being motivated by external stimuli providing future reward, and its value lies in doing something for its own sake. Defined by Csikszentmihalyis and Csikszentmihalyis (1998), flow is a state in which “all the contents of consciousness are in harmony with each other, and with the goals that define a person’s self. These states are the subjective conditions

we call pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, and enjoyment” (p. 24). The state of flow is one of self-challenge, self-absorption, self-enjoyment, and the fulfillment of goals of and for self. The choices one makes between alternatives either satisfies the goals of the self (the state of flow), or satisfies the genetic/cultural goals learned through evolution.

During flow, one frequently loses the sense of time, one believes that the outcome of the activity is under one’s control, and the motivation for continuance or repetition is enjoyment. Flow is related to personal well-being in that it is centered within the self; it maintains a harmonious state of consciousness and involves skills and knowledge. Flow as an experience of enjoyment associated with personal growth, as an enhancement of ego strengths, and as the fulfillment of intrinsic needs plays an important role in establishing one’s positive subjective state.

**Joy.** Individually subjective, the state of joy usually arises in contexts appraised as secure, safe, and familiar, and is frequently accompanied by physical components such as a flushed face, alertness, laughter, and a sense of bodily well-being. Joy is defined as the high arousal positive emotion of aliveness, or the communication of being alive, in the psychological sense (Fredrickson, 1998). Joy can at times be a tonic for restoring emotional wellness. Joy may reach its highest level during the process of becoming human. The process of transcendence through self-actualization provides a multitude of the feelings delineated under the domain of joy. I can testify that the sense of inner-pride (intrinsic joy) associated with the various facets of personal growth is just as satiating, sustainable, and long lasting as the enjoyment derived during play.

**Savouring.** It is evidentiary that both thoughts and behaviors are elicited before, during, and after partaking in a positive experience. Savouring, derived from the Latin



word “sapere” or “to taste,” is the process of being aware of, attentive to, and actively appreciative of these subjective experiences. Bryant and Veroff (2007) defined savouring as the capacity to attend to, appreciate, and enhance the positive experiences of one’s life. While not an emotion itself, savouring deals with positive emotions and feelings and the cognitive recognition and reflective discernment of these emotions and feelings.

Bryant and Veroff (2007) also speculated that savouring, as related to Fredrickson’s (1998) broaden-and-build theory may be the motivating state to enhance one’s cognitive repertoire under the conditions of a positive emotional event. Savouring may be reflection with respect to memories (the past), an occurring event (the present), or an anticipation (the future) but in all cases deals with the enjoyment and lengthening of the positive experience.

In their recent study of the progress of positive psychology, Seligman et al., (2005) proposed that the enhancement of positive subjective states lies in three distinct but interrelated routes: the “meaningful life” or meaning, the “engaged life” or engagement, and the “pleasant life” or positive emotions. While in agreement, I believe that attaining meaning and engagement in life are the precursors to truly attaining a pleasant life.

### **Enhancing Positive States**

**The meaningful life.** Seligman et al., (2006) proposed the meaningful life as a route to enhancing positive subjective states and posit that it is accomplished by believing in something bigger than the self and utilizing one’s “Signature Strengths” and talents to serve that belief. In their exploration of what makes the good life possible, and what is right about people, Peterson and Seligman (2004) concluded that virtues are indicative of

moral excellence in the way people lead their lives and the central characteristics of these virtues have been valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers throughout history. Positive institutions such as community, family, country, religion, or politics are in abundance. Each institution may provide the means to achieve a meaning in one's life that transcends merely benefits to the self, but validates positive emotional responses through a benefit provided to a greater purpose.

**The engaged life.** A second route proposed by Seligman and his colleagues (2006) as a means to enhancing positive subjective states is that achieved through the "engaged life." This portrays a life filled with joy and excitement sustained by involvement and absorption in one's work and relationships bolstered by one's creativity. Seligman and colleagues also suggested that further increased involvement in activities closely aligned with one's signature strengths promotes the engaged life.

It is through the existence of the conscious self or consciousness that permits one to choose to transform physiological processes of an instinctual nature into positive subjective experiences representing goals of the self (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi have constructed consciousness into three components of attention (which makes one alert to information), awareness (which interprets the information), and memory (which stores the information for recall). They further expand this construct into psychic entropy and negentropy states in which the conscious mind is making decisions between what genetics and culture tell us we should do and what the self wants to do. The choices one makes between alternatives either satisfies the goals of the self, which is the state of flow, or satisfies the



genetic/cultural goals learned through evolution. When absorption in these subjective experiences reaches an intense level, the state of flow is usually experienced.

**The pleasant life.** The third route that Seligman et al. (2006) proposed as a means to enhancing positive subjective states is the construct of the “pleasant life” entrenched in the heightened degree of positive emotions with respect to the past, the present, and the future, and the learned skills associated with increasing their intensity and duration. Satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride, and serenity are all positive emotions reflective of the past. Satisfaction derived from immediate pleasures is positive emotions occurring in the present. Hope, optimism, faith, trust, and confidence are all positive emotions utilized to define a future state.

Frequently, many of these emotions are viewed from their mirror-image negative state during the course of negative interventions aimed at resolving existing problems. Traditionally, therapy focusing on overcoming negativism is aimed ultimately at increasing the intensity of positive emotions through the modulation of the negative. Positive psychotherapy however aims its focus directly on accentuating and heightening the positive emotions as the mechanism for decreasing negativism.

### **Positive Emotions**

Positive emotions result from experiencing positive effect and thereby often precipitate a continuation of engagement of that particular event or situation (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Emotions can be thought of as contagious energy in motion being the displays of one’s feelings to any particular event or situation. They are symbols of the state of mind communicating knowledge of feelings to the self and others. They bring about understanding, both internally and externally, through their connection to

people and the real world. Negative emotions help us to survive; positive emotions help us to thrive. Negative emotions are feelings of exclusion and are motivated by fear and control. For example, we may feel fear and apprehension when our safety is threatened and our fright and flight response has been activated. Positive emotions, which are few in number and diffuse in nature, are feelings of inclusion and are generally motivated by the wants of enjoyment and unity. When we feel validated and/or our efforts are appreciated, we may feel more confident and experience positive emotions.

Fredrickson (1998, 2001) and Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, and Larkin, (2003) in Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build" theory contended that negative emotions initiate specific action tendencies such as fear evokes flight and anger evokes aggression, while at the same time restricting one's thought-actions. Contrarily, positive emotions expand the attention focus often demonstrated in flow, increasing cognitive and intellectual processes by enlarging one's expert knowledge and intellectual complexity as well as enhancing action responses.

Contributing to the development of one's physical resource (physique, physical skills, health, and longevity), positive emotions also strengthen social resources through alliances, friendships, family, and social support networks, and bolster psychological resources such as resilience, optimism, and creativity. Postulating an "undoing hypothesis" that positive emotions act as an efficient countermeasure to the after affects of negative emotions, Fredrickson (1998) went on to suggest that by increasing the amount and level of positive emotions, the effect of negative emotions may be diminished or neutralized.



As counsellors, we need to embrace engaging in events that generate positive emotions and acknowledge the benefits. We can do this by embracing a new way of being, thereby enjoying the benefits of a PCSCP while modeling a healthy way of being for those we interact with on a daily basis. Therefore, I believe that by implementing components of positive psychology combined with self-awareness, personal responsibility, and a commitment to “doing” self-care, counselling students/trainees, and other helping professionals will not only arm themselves against the effects of VT but will also experience personal growth through positive psychotherapy.

### **Positive Psychotherapy**

Positive psychotherapy is founded in the belief that building and heightening positive emotional affects, utilizing primary character strengths, and confirming meaning of life, may be successful countermeasures to treat negativity. Leading positive psychology researchers, Seligman, Rashid, and Parks (2006) have validated positive psychotherapy as an effective treatment intervention in treating depression and have shown it may also prevent its reoccurrence. Given Seligman and colleagues’ findings, I posit the notion that when it comes to vicarious traumatization, positive psychotherapy can be useful in not only mitigating or minimizing the level to which one experiences VT and shorten its duration, but may also prevent it from occurring.

Similar to the “strengths-based” approach used in social work and other helping arenas, the underlying principle of positive psychotherapy is to look for what is working in an individual’s life, have them acknowledge their individual character strengths, reinforce these individual positive aspects, develop ways of doing it more often, and learn to enjoy the positive emotions accompanying the utilization. Simplistically, the goal of

positive psychotherapy is to keep the positive aspects of the clients' lives in the forefront of their minds, to teach behaviors that bring positive feedback from others, and to strengthen already existing positive aspects, rather than teaching the re-interpretation of negative aspects.

Positive psychotherapy was first utilized by Fordyce in the late 70s while researching a "happiness" intervention framed in the elements of actively being involved in the aspects of meaningful work, social and personal relationships, reasonable expectations of self and life, and the pursuit of being happy (Seligman et al., 2006). In 1999, Fava and colleagues subsequently developed a well-being intervention based on mastery of one's environment, enhancing positive relationships, acceptance of self, and maintaining meaning and purpose in life (Seligman et al., 2006). Frisch posited a quality of life intervention in 2006 founded on blending cognitive interventions with the outlook of a satisfying life (Seligman et al., 2006). Despite the modern negative connotation frequently given to being happy, in essence it merely implies the phenomenon of pleasant feelings including joy, excitement, engagement, enthusiasm, and peace.

**The "Values in Action" (VIA) classification.** In their recent publication, "Character Strengths and Virtues," Peterson and Seligman (2004) established the "Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths and Virtues" in order to provide psychologists with a universally accepted common language for discourse on ego strengths. The VIA classifies 24 character strengths within the domain of the six core virtues. In their quest to discover what makes the "good" life possible and what is "right" about people, Peterson and Seligman (2004) concluded that virtues, as central



characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers, portray moral excellence in people and the lives they lead.

**Core virtues.** Peterson and Seligman (2004) hypothesize that the virtues are broad categories epitomizing the apex of human behavior derived through consideration of what has been historically valued across time and cultures. Peterson and Seligman go on to suggest that the virtues are universal, timeless, and perhaps reflective of evolutionary characteristics required for the survival of the human species. As a way of connecting the virtues to the character strengths, I have included a definition of the virtue and listed the corresponding strengths.

***Wisdom and knowledge.*** First on the list of virtues is that of “Wisdom and Knowledge” defined as cognitive strengths portraying the gaining, retaining, and utilization of collected knowledge, which includes such character strengths as creativity, curiosity, judgment and open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective.

***Courage.*** Defined as the ability to summon emotional strength to overcome internal and/or external opposition, and adversity, Courage highlights such character strengths as bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest.

***Humanity.*** Defined as interpersonal skills and character strengths directed at the care of others, Humanity encompasses the capacity to love and be loved, kindness, and social intelligence.

***Justice.*** Defined as the willingness to serve for the betterment of community, Justice incorporates such concepts as teamwork, fairness, and leadership.

***Temperance.*** Defined as the avoidance of excesses of the self, temperance speaks to forgiveness and mercy, modesty and humility, prudence, and self-regulation.

***Transcendence.*** Rounding out the six virtues is that of “Transcendence,” and it is defined as the strengths that lend meaning to life through a belief in the human connection to something larger than the self and is exhibited by an appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness and spirituality.

Although I agree with Peterson and Seligman (2004) when they stated that there is a universality of virtues, I believe virtues tend to be experienced in an individualized manner. Although we all possess virtues, we “possess” different levels of each virtue; we display them differently, and deploy them at varying stages of lifespan development, and under differing conditions. I believe that by providing hands-on, action-oriented exercises that incorporate individual character strengths via the virtue in which it lies, the individual practitioner will more likely ‘buy-in’ to the relevance and value of a personalized self-care plan.

**Character strengths.** Character strengths define the virtues through psychological processes and mechanisms manifested by people in response to situational themes and events. “Character strengths are the bedrock of the human condition and that strength-congruent activity represents an important route to the psychological good life” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4). To be of ‘good character’ is to be recognized as having strength of character; having character strengths is the activity-based process of personal development over time and situations. A conscious dedication to develop, nurture, maintain, and enhance character strengths is the human function in the journey of living, and their attainment promotes intrinsic and extrinsic contentment which is the singular determinant of one living a good life.



Philosophers and psychologists have postulated the value of character strengths for many, many years. Aristotle believed that a life well lived, in accordance with particular character strengths, was a life of satisfaction. Erikson's epigenetic principle introduced the concept of eight sequential, invariant, and hierarchical ego virtues (or ego strengths) being developed as a result of balancing opposing dispositions during the stages of psychosocial crises. This implies that character is built on adversity and how one reacts to adversity determines one's character (Boeree, 2006).

Markstrom and Marshall (2005) developed a system for the measurement of the individual ego strengths, as well as providing an overall score as an indicator of one's psychosocial health and maturity. The self-report Psychosocial Inventory of Ego Strengths (PIES) was administered in several studies by Markstrom, Sabino, Turner, and Berman (1997) confirming its validity, reliability, and utility to measure psychosocial maturity. The studies supported the belief that higher scores in ego strengths are reflected in identity achievement, self-esteem, and internal locus of control, empathy, and positive coping.

***Character strengths associated with the core virtue of wisdom and knowledge.***

*Creativity (originality; ingenuity).* The process of using one's cognitive abilities and/or physical talents aimed at positively enhancing the lives of self and others, creativity is unbounded in the domains to which it is applied. Creative people use their cognitive abilities to conceptualize original and imaginative methods of discovery in all fields of endeavor from science to everyday problem solving. Creative people use their talents in innovative and self-satisfying artistic expression or for devising unique ways of doing mundane tasks. As one of the character strengths, creativity can be applied to all

facets of life for the positive betterment of mankind (extrinsic reasons) or the satisfaction and growth of self (intrinsic reasons).

*Curiosity (interest; novelty seeking; openness to experience).* Curiosity is a process of self-motivation aimed at discovery of ongoing experiences in one's daily life. It is the willingness to pursue areas of interest or challenge which are founded in the gaining of knowledge or in novelty seeking. Curiosity is the catalyst between openness to experience and discovering the boundary of human knowledge. Curiosity is not only self-regulating but is a positive influence on self-esteem, confidence of competency, and sense of mastery. As one of the character strengths, curiosity serves to stave off boredom and apathy.

*Open-mindedness (judgment; critical thinking).* The cognitive ability to critically "think things through" by fully considering all the implications and ramifications of a situation, open-mindedness involves the recognition, examination, and unbiased weighing of factors on all sides when considering a decision. Frequently it requires the self-regulation to look beyond one's beliefs and goals, and to be prepared to alter one's opinion when due consideration merits it. As one of the character strengths, open-mindedness permits one the attributes of broad comprehension and unbiased judgment.

*Love of learning.* The intrinsically driven enthusiastic pursuit of acquiring information, the love of learning expands one's knowledge or assists in attaining enhanced mastery of a topic or skill. The penchant for learning can be achieved formally or informally, singularly or in groups, cognitively and/or physically, and tends to be done systematically. Love of learning may be restricted to a single subject or may span several



areas at once. As one of the character strengths, love of learning allows one to negate the frustration and overcome the obstacles frequently encountered in leaning.

*Perspective (wisdom).* Often gained through experience, perspective allows one the ability to make sense of their daily life and the world they live in. People with perspective rely upon their heightened understanding of life to provide wise and rational counsel to their fellow human beings in order that they too may find a sense of meaning. As one of the character strengths, perspective allows self-recognition of one's merits and fallacies, a broader comprehension of meaning in one's life, and a firm commitment to making a positive contribution to society.

***Character strengths associated with the core virtue of courage.***

*Bravery (valor).* The internal fortitude to face challenges or threats in daily life, bravery has the potential to bring difficulty, harm, or pain to the self or others. It involves acting on or speaking up for what is right despite opposition or unpopularity. Bravery is the intrinsic urge to act voluntarily in assisting others with acknowledged disregard for the consequences or the extent of the adversity. As one of the character strengths, bravery allows individuals to place morality and higher purpose at the apex of importance.

*Persistence (perseverance; industriousness).* Individuals who display the mental dedication to persevere in their endeavors until they finish what they start despite the obstacles and setbacks encountered are considered persistent. These individuals are industriously fastidious in the pursuit of their goals and are staunch in their dedication, firm in their patience, and unwavering in their focus. As one of the character strengths, persistence is the fuel that feeds the engine of dedicated striving to succeed.

*Integrity (authenticity; honesty).* People with integrity are those who not only hold honesty, sincerity, and genuineness as a pattern of daily living, but also infallibly exhibit themselves in this manner. They hold themselves accountable for their own thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions and are vigilant to ensure that they do not misrepresent or mislead through their actions or omissions. They maintain a sense of ownership of self, ownership of self-responsibility, and frequently display a sense of authentic wholeness in their lives. As one of the character strengths, integrity is often “self-placed” as the highest intrinsic value.

*Vitality (zest; enthusiasm; vigor; energy).* Residing in one’s zestful approach to the daily challenges of life vitality involves the self-determination to lead a life of excitement, adventure, and liveliness fueled by constant energy and a wanton desire to feel alive and activated. It is an enthusiastic commitment not to do things half-heartedly, but rather to embrace the adventure of being complete in both the mental and physical tribulations experienced each day. As one of the character strengths, vitality can be an irrepressible positive force in the task of daily living.

***Character strengths associated with the core virtue of humanity.***

*Love.* Those who make a conscious and directed effort to be close to others exhibit love, founded in the valuing of close relationships. The intensity of the closeness is most frequently found in relationships where caring and sharing are freely given and freely reciprocated. Love is thought to be without boundaries, not restricted to human closeness, and may be expressed in terms of romance, sex, companionship, or family. As one of the character strengths, love enables trust in others as well as providing the foundation for a sense of self-contentment.



*Kindness (generosity; nurturance; care; compassion; altruistic love; nice-ness).*

Kindness involves freely offering aid and assistance to others without the expectation of reciprocity or personal gain. These acts of good deeds display generosity, and are frequently grounded in care and compassion for one's fellow man. Favors to others may be driven by altruism or simply by a desire to nurture. Kindness to others embodies respect, disregard for relatedness or similarity, and on occasion emotional affection. As one of the character strengths, kindness may bring joy through the simple act of giving and helping.

*Social intelligence (emotional and personal intelligence).* Socially intelligent people are attuned to the emotions and feelings of others, perceptive to the goals and intentions of others, and adept at fostering inclusiveness of all in any situation. While aware of their own motivation and worth, socially intelligent people strive to instill in others a sense of comfort and of being valued within the group. As one of the character strengths, social intelligence enables one to foster healthy relationships.

***Character strengths associated with the core virtue of justice.***

*Citizenship (social responsibility; loyalty; teamwork).* When working within a group by working for the betterment of the entire group to achieve the common good and the common goal, citizenship results. Within the team or the community, loyalty to the organization and the cause, maintaining one's fair share of the work, and putting aside personal agendas embody acts of social responsibility. Personal sacrifice, obedience to authority, willingness to compromise, and accommodation of consensus are all features of good citizenship. As one of the character strengths, citizenship provides an individual with civic responsibility and social belonging.

*Fairness (equity; justice).* Treating everyone according to the universal ideals of equality and justice, fairness is demonstrated. In one's interactions with others, it requires the avoidance of personal bias, maintaining respect and compassion, a willingness to endorse the standards of morality and ethics, and an insistence that all parties interact in this manner. As one of the character strengths, fairness is applied equally throughout all levels of society.

*Leadership.* Leadership is the process of providing vision, direction, coaching, support, delegation, and motivation to a group of people to execute the tasks required to achieve a common goal. It requires skills in the area of organization, social interaction, providing critical feedback, and the ability to monitor and control progress, and apply corrective actions when remedy is required. Leaders get things efficiently done while maintaining team cohesion; leaders listen with empathy and understanding. As one of the character strengths, leadership provides the glue for social, business, community, and other groups.

***Character strengths associated with the core virtue of temperance.***

*Forgiveness and mercy.* Seen by some as a spiritual process with emotional-regulating properties, forgiveness may be utilized for enhancing positive subjective states. Forgiveness is intentional, outwardly directed, and involves a conscious choice of positivity by offering mercy instead of vengeance for transgressions committed against the self. It is displayed by offering a second chance, accepting the shortcomings, tempering feelings of revenge, and resisting the temptation to wallow in a victim mentality. As one of the character strengths, forgiveness allows one to put aside the self-destructive negativity associated with being wronged.



*Humility/Modesty.* Humility and modesty involve the self-regulation and maturity required to allow one's deeds and accomplishments to be recognized by others rather than by the self. Individuals with humility do not seek praise, do not seek the position of focus, and are receptive to advice and assistance from others. As one of the character strengths, humility/modesty allow the individual to be cognizant of one's limitations and fallibilities.

*Prudence.* Prudence resides in the consideration of choice of action to the consequences of that action. Prudent people self-regulate impulsive behavior, and what they say to avoid regrets at a later date. The tolerance of acceptable risk, consideration of short-term versus long-term benefits to future goals, and maintaining an intelligent and practical orientation to life are displays of prudence. As one of the character strengths, prudence brings logic, consideration, and control to the daily decisions of living.

*Self-regulation (self-control).* Self-regulation involves monitoring and controlling reactions to what one feels and does. Instinctive responses of impulsivity, flight, or aggression are negated by a conscious choice to abide by pre-conceived concepts of appropriate behavior. Being disciplined, controlling appetites and cravings, and initiating mechanisms to resist temptations are displays of self-control. As one of the character strengths, self-regulation allows steadiness and controlled reactions to the positive and negative effects of daily events.

***Character strengths associated with the core virtue of transcendence.***

*Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe; wonder; elevation).* Appreciation of beauty encompasses consciously noticing, savoring, and appreciating beauty in the world, the execution of skilled performances, and the excellence in one's endeavors. Finding

awe in all domains of life, seeking wonder in everyday events, and deriving pleasure inherent to virtue and morality are displays of appreciation. As one of the character strengths, appreciation of beauty allows one to marvel at the physical and spiritual beauty of human existence.

*Gratitude.* Awareness, contemplation, and expression of gratitude is the thankfulness one feels for what one has and for the good things that happen. Altruistic in nature, founded on empathy, and directed outwardly, gratitude usually precipitates a moral affect. It resides in the mindset of goodwill independent of reciprocal action. As one of the character strengths, gratitude is valued as a panacea for happiness, good health, enhanced social relationships, and mental calmness.

*Hope (optimism; future-mindedness; future orientation).* Hope is the perceived belief in the capacity to reach future goals through the utilization of pathways thinking (establishing the routes) and agency thinking (energetically using those routes). It engenders an expectation of a good future, and a confidence in working towards that future. As one of the character strengths, hope allows people to expect the best from themselves, others, and their future experiences.

*Humor (playfulness).* Humor involves bringing joy, laughter, and happiness to oneself and others. People enjoy smiling, laughing, teasing, and participating in playful response to adversity. Humor evokes the art of seeing the lighter side of life, striving to employ cheerfulness in overcoming obstacles, and injecting comic relief to combat stress. As one of the character strengths, humor allows individuals to maintain a playful and imaginative approach to life.



*Spirituality (religiousness; faith; purpose).* Spirituality reflects one's belief that there is a higher purpose to life, having faith in a meaning to the universe, and accepting one's place within the grander scheme. Spirituality may reside in religious belief and practice associated with formal communal organizations, or it may reside intrinsically as an individual and private exploration of meaning in one's life. As one of the character strengths, spirituality allows a sense of comfort when adversity occurs, an awareness and belief in the sacred as part of everyday life, and the experience of transcending beyond the self.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) characterized one's "Signature Strengths" as the top five character strengths that an individual possesses according to the results of the individual's VIA-IS survey. In a research paper comparing the cumulative results of 117,676 VIA-IS surveys between September 2002 and December 2003 of respondents from 54 nations in the world, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) found that "the rank order of self-attributed strengths of character was similar across all nations" (p. 125).

Canadian respondents (n = 9504) identified the following as their cumulative Signature Strengths (in order): fairness (Justice); judgment [open-mindedness] (Wisdom); curiosity (Wisdom); honesty [integrity] (Courage); and kindness (Humanity), (p. 121). It is curious to note that the character strengths in the virtue of Temperance (i.e. forgiveness/mercy, humility, prudence, and self-regulation) were almost all ranked in the 4<sup>th</sup> quartile indicating that these strengths were least valued by Canadian respondents. It will be interesting to see whether the cumulative results of the participants in the Workshop, assuming they are primarily helping professionals, will display the same pattern as the population in the referenced research paper.

I believe that a conscious dedication to develop, nurture, maintain, and enhance one's character strengths is the human function on the journey of personal growth and by doing so, intrinsic and extrinsic contentment achieved through a personalized self-care program is possible.



### Chapter Three – Foundational Perspectives

#### Spirituality

The term spirituality derived from the Latin “spiritus” literally translated means the breath of life (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). Contemporary researchers view spirituality in the context of a human belonging or connectedness of the self within the framework of a higher universal entity. The transcendent dimension of spirituality is characterized by freedom of self-expression, informal and deep-rooted feelings of attachment to something larger than self along with identifiable values with respect to life, nature, others, and self. Although Peterson and Seligman (2004) have identified spirituality as a character strength residing in the domain of transcendence, I believe spirituality to be a fundamental element to a holistic and well-balanced existence.

Spirituality is centered in the self, and autonomy of self is the single intrinsic motivator; religiousness is centered in institutions and organizations, and is based upon the externally authoritative ‘traditionally-centered’ doctrines of the worlds various religions. Spiritualists seek self-growth through an emotional self-fulfillment derived from identifying sacredness born of savoring ordinary objects and experiences within their daily lives. In their longitudinal research study, Wink and Dillon (2003) concluded that wisdom, engagement in creative life tasks, enhancement of knowledge, and a heightened well-being through personal growth were significantly correlated to spirituality.

Wisdom, one of the virtues as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), is exhibited by highly spiritual individuals through a complex cognition of the human journey which frequently results in their being valuable role models to the younger

generation. In summary, Wink and Dillon (2003) posit that spiritualists portray assertion, protection, and expansion of the self as an agentic mode of living.

In his book on alternative paths, Elkins (1998) defined spirituality as “a way of being and experiencing that which comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (p. 33).

Recent progress in the scientific study of spirituality has focused on associating specific spiritual emotions (those experienced when individuals imbue seemingly secular aspects of their lives), and emotional processes such as gratitude, awe, and reverence (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006).

### **Self-Care**

Counsellors, whether helping professionals or students/trainees, must pay adequate attention to themselves with respect to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Impairment of the counsellor often occurs when their concern for clients' issues leads to a minimizing or ignoring of their own needs. They must balance at least two life domains, i.e. personal and occupational, or personal and academic, and often must balance all three domains.

In simple terms, a personalized self-care program is an essential mechanism to attaining this balance by paying close and constant attention to one's physical, psychological, and social well-being in order to enjoy a healthy lifestyle (Badali & Habra, 2003; Neumann & Gamble, 1995). Of distressing concern, factors such as a lack of experience, a high workload, role demands, and a perceived or actual deficiency in



subject mastery may leave the counselling student/trainee in a position of increased susceptibility to the effects of VT (Badali & Habra, 2003).

Self-care programs are founded in the constructs of heightened self-awareness, critical self-reflection, and self-care activities (Spelliscy, 2009). Self-care programs traditionally encompass addressing five main areas of physical and psychological care of the self. Activities that concern the biological health of the body include eating a well-balanced diet; regular exercise, sleep, and sexual activity; routine and “when required” medical attention; time off for relaxation; and participation in a variety of activities that combine fitness and fun.

Activities that enhance an emotional balance and stability include loving, praising, and affirming yourself; seeking comfort with objects, people, or places; allowing yourself to be happy and laugh, or to be sad and cry; and spending time with those you enjoy or are important to you. Self-care for the spirit activities include singing and praying in a religious or non-religious context; taking time for reflection of yourself, nature, or your blessings; remaining optimistic and hopeful; and, finding a spiritual connection to a higher entity.

Activities that strengthen the psychological self are making time for self-reflection, paying heed to your intuitions, attitudes, feelings, and thoughts; seeing a counsellor or therapist when needed; and letting others be there for you. Lastly, and often overlooked, self-care in the workplace or professional sense includes activities such as taking time out for co-workers, visitors, or others in the workplace; balancing caseloads and setting limits with clients and colleagues; obtaining proper supervision,

consultation, or support groups; and, taking quiet time at work just for yourself. All of these traditional activities of self-care form a valued component of any self-care program.

### **Responsibility and Ethics**

Self-care should be a never-ending process incorporated into a counsellor's armor, and may be properly viewed through three related lenses of responsibility and ethics: the individuals, the educators, and the employers. In the field of counselling, self-care is not a singular individual choice; it is an ethical necessity, a moral imperative and professional requirement aimed at maintaining sustainable well-being.

**Individuals.** Each individual bears a responsibility for maintaining their own well-being and personal growth immaterial of life circumstances. To me, this seems part and parcel of the human journey. A counsellor bears the additional onus of maintaining functional and foundational competency in order to provide effective service to their clients. Amundson (2009) defined the functional domain of competency as "what we do specifically," whereas foundational is defined as "how we ought to think generically" (p. 6).

According to The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (CPA, 2000), psychologists adhering to the Principle of Responsible Caring would according to Section II.12 "Engage in self-care activities that help to avoid conditions (e.g. burnout, addictions) that could result in impaired judgment and interfere with their ability to benefit and not harm others" (p. 2). The American Psychological Association's (APA, 2002) Code of Ethics as well as the College of Alberta Standards of Practice (2005), are even more directive in a counsellor's responsibility wherein it stated under Standard 2.06 the clear implication that not knowing or knowing and not doing something about it are



no longer acceptable platforms of conduct and competency. The irony of counsellor self-care is that we tend to not practice what we preach.

**Educators.** Also bearing a share of the responsibility in contributing to a counsellor's self-care program are those who are doing the education of up and coming helping professionals. Section II.24 of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists states that psychologists would "Perform their teaching duties on the basis of careful preparation, so that their instruction is current and scholarly" (CPA, 2000, p. 18).

Perhaps educators should bear in mind the ethical obligation in being current and scholarly and have an awareness of how vital self-care is to their students and trainees. Going a few steps further, educators must first acknowledge the significance of a self-care program, develop and maintain their own and "walk the talk" before they speak to counselling students/trainees on the imperative nature of self-care as it has been proven time and again how important modeling is - be it in a personal or professional arena (Pilotte & Jackson, 2006).

**Employers.** Those who employ counsellors bear the same responsibility under the Codes of Ethics as if they were de facto counsellors themselves. Sections II.7, II.25, and IV.4 of the Ethics Code for Canadian Psychologists (CPA, 2000) delineated employer responsibilities with respect to job assignment and competency, professional development sponsorship, and the need to foster growth both on a personal and professional level. Employers must create an environment where self-care is not only valued for their employees, but is actively fostered in their employees. Employers must also recognize the individuality of self-care for their employees, and refrain from

initiating a “one size fits all” approach to fulfilling their ethic obligations and responsibilities.

I believe there is value in constructing one’s own PCSCP containing traditional activities that enhance the physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and workplace domains of self-care. However, utilizing positive psychology aspects as illustrated in the psycho-educational components and the Character Strength exercises presented in the Workshop will significantly strengthen a counsellor’s PCSCP. I believe that the combination of the traditional with my approach to personally customized self-care programs will provide a strategic defense to the prevention or mitigation of the effects of VT and may provide a fertile environment for personal growth.

### **Personal Growth**

Personal growth in its broadest sense has been defined as the development and enhancement of the self. Wagner, Forstmeier, and Maercker (2007) indicated that research studies have found positive aspects of personal growth in psychological health resulting from experiencing trauma, whereas other studies have indicated negative or inverse relationships between these factors. However, Wagner et al. (2007) concluded that posttraumatic growth is only possible when “growth cognitions are translated into growth actions” (p. 409). After performing a recent literature search, it became evident that correlating personal growth or posttraumatic growth with vicarious traumatization is somewhat uncharted waters in the field of scientific research.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) defined posttraumatic growth as the positive psychological changes that can occur following a traumatic event. These include changes in established cognitive aspects such as beliefs and goals, which can facilitate behavioral



changes. In their review of 39 studies of positive change following trauma and adversity, Linley and Joseph (2004) found that the prevalence rate for personal traumatic growth varied from a statistical low of 3% for bereaved persons to a statistical high of 98% for breast cancer survivors. They posit that this large difference was more dependent on “the characteristics of the subjective experience of the event, rather than the event itself” (p. 15).

In their study to characterize positive change processes resulting in personal traumatic growth, Woodward and Joseph (2003) identified three domains: an inner drive to live; psychological vehicles of change initiated by their interactions within their environment; and self-described psychological changes. Utilizing personal experience narratives of individuals who had suffered childhood abuse, they also hypothesized that personal traumatic growth is founded in the person experiencing the traumatic event, and not within the event itself.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) were able to measure the five major domains of personal traumatic growth, which are improved relationships with others in the context of intimacy, closeness, and meaning; an openness to new possibilities in one’s life; a greater appreciation of life through a recognition of what is truly important; an enhanced sense of personal strength; and spiritual development. Surprisingly, the psychological processes that enable positive growth are identical, and concomitant to those used to combat and adapt to negative disturbances.

Peterson, Park, Pole, D’Andrea, and Seligman (2008) then correlated various character strengths to the components of personal traumatic growth as identified by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004). Kindness and love relate to improved relationships with

others; curiosity, creativity, and love of learning relate to openness to new possibilities; appreciation of beauty, gratitude, and zest relate to greater appreciation of life; bravery, honesty, and perseverance relate to enhanced personal strength; and spirituality (and religiousness) relates to spiritual development.

Wink and Dillon (2003) have correlated spirituality to a heightened well-being through personal growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) measured five domains of personal traumatic growth which Peterson et al. (2008) positively correlate with various character strengths. The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (CPA, 2000), the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2002) Code of Ethics, and the College of Alberta Standards of Practice (2005) all require helping professionals to engage in self-care activities. Sommer (2008) has clearly stated that self-care ranks of highest importance in the professional practice of counselling.

Investing in a self-care program that may result in maintaining a healthy balance between personal, academic, and occupational life is of extreme importance for helping professionals. As a conclusion to this project, I have generated a workshop as a process that may assist those in the helping professions to develop their PCSCP.

The workshop, a convenient starting point for novice and experienced counsellors alike will introduce the concepts of positive psychology, positive psychotherapy, personal growth, personal traumatic growth, choice theory, personal accountability, and self-care. It will also present a series of hands-on practical activities as a way of introducing the concept of core virtues and character strengths and will provide a means for choosing exercises to experience the positive psychological benefits of positive psychology interventions that may be passed along to family members, co-workers, and clients.



Laying the foundation, whereby, the participant may begin to acknowledge the importance of self and take control of their self-care programs will also be introduced as tangential elements.

## Chapter Four – The Self-Care Workshop

It has become readily apparent from numerous discussions with colleagues, educators, and fellow students who were interested in what I was doing for my project that there is a definite need for such an offering in Prince George and surrounding areas. It is my hope to be able to deliver this workshop as a “special interest” topic within the Continuing Education programs offered at both the College of New Caledonia (CNC) and at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Eventually, I would like to develop the workshop into a university transfer course as I believe it will serve as an integral foundational piece for helping professionals, especially new students and trainees in either the social work or counselling fields of study to build a tool that may lead to prevention, mitigation, or at the very least, better prepare them for their chosen professions.

I will present a series of “hands-on, action-oriented” self-completing exercises based upon positive psychology constructs. The opportunity for “doing” as opposed to merely “learning” followed by group discussions on the potential benefit of incorporating each exercise into a customized self-care program will be a significant workshop component. The rationale for workshop content is to present a series of practical activities based upon maximizing the benefits of positive emotions, utilizing the constructs of “Core Virtues” and individual “Signature Character Strengths.”

Exploring occupational hazards such as countertransference, compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious traumatization will provide a focus for adopting a self-care program. Through the introduction of a group exercise, participants will be provided the opportunity to self-reflect, write down, and relate to fellow participants how vicarious



traumatization may be influencing their personal and professional well-being.

Introducing aspects of choice theory and personal accountability, positive psychology, positive psychotherapy, spirituality, self-reflection, and self-care will gently nudge participants towards self-awareness and responsibility of self, to self, and to others prompting participants to take the necessary actions to develop a self-care program that she/he will utilize.

### **Workshop Goals**

The primary goal of this workshop is for the participants to participate in formulating a customized self-care program that utilizes components from positive psychology and positive psychotherapy. A secondary goal is for participants to garner knowledge that may foster self-reflection to the point of self-awareness spurring them into taking the necessary actions to develop ideas, construct a program, and practice their customized self-care strategies.

Another goal is to inform participants on such occupational hazards as vicarious traumatization, burnout, compassion fatigue, etc. as well as choice theory and personal accountability, and spirituality. A final goal for this workshop is to provide an opportunity for the facilitator(s) to learn what works and what doesn't work in a workshop setting for helping professionals who are seeking to become more informed about their character strengths and personal resources.

### **Workshop Structure**

Two weeks prior to the start date of the workshop, participants will be directed to take the "Values in Action" Inventory of Strengths Survey (VIA-IS) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) accessed from the VIA website

(<http://www.viacharacter.org/VIASurvey/tabid/55/Default.aspx>) and after receiving their results (which are immediate), will be requested to forward them to the facilitator in order for a customization of materials to be presented during the workshop. From the participants' results, a histogram will be developed (see example in Appendix E, p. 105) depicting the Signature Strengths of the entire group. Based upon the histogram, the facilitator will select certain PowerPoint slides that correspond with the Core Virtues and Signature Strengths in order of frequency. The "hands-on, action oriented" exercise slides will also be selected to correspond with the groups Signature Strengths. The psycho-educational components will be chosen with a focus on how much time, group knowledge base, and pertinence to the participants' Signature Strengths.

The workshop for developing a "Personally Customized Self-Care Programs (PCSCP)" will consist of five 3.0 hour sessions offered to individuals interested in creating their own unique self-care program. Seminar groups will consist of 8 to 10 participants and 1 or 2 workshop facilitators. The general format of the workshop will be mostly discussion-based and the facilitator(s) will provide psycho-educational material introduced through a slideshow presentation and handouts at the beginning of each session.

Participants will receive worksheets at the beginning of each session that will have a description of the week's homework exercise and space for recording various aspects of their experience with the exercise they chose to utilize. The worksheet will serve as a tool to prepare participants for the "in-session" discussions. In each session, participants will be invited to share their homework experiences and to explore how it might be beneficial (or not) to include the exercise in their personalized self-care plan.



Participants will also receive printed copies of the slides so that they may write down thoughts or questions during the presentation which will be addressed after the presentation and that would serve as a helpful resource after the workshop is completed.

**Venue.** I might inquire at the College of New Caledonia (CNC), University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and the Community Care Centre (CCC) as appropriate venues as well as the Secondary Schools as prospective consumers.

**Advertising.** I plan on marketing this workshop through my existing company “Wordtech 2000” or through a new enterprise being contemplated and will create an interest list by disseminating the workshop information through targeted emails, brochures, leaflets and by handing out business cards via networking opportunities.

**Cost.** It will depend on venue availability, equipment and supplies required, and number of participants registered. As a pilot, I might look at it being done as a free community service so as to launch the workshop and to garner feedback as how to improve on its content and delivery.

**Participants.** I propose that the participants will be those individuals who are currently working in a helping profession, students studying in social work and counselling fields, educators, as well as agency people working for institutions looking to support their employees and to minimize staff turnover.

**Prerequisites.** While no formal prerequisites currently exist, initially the Workshop will be offered to helping professionals and student/trainees who are presently associated within either an academic or occupational setting. The rationale for this lies in the following reasons.

First, the success of the assignments depends somewhat on the maturity level of the participants with respect to self-reflection and self-awareness. Their eagerness to further self-reflect as a vehicle for heightened self-awareness would be beneficial. Secondly, participants who view revealing their lived experiences as a means of becoming more informed as to their character and their innate strengths are more likely to seek the opportunities for enhanced personal growth through a personally customized self-care program.

Thirdly, participants with previous exposure to the concepts of core virtues and character strengths, an understanding of the equality of character strengths irrespective of which core virtue they fall under, and the insight and knowledge to respect the individual VIA-IS results as non-judgmental and non-comparative between participants should stand to maximize their benefit from the Workshop. Lastly, the training course is in its infancy, being a brand-new first time offering, and it is felt by the author (and facilitator) that honing and refining the Workshop content and delivery may best be achieved with the aforementioned target audience.

### **Workshop Evaluation**

Evaluation forms will be distributed at the end of the fifth session so that participants can indicate if their needs were met, what they saw as most valuable and least valuable, and what comments and/or recommendations they might have for future offerings.



**Session One Format: (Approximately 180 minutes)****Objective**

The objective of this session is to introduce the participants to the constructs of vicarious traumatization, and on core virtues, character strengths, and signature strengths. The connection between these subjects as demonstrated through the learning exercises will be established.

The objective will be accomplished in the following steps:

1. Complete the participant introductions.
2. Provide an outline of workshop structure and its goals.
3. Co-create and establish learning group norms.
4. Conduct the Icebreaker exercise of reflective narratives by the participants.
5. Elaborate on VIA-IS Survey and present the group's results through the histogram.
6. Introduce the constructs of vicarious traumatization, countertransference, compassion fatigue, and burnout.
7. Engage in facilitated discussion "connecting the dots" with the potential for an influence of VT on the personal and professional lives of the participants.
8. Introduce the top core virtue according to the histogram and its corresponding signature strengths.
9. Brainstorm/Create/Choose personalized self-care exercises and establish the expectations for the homework exercise.

**Introductions (15 minutes)**

- Participants will be welcomed to the workshop; facilitator(s) will introduce her/himself and participants will be invited to introduce themselves and to provide a bit of information about their background, why they signed up and what did they hope to get from attending the workshop.

**Overview (10 minutes)**

- Via a slide presentation, the participants will be given the workshop curriculum that will outline the delivery format, an introduction of the concepts to be presented and discussed, as well as the goals of the workshop.
- At the beginning of each session, worksheets will be handed out that will outline the specific “in-session” exercise so that participants will have the opportunity to write down and reflect upon what they would like to contribute. These worksheets will contain information on the core virtue and character strengths taken from the group’s histogram, and a cursory amount of information pertaining to the psycho-educational pieces chosen for discussion in that particular session.
- Group norms such as attendance, confidentiality, respectful communication, break times, and the need for positive regard and cultural sensitivity will be discussed.

**Icebreaker – Positive Introductions (75 minutes)**

- Time will be spent on getting to know each other by way of “positive introductions” wherein each participant will tell a story about themselves.



This reflective narrative will have a beginning, middle, and an end illustrating what they see as their best attribute.

- Facilitator will begin telling her/his story as an example of what is being sought and how it might be framed.
- Each participant will be given approximately 5 – 10 minutes to generate ideas and write down if desired what they plan on saying. Stories will be elicited from each participant and another 3 – 5 minutes will be given for them to relay what it is they wanted the rest of the group to know.
- Discussion as to what that exercise felt like for them and what difficulties they may have had in developing their story.

#### **Break (15 minutes)**

#### **Psycho-Educational Component (30 minutes)**

- This session will begin with a discussion on what the participants thought about the VIA-IS questionnaire they completed prior to attending the workshop. Any questions, comments, or concerns will be addressed.
- The group histogram will be presented and explained
- A brief introduction to the concepts of vicarious traumatization, countertransference, compassion fatigue, and burnout will be presented via a slideshow.

#### **In-Session Exercise (20 minutes)**

- This component of the workshop will begin the self-reflection piece whereby participants will explore how vicarious traumatization may be affecting their personal and professional lives. They will also be asked for their definition of

self-care; asked whom do they see as responsible; what, if any, significance does self-care play in their personal and professional lives; how they are currently practicing self-care; and, what are some of the barriers that they have experienced in the past that do not allow for them to adhere to their self-care program.

- Introduction to the top core virtue according to the histogram (referred to as Core Virtue #1) and corresponding signature strengths will be presented and this will be done according to the group histogram results via slideshow presentation and handouts.

#### **Homework Assignment (10 minutes)**

- The first session will end with a homework assignment that will invite participants to choose two or three exercises for Core Virtue #1 and for their specific signature strengths. They may choose to create exercises that will fit for their particular circumstance whereby they can practice their strength, acknowledge how it feels for them, and take note of how it affected them and any others who were involved.
- Participants will be invited to use one or more of their strengths each day in a way that they had not done so before. This can be achieved by one of three ways: by choosing from exercises presented, modifying something that they already do on a regular basis, or by creating a new activity.

#### **Questions and Comments (5 minutes)**



**Session Two Format: (Approximately 180 minutes)****Objective**

The objective of this session is to reinforce the participants' understanding of their individual signature strengths and to make the connection between enhanced use of these strengths and the potential to stave off or to mitigate the effects of vicarious traumatization. A further exploration of the interconnection between VT and choice theory, personal accountability, personal growth, and self-care will be made.

This objective will be accomplished in the following steps:

1. Group discussion of homework assignment with emphasis on signature strengths.
2. Provide further discussion on the subject of VT, countertransference, compassion fatigue, and burnout and introduce the constructs of positive psychology, positive psychotherapy, choice theory, personal accountability, personal growth, and self-care.
3. Introduce the next two highest ranking core virtues and their signature strengths as shown in the histogram.
4. Engage participants in creatively displaying their feelings by doing a collage in groups or individually.
5. Brainstorm/Create/Choose new exercises for homework assignment.

**Welcome Back (10 minutes)**

- Participants will be welcomed and thanked for coming. Questions, comments, or concerns about the homework assignment or any of the information presented thus far will be addressed at this point.

**Homework Review (90 minutes)**

- As a means of demonstrating for the participants what is being requested, the Facilitator(s) will begin this portion with sharing her/his signature strength, under what core virtue it falls, and what exercise(s) they chose to perform to utilize the strength and to share her/his experience. (Note: Facilitators will have prepared this in advance for Core Virtue #1 as if they were one of the participants.)
- Participants will then be invited to speak about one of their signature strengths, the exercises they chose to utilize that particular character strength and share their experience with the group. They will be asked to briefly discuss what worked for them, what did not, how they felt when they were performing their chosen exercise and would they see that exercise as a positive addition to their personally customized self-care program.
- Each participant will be given approximately 5 – 10 minutes to generate ideas and write down if desired what they plan on saying. Stories will be elicited from each participant and another 3 – 5 minutes will be given for them to relay what it is they wanted the rest of the group to know.
- Discussions as to what that exercise felt like for them and what difficulties they may have had in developing their story will round out the homework review.

**Break (15 minutes)**



**Psycho-Educational Component (30 minutes)**

- Sessions will include brief overviews of such concepts as vicarious traumatization, countertransference, compassion fatigue, burnout, positive psychology, positive psychotherapy, choice theory and personal accountability, personal growth, and self-care.
- Introduction to the next two highest ranking core virtues (referred to as Core Virtues #2 and #3) and the corresponding signature strengths will be presented according to the group histogram results via a slideshow and handouts.

**In-Session Exercise (20 minutes)**

- Participants will be broken into dyads wherein each person will have an opportunity to discuss a particular situation where they were pleased with how they reacted to a challenging situation and what feelings were stirred for them. Then they would be invited to discuss a challenging situation where they were not pleased with how they reacted and then each participant would be invited to explore how they might have done things differently.

**Homework Assignment (10 minutes)**

- The session will end with the homework assignment inviting participants to choose two or three exercises as presented for Core Virtues #2 and #3 and their own specific signature strength(s). Again, they may choose to create exercises that will fit for their particular circumstance whereby they can practice their strength, acknowledge how it feels for them, take note on their worksheets of how it affected them and what they observed of others involved.

- Participants will be invited to use one or more of their strengths each day in a way that they had not done so before. This can be achieved by modifying something that they already do on a regular basis or by creating a new activity.

### **Questions and Comments (5 minutes)**

### **Session Three Format: (Approximately 180 minutes)**

#### **Objective**

The objective for this session is to further establish the connection between the psycho-educational components and the mitigation of the effects of vicarious traumatization. This objective will be accomplished in the following steps:

1. Group discussion of homework assignment with emphasis on signature strengths.
2. Provide further discussion on the psycho-educational concepts previously introduced, and relate the possible connection to the effects of vicarious traumatization.
3. Introduce the next two highest ranking core virtues and their signature strengths as shown in the histogram.
4. Brainstorm/Create/Choose new exercises for homework assignment.

Session Three will be a duplicate of Session Two with these exceptions:

- The Facilitator will not be required to give a demonstration for the participants.
- The Homework review will discuss Core Virtues #2 and #3 assignments.
- The psycho-educational component will introduce Core Virtues #4 and #5.



- The homework assignment will be on Core Virtues #4 and #5.

#### **Session Four: (Approximately 180 minutes)**

##### **Objective**

The objective of this session will be to establish the relationship between the self and self-care with respect to an individual program of self-care and how it may be used as a defense against the effects of VT.

The objective will be accomplished in the following steps:

1. Participants will team up with someone they have not worked with before and discuss homework assignment.
2. Discussions of choice theory, “Personally Accountable Persons,” spirituality, and self-awareness will explore these concepts and relate possible connections to the effects of vicarious traumatization.
3. Participants will be invited to journal or to pair up with someone to discuss their sense of purpose and meaning in life (to the point to which they are comfortable in sharing).
4. Introduce the last highest ranking core virtue and its signature strengths as shown in the histogram.
5. Brainstorm/Create/Choose new exercises for homework assignment.

Session Four will be a duplicate of Session Three with these exceptions:

- The homework review will discuss Core Virtues #4 and #5 assignments.
- The psycho-educational component will introduce Core Virtue #6.
- The homework assignment will be on Core Virtue #6.

**Session Five Format: (180 minutes)****Objective**

The objective of this final session will be to complete discussion on the final exercise and to assist the participants in the beginnings of formulating their own self-care program utilizing the constructs of positivity learned through the exercises.

The objective will be accomplished through the following steps:

1. Facilitate group discussion of homework assignment.
2. Revisit vicarious traumatization, personal responsibility, and the connections between and among them with respect to a well-balanced personal and professional life.
3. Have participants build their own “personally customized self-care plan” incorporating the self-care exercises offered, things they are already doing, and any new exercises created during the workshop using the worksheets provided.
4. Provide feedback form to participants.
5. Wrap up and closure.

**Welcome Back (10 minutes)**

- Participants will be welcomed and thanked for coming. Questions, comments, or concerns will be addressed at this point.

**Homework Review (50 minutes)**

- Participants will be invited to speak about their signature character strengths in Core Virtue #6 and to share their experiences in utilizing their specific signature strength(s). Questions to be answered would be similar to what



worked for them, what did not, how they felt when they were performing their chosen exercise and asked if they see that particular exercise as a positive addition to their personally customized self-care program.

- Each participant will be given approximately 5 – 10 minutes to generate ideas and write down if desired what they plan on saying. Stories will be elicited from each participant and another 3 – 5 minutes will be given for them to relay what it is they wanted the rest of the group to know.
- Discussions as to what that exercise felt like for them and what difficulties they may have had in developing their story will round out the homework review.

#### **Break (15 minutes)**

#### **Psycho-Educational Component (20 minutes)**

- This session will include any concepts not previously discussed.
- Participants will be asked to share their thoughts and invited to ask questions about the psycho-educational components of the workshop.

#### **Self-Care Program Worksheet (60 minutes)**

- A Self-Care Program Worksheet will be circulated to each of the participants to be used as a guide to generate a customized and personalized self-care program. The facilitator will review the generic components of a self-care program, review examples of various types of components that might be incorporated, and assist individuals during the working session on development of their individual self-care program. This session may be

broken up into segments where the entire group or smaller groups work together for part of the brainstorming.

### **Wrap Up (25 minutes)**

- Evaluation forms will be distributed at the end of the session so that participants can indicate if their needs were met, what they saw as most valuable and least valuable, and what comments and/or recommendations they might have for future offerings (see Appendix F).

### **Questions and Comments**

- Last minute questions and/or comments from participants will be welcomed.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project is to provide counselling student/trainees and other helping professionals at various stages of their careers with a process that would be beneficial in preventing and/or mitigating the effects of VT while allowing for the possibility and providing the opportunity for personal growth. The process, based on the ability of individuals to generate a self-care program is integral to the construct of personal growth.

I believe that each helping professional should invest time and energy to construct, initiate, and maintain a personally customized self-care plan (PCSCP) utilizing the elements of the constructs touched upon in this paper. Shifting the current paradigm, in which it is thought that a self-care program is a “nice to have but not critical to the mental and emotional health of helping professionals” (Pilotte & Jackson, 2006, p. 4) is the initial and necessary step that each helping professional must take as a precursor to the actual work of generating a self-care plan.



By creating their own self-care plan and by participating in educational opportunities on what VT is and is not, helping professionals will have developed the knowledge base to recognize and accept the onset of VT symptoms in themselves and others, to recognize its influence on client-counsellor interactions, and to work towards mitigating its effects. By promoting the investment in prevention strategies to provide protective buffers, and by the acceptance of a diagnosis as an occupational hazard, helping professionals may transcend personal growth beyond mere recovery to awareness of self that will benefit them in their lived experience.

The project is not intended to replace current interventions utilized to prevent, mitigate, and reduce the effects of VT, but rather as a compliment to existing modes of prevention, intervention, and individualized self-care programs.

## **Appendix A – Core Virtues**

### **Workshop Handout**

Peterson and Seligman (2004) hypothesized that virtues are broad categories epitomizing the apex of human behavior. The six core virtues were derived through consideration of what has been consistently and historically valued across time and cultures. The views of religious thinkers and moral philosophers through the ages were a primary source. They suggest that virtues are universal, timeless, and perhaps reflective of evolutionary biological characteristics required for the survival of the human species. There are supporters who advocate that one must possess all of the virtues at a sufficiently high level to qualify as having “good character.”

#### **Wisdom**

Wisdom is defined by the cognitive strengths portraying the gaining, retaining, and utilization of collected knowledge. Wise individuals, having fought the hard battles of experience to acquire this collected knowledge, tend to be dedicated to its use for the betterment of mankind. Frequently labeled the “noble intelligence,” its application generates appreciation rather than resentment. Wisdom is considered in philosophy as the chief virtue that permits the other virtues to exist.

#### **Courage**

Courage, defined as having the strength or fortitude to surmount fear whether internally or externally generated, is the ability to summon emotional strength to overcome intrinsic or extrinsic opposition and adversity. In the physical aspect, observable acts such as saving others or oneself despite the fear of pain, injury, or death is to be courageous. Being morally courageous implies cognitively maintaining



authenticity of self and being motivated towards ethical integrity when counteracting dilemmas that have the potential to result in personal loss. Positivity, when dealing with debilitating sickness or overcoming a destructive habit is displayed by those who possess psychological courage. Courage is about doing what is right.

### **Humanity**

Humanity is defined as utilizing interpersonal skills and character strengths directed at the care and concern of others. Altruistic and pro-social, acts of generosity, kindness, or benevolence are performed without the expectation of reciprocity. The social benefits of humanity tend to be among groups in a one-to-one manner. Individuals, who are empathic and sympathetic, have dispositions to tend and befriend, and who rely on doing more than what is fair are ambassadors of humanity.

### **Justice**

Justice is defined as maintaining a willingness to serve for the betterment of the community. The social benefits of humanity tend to be between groups in a one-to-many manner. Founded in the construct of equity rather than equality, just individuals posit that the merit of reward is commensurate with contribution, and people ultimately get what they justly deserve.

### **Temperance**

Temperance is defined as strengths that protect against excess of the self. Self-restraining and self-denying, acts of temperance tend to be preventive measures that protect the self from negative emotions such as hatred, immodesty, and arrogance. The ability to monitor and self-control one's wants and desires temper the excesses of one's

emotional, physical, and mental appetite. Striving for temperance endorses the desire for balance and harmony in one's life.

**Transcendence**

Transcendence is defined as the strengths that lend meaning and purpose to life through a belief in the human connection to something larger than the self.

Transcendental traits extend both beyond the self and beyond the range of human knowledge, forging a spiritual connection to a larger universe. Whether sought out through formalized religious organizations or explored in an individual spiritualistic manner, one's transcendence journey surpasses materialism and association with others to the sacred or divine aspects of life.



## **Appendix B – Character Strengths**

### **Workshop Handout**

Core Virtue: **WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE** – cognitive strengths portraying the gaining, retaining, and utilization of collected knowledge

#### **Character Strengths**

1. **CREATIVITY (ORIGINALITY; INGENUITY).**

Creativity is the process of using one's cognitive abilities and/or physical talents aimed at positively enhancing the lives of self and others. Creativity is unbounded in the domains to which it is applied. Creative people use their cognitive abilities to conceptualize original and imaginative methods of discovery in all fields of endeavor from science to everyday problem solving. Creative people use their physical talents in innovative and self-satisfying artistic expressions or to devise more productive ways of doing tasks. As one of the character strengths, creativity can be applied to all facets of life for the positive betterment of mankind (extrinsic reasons) or the satisfaction and growth of self (intrinsic reasons).

2. **CURIOSITY (INTEREST; NOVELTY-SEEKING; OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE).**

Curiosity is a process of self-motivation aimed at discovery of ongoing experiences in one's daily life. It is the willingness to pursue areas of interest or challenge which are founded in the gaining of knowledge or in novelty seeking. Curiosity is the catalyst between openness to experience and discovering the boundary of human knowledge. Curiosity is not only self-regulating but is a positive influence on self-esteem, confidence of competency, and sense of

mastery. As one of the character strengths, curiosity serves to stave off boredom and apathy.

3. **OPEN-MINDEDNESS (JUDGMENT; CRITICAL THINKING).**

Open-mindedness is the cognitive ability to critically “think things through” by fully considering all the implications and ramifications of a situation. It involves the recognition, examination, and unbiased weighing of factors on all sides when considering a decision. Frequently it requires the self-regulation to look beyond one’s beliefs and goals, and to be prepared to alter one’s opinion when due consideration merits it. As one of the character strengths, open-mindedness permits one the attribute of broad comprehension and unbiased judgment.

4. **LOVE OF LEARNING.**

Love of learning is the intrinsically driven, enthusiastic pursuit of expanding one’s knowledge, or attaining enhanced mastery of a topic or skill. It is achieved formally or informally, singularly or in groups, cognitive and/or physical, and tends to be systematic in the approach to the learning. Love of learning may be restricted to a single subject or may span several areas at once. As one of the character strengths, love of learning allows one to negate the frustration and overcome the obstacles frequently encountered in leaning.

5. **PERSPECTIVE (WISDOM).**

Perspective, which is often gained through experience, allows one the ability to make sense of their daily life and the world they live in. People with perspective rely upon their heightened understanding of life to provide wise and rational counsel to their fellow man in order that they too may find a sense of meaning.



As one of the character strengths, perspective allows self-recognition of one's merits and fallacies, a broader comprehension of meaning in one's life, and a firm commitment to making a positive contribution to society.

Core Virtue: **COURAGE** – having the ability to summon emotional strength to overcome internal and external opposition and adversity

### **Character Strengths**

#### **1. BRAVERY (VALOR).**

Bravery is the internal fortitude to face challenges or threats in daily life, which have the potential to bring difficulty, harm, or pain to the self or others. It involves acting on or speaking up for what is right despite opposition or unpopularity. Bravery is the intrinsic urge to act voluntarily in assisting others with acknowledged disregard for the consequences or the extent of the adversity. As one of the character strengths, bravery allows individuals to place morality and higher purpose at the apex of importance.

#### **2. PERSISTENCE (PERSEVERANCE; INDUSTRIOUSNESS).**

Persistent people display the mental dedication to persevere in their endeavors until they finish what they start despite the obstacles and setbacks encountered. They are industriously fastidious in the pursuit of their goals and are staunch in their dedication, firm in their patience, and unwavering in their focus. As one of the character strengths, persistence is the fuel that feeds the engine of dedicated striving to succeed.

### 3. **INTEGRITY (AUTHENTICITY; HONESTY).**

People with integrity are those who not only hold honesty, sincerity, and genuineness as a pattern of daily living, and infallibly exhibit themselves in this manner. They hold themselves accountable for their own thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions and are vigilant to ensure that they do not misrepresent or mislead through their actions or omissions. They maintain a sense of ownership of self, ownership of self-responsibility, and frequently display a sense of authentic wholeness in their lives. As one of the character strengths, integrity is often “self-placed” as the highest intrinsic value.

### 4. **VITALITY (ZEST; ENTHUSIASM; VIGOR; ENERGY).**

Vitality resides in one’s zestful approach to the daily challenges of life. It involves self-determination to lead a life of excitement, adventure, and liveliness fueled by constant energy and a wanton desire to feel alive and activated. It is an enthusiastic commitment not to do things half-heartedly, but rather to embrace the adventure of being complete in both the mental and physical tribulations experienced each day. As one of the character strengths, vitality can be an irrepressible positive force in the task of daily living.

Core Virtue: **HUMANITY** – interpersonal skills and character strengths directed at the care of others.

### **Character Strengths**

#### 1. **LOVE.**

Those who make a conscious and directed effort to be close to others exhibit love, founded in the valuing of close relationships. The intensity of the closeness is



most frequently found in relationships where caring and sharing are freely given and freely reciprocated. Love knows no boundaries, is not restricted to human closeness, and is expressed in terms of romance, sex, companionship, or family. As one of the character strengths, love enables trust in others as well as providing the foundation for a sense of self-contentment.

**2. KINDNESS (GENEROSITY; NURTURANCE; CARE; COMPASSION; ALTRUISTIC LOVE; NICENESS).**

Kindness involves freely offering aid and assistance to others without the expectation of reciprocity or personal gain. These acts of good deeds display generosity, and are frequently grounded in care and compassion for one's fellow man. Favors to others may be driven by altruism or simply by a desire to nurture. Kindness to others embodies respect, disregard for relatedness or similarity, and on occasion emotional affection. As one of the character strengths, kindness may bring joy through the simple act of giving and helping.

**3. SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE (EMOTIONAL AND PERSONAL INTELLIGENCE).**

Socially intelligent people are attuned to the emotions and feelings of others, perceptive to the goals and intentions of others, and adept at fostering inclusiveness of all in any situation. While aware of their own motivation and worth, socially intelligent people strive to instill in others a sense of comfort and of being valued within the group. As one of the character strengths, social intelligence enables one to foster healthy relationships.

Core Virtue: **JUSTICE** – the willingness to serve for the betterment of the community

### **Character Strengths**

#### **1. CITIZENSHIP (SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY; LOYALTY; TEAMWORK).**

Citizenship is displayed within a group by working for the betterment of the entire group to achieve the common good and the common goal. Within the team or the community, loyalty to the organization and the cause, maintaining one's fair share of the work, and putting aside personal agendas embody acts of social responsibility. Personal sacrifice, obedience to authority, willingness to compromise, and accommodation of consensus are all features of good citizenship. As one of the character strengths, citizenship provides an individual with civic responsibility and social belonging.

#### **2. FAIRNESS (EQUITY; JUSTICE).**

Fairness is demonstrated by treating everyone according to the universal ideals of equality and justice. In one's interactions with others, it requires the avoidance of personal bias, maintaining respect and compassion, a willingness to endorse the standards of morality and ethics, and an insistence that all parties interact in this manner. As one of the character strengths, fairness is applied equally throughout all levels of society.

#### **3. LEADERSHIP.**

Leadership is the process of providing vision, direction, coaching, support, delegation, and motivation to a group of people to execute the tasks required to achieve a common goal. It requires skills in the area of organization, social interaction, providing critical feedback, and the ability to monitor and control



progress, and apply corrective actions when remedy is required. Leaders get things efficiently done while maintaining team cohesion; leaders listen with empathy and understanding. As one of the character strengths, leadership provides the glue for social, business, community, and other groups.

Core Virtue: **TEMPERANCE** – strengths that protect against excess.

### **Character Strengths**

#### **1. FORGIVENESS AND MERCY.**

Forgiveness is a spiritual process with emotional-regulating properties utilized for enhancing positive subjective states. Forgiveness is intentional, outwardly directed, and involves a conscious choice of positivity by offering mercy instead of vengeance for transgressions committed against the self. It is displayed by offering a second chance, accepting the shortcomings, tempering feelings of revenge, and resisting the temptation to wallow in a victim mentality. As one of the character strengths, forgiveness allows one to put aside the self-destructive negativity associated with being wronged.

#### **2. HUMILITY/MODESTY.**

Humility and modesty involve the self-regulation and maturity required to allow one's deeds and accomplishments to be recognized by others rather than by the self. Individuals with humility do not seek praise, do not seek the position of focus, and are receptive to advice and assistance from others. As one of the character strengths, humility/modesty allow the individual to be cognizant of one's limitations and fallibilities.

### 3. **PRUDENCE.**

Prudence resides in the consideration of choice of action to consequences of that action. Prudent people self-regulate impulsive behavior, and what they say to avoid regrets at a later date. The tolerance of acceptable risk, consideration of short-term versus long-term benefits to future goals, and maintaining an intelligent and practical orientation to life are displays of prudence. As one of the character strengths, prudence brings logic, consideration, and control to the daily decisions of living.

### 4. **SELF-REGULATION (SELF-CONTROL).**

Self-regulation involves monitoring and controlling reactions to what one feels and does. Instinctive responses of impulsivity, flight, or aggression are negated by a conscious choice to abide by pre-conceived concepts of appropriate behavior. Being disciplined, controlling appetites and cravings, and initiating mechanisms to resist temptations are displays of self-control. As one of the character strengths, self-regulation allows steadiness and controlled reactions to the positive and negative effects of daily events.

Core Virtue: **TRANSCENDENCE** – strengths that lend meaning to life through a belief in the human connection to something larger than the self.

### **Character Strengths**

#### 1. **APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCE (AWE; WONDER; ELEVATION).**

Appreciation of beauty encompasses consciously noticing, savoring, and appreciating beauty in the world, the execution of skilled performances, and the excellence in one's endeavors. Finding awe in all domains of life, seeking



wonder in everyday events, and deriving pleasure inherent to virtue and morality are displays of appreciation. As one of the character strengths, appreciation of beauty allows one to marvel at the physical and spiritual beauty of human existence.

## **2. GRATITUDE.**

Gratitude is the awareness, contemplation, and expression of thankfulness for what one has, and for the good things that happen. Altruistic in nature, founded on empathy, and directed outwardly, gratitude usually precipitates a moral affect. It resides in the mindset of goodwill independent of reciprocal action. As one of the character strengths, gratitude is valued as a panacea for happiness, good health, enhanced social relationships, and mental calmness.

## **3. HOPE (OPTIMISM; FUTURE-MINDEDNESS; FUTURE ORIENTATION).**

Hope is the perceived belief in the capacity to reach future goals through the utilization of pathways thinking (establishing the routes) and agency thinking (energetically using those routes). It engenders an expectation of a good future, and a confidence in working towards that future. As one of the character strengths, hope allows people to expect the best from themselves, others, and their future experiences.

## **4. HUMOR (PLAYFULNESS).**

Humor involves bringing joy, laughter, and happiness to oneself and others. People enjoy smiling, laughing, teasing, and participating in playful response to adversity. Humor evokes the art of seeing the lighter side of life, striving to employ cheerfulness in overcoming obstacles, and injecting comic relief to

combat stress. As one of the character strengths, humor allows individuals to maintain a playful and imaginative approach to life.

**5. SPIRITUALITY (RELIGIOUSNESS; FAITH; PURPOSE).**

Spirituality reflects one's belief that there is a higher purpose to life, having faith in a meaning to the universe, and accepting one's place within the grander scheme. Spirituality may reside in religious belief and practice associated with formal communal organizations, or it may reside intrinsically as an individual and private exploration of meaning in one's life. As one of the character strengths, spirituality allows a sense of comfort when adversity occurs, an awareness and belief in the sacred as part of everyday life, and the experience of transcending beyond the self.



**Appendix C – Workshop Worksheets****Session One Worksheet****A. Presentation of Core Virtue #1 and Positive Introductions:**

- i. Jot down a few thoughts on what you would like the group to know about you.
- ii. What did this task feel like for you, did it bring up feelings of positivity or negativity?
- iii. What difficulties did you have in developing and telling your story?

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**B. Homework Assignment:**

- i. Choose any two or three exercises to practice your specific Signature Strength from Core Virtue #1. (If you do not have a Signature Strength in this Virtue, choose an exercise that interests you.)
- ii. Or create two or three exercises that will fit for your particular circumstance taking into account such things as work, family, hobbies and other commitments.
- iii. During the upcoming week, make a concerted effort to practice your Signature Strengths through the exercises you developed or have chosen to perform.
- iv. On a separate sheet of paper, jot down your Signature Strength, the exercises you chose, how you felt, and your overall experience when you performed the exercise.

**NOTE: BE PREPARED TO SHARE AND DISCUSS THIS ASSIGNMENT AT THE NEXT SESSION**

**Session Two Worksheet****A. Participant Presentation of Core Virtue #1 and Signature Strength Homework:**

- i. Briefly discuss what worked for you.
- ii. What did not work so well and how would you improve on the experience?
- iii. How did you feel before, during, and after having performed the exercise?
- iv. Do you see this exercise as a strategy for your Personally Customized Self-Care Plan, and if so, why; and, if not, why not?

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**B. Homework Assignment:**

- i. Choose any two or three exercises to practice your specific Signature Strength from Core Virtues #2 & #3. (If you do not have a Signature Strength in these Virtues, choose an exercise that interests you.)
- ii. Or create two or three exercises that will fit for your particular circumstance taking into account such things as work, family, hobbies and other commitments.
- iii. During the upcoming week, make a concerted effort to practice your Signature Strengths through the exercises you developed or have chosen to perform.
- iv. On a separate sheet of paper, jot down your Signature Strength, the exercises you chose, how you felt, and your overall experience when you performed the exercise.

**NOTE: BE PREPARED TO SHARE AND DISCUSS THIS ASSIGNMENT AT THE NEXT SESSION**



**Session Three Worksheet****A. Participant Presentation on Core Virtue #2 & #3 and Signature Strengths Homework:**

- i. Briefly discuss what worked for you.
- ii. What did not work so well and how would you improve on the experience?
- iii. How did you feel before, during, and after having performed the exercise?
- iv. Do you see this exercise as a strategy for your Personally Customized Self-Care Plan (PCSCP), and if so, why; and, if not, why not?

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**B. Homework Assignment:**

- i. Choose any two or three exercises to practice your specific Signature Strength from Core Virtues #4 & #5. (If you do not have a Signature Strength in these Virtues, choose an exercise that interests you.)
- ii. Or create two or three exercises that will fit for your particular circumstance taking into account such things as work, family, hobbies and other commitments.
- iii. During the upcoming week, make a concerted effort to practice your Signature Strengths through the exercises you developed or have chosen to perform.
- iv. On a separate sheet of paper, jot down your Signature Strength, the exercises you chose, how you felt, and your overall experience when you performed the exercise.

**NOTE: BE PREPARED TO SHARE AND DISCUSS THIS ASSIGNMENT AT THE NEXT SESSION**

**Session Four Worksheet****A. Participant Presentation on Core Virtue #4 & #5 and Signature Strengths Homework:**

- i. Briefly discuss what worked for you.
- ii. What did not work so well and how would you improve on the experience?
- iii. How did you feel before, during, and after having performed the exercise?
- iv. Do you see this exercise as a strategy for your Personally Customized Self-Care Plan (PCSCP), and if so, why; and, if not, why not?

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**B. Homework Assignment:**

- i. Choose any two or three exercises to practice your specific Signature Strength from Core Virtue #6. (If you do not have a Signature Strength in this Virtue, choose an exercise that interests you.)
- ii. Or create two or three exercises that will fit for your particular circumstance taking into account such things as work, family, hobbies and other commitments.
- iii. During the upcoming week, make a concerted effort to practice your Signature Strengths through the exercises you developed or have chosen to perform.
- iv. On a separate sheet of paper, jot down your Signature Strength, the exercises you chose, how you felt, and your overall experience when you performed the exercise.

**NOTE: BE PREPARED TO SHARE AND DISCUSS THIS ASSIGNMENT AT THE NEXT SESSION**



**Session Five Worksheet****A. Participant Presentation on Core Virtue #6 and Signature Strengths Homework:**

- i. Briefly discuss what worked for you.
- ii. What did not work so well and how would you improve on the experience?
- iii. How did you feel before, during, and after having performed the exercise?
- iv. Do you see this exercise as a strategy for your Personally Customized Self-Care Plan (PCSCP), and if so, why; and, if not, why not?

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**B. Homework Assignment:**

**Mindfully continue to exercise your particular Signature Strengths and remaining Character Strengths in such a manner and frequency that the tasks enhance and increase your positive emotions and minimize your negative ones.**

**Appendix D – Self-Care Plan****Developing a Personally Customized Self-Care Plan (PCSCP)****1. SIGNATURE CHARACTER STRENGTH S - STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE:**

<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Signature Strength One	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Signature Strength Two	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Signature Strength Three	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Signature Strength Four	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Signature Strength Five	
Exercise(s)	



**2. CHARACTER STRENGTHS - STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE**

<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Character Strength	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Character Strength	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Character Strength	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Character Strength	
Exercise(s)	
<b>Core Virtue</b>	
Character Strength	
Exercise(s)	

**In the right hand column, tick off what you do presently or  
add what you will do.**

### 3. PHYSICAL SELF-CARE

Eat Regularly	
Eat a well-balanced diet	
Exercise	
Get enough sleep	
Take time for sexual activity	
Visit a doctor on a regular basis	
Get medical care when needed	
Get massages	
Take time off when ill	
Wear clothes that make you feel good	
Dance, walk, run, curl, golf (any sporting activity you enjoy)	

### 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-CARE

Make time for self-reflection	
See a Counsellor or Therapist	
Write in a journal	
At times, say no to added responsibility	
Listen to your intuition, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and feeling	
Let others be "there" for you	

### 5. EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE

Spend time with those you enjoy	
Stay in contact with those important to you	
Love yourself	
Allow yourself to cry	
Find things that make you laugh	
Play with children	
Give yourself affirmations; praise yourself	
Seek out comforting activities, objects, people, or places	



**6. SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE**

Make time for reflection	
Spent time with nature	
Find a spiritual connection (friend, co-worker, centre)	
Be open to inspiration	
Cherish your optimism and hope	
Be aware of nonmaterial blessings in your life	
Embrace “not knowing”	
Read inspirational literature	
Sing	
Pray	

**7. WORKPLACE OR PROFESSIONAL SELF-CARE**

Take a break during work – your lunch or scheduled coffee break	
Take a moment or two to chat with co-workers	
Make quiet time to complete tasks	
Set limits with clients and colleagues	
Balance caseload so no one day or part of a day is “too much”	
Arrange your workspace so it is comfortable and efficient	
Get regular supervision or consultation	
Have a peer support group	

Adapted From: Saakvitne, K. W., & Pearlman, L. A. (1996). Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Appendix E – PowerPoint Slides

# A SELF – CARE WORKSHOP From Thoughts to Actions

*“A Personally Customized Self-Care Program Utilizing  
Positive Psychology Strategies”*

*Patricia (Trish) Piore, BSW, MEd.*

## OVERVIEW

### WORKSHOP STRUCTURE:

- ❖ Five Sessions
- ❖ 8 - 10 Participants
- ❖ 3.0 hours in length
- ❖ Didactic Presentations
- ❖ Experiential Exercises
- ❖ Facilitated Discussions
- ❖ Design of Customized Self-Care Plan



## OVERVIEW

### WORKSHOP GOALS:

- ❖ Self-Awareness (VIA-IS)
  - (Core Virtues & Character Strengths)
- ❖ Psycho-Education
  - Vicarious Traumatization, PAPs, Choice Theory, PP & PPT, Personal/Posttraumatic Growth, Spirituality, Self-Care
- ❖ Develop/Select/Perform Experiential Exercises
- ❖ Self-Reflection
  - Willingness to discuss thoughts, feelings, and emotions
- ❖ Design of a Customized Self-Care Plan
  - Use of Signature Strengths and Exercises

## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION (VT):

- ❖ What is it and what professionals are more likely to suffer from it?
- ❖ What are the symptoms of VT?
- ❖ What are the cultural and gender differences to be considered?
- ❖ How can we best fortify ourselves and lessen the chances of VT occurring
- ❖ What role do the Core Virtues and Character Strengths play in developing a self-care strategy?
- ❖ How can incorporating our Character Strengths into a self-care program assist in mitigating the effects of VT?

## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### CHOICE THEORY:

- ❖ What does this mean to you?
- ❖ How do you practice it day-to-day?
- ❖ What is the value of practicing it?
- ❖ Do you believe everyone has a choice? Why or why not?
- ❖ How do you think this fits in with developing a self-care strategy?

## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### PERSONALLY ACCOUNTABLE PEOPLE (PAPS):

- ❖ What does this mean to you?
- ❖ How do you practice it day-to-day?
- ❖ What is the value of practicing it?
- ❖ How do you feel when you take personal responsibility for your actions or inactions?
- ❖ How do you feel when other people don't assume responsibility or are unaccountable for their actions?



## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY (PP) & POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY (PPT):

- ❖ What are PP & PPT?
- ❖ What are the six Core Virtues according to Peterson and Seligman?
- ❖ What are the twenty-four Character Strengths?
- ❖ What role do the Virtues and Character Strengths play in developing a self-care strategy?
- ❖ What are "Signature Strengths?"

## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### PERSONAL/POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH:

- ❖ What is personal and posttraumatic growth?
- ❖ Do you believe that a person can grow from a negative event? Give an example and explain.
- ❖ How do we achieve personal growth?
- ❖ Why is it important to our self-care?
- ❖ What role do our Character Strengths play in our personal or posttraumatic growth?

## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### SPIRITUALITY:

- ❖ What does this mean to you?
- ❖ How do you practice it on a daily basis?
- ❖ What role do you think that it plays in self-care and a healthy way of being?
- ❖ What emotions do you experience when you reflect on your journey?

## QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

### SELF-CARE:

- ❖ Whose responsibility is it?
- ❖ What does it mean to you?
- ❖ What are the cultural and gender differences that might influence the formulation of a self-care plan?
- ❖ How do you practice it day-to-day?
- ❖ What is the value of practicing it?



## A SELF – CARE WORKSHOP Psycho-Education

*“A Personally Customized Self-Care Program Utilizing  
Positive Psychology Strategies”*

*Dr. Patricia Pilone  
Patricia (Trish) Pilone, BSW, MEd.*

## VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION

- ❖ VT is about the counsellor – not the client
- ❖ Changes to the core aspects of the therapist's self happen beyond the sessions
- ❖ Cognitive schemas, identity, memory, belief system become severely changed

## VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION

### IS NOT:

#### ❖ COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

- As this is an immediate emotional reaction by the counsellor
- It is related specifically to interactions during the session

#### ❖ COMPASSION FATIGUE

- As this is a cumulative build-up of traumatic stress, as well as physical and mental fatigue

## VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION

### ❖ BURNOUT:

- As this is a gradual and cumulative build up of stress related to working conditions and may be related to unbalanced lifestyle
- It results in emotional exhaustion and chronic tedium in the workplace
- Counsellors may begin to feel overloaded and overwhelmed secondary to client concerns



## VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION

### SYMPTOMS:

- ❖ Jumpiness and tension or posttraumatic hyperarousal
- ❖ Flashbacks and nightmares or a preoccupation with the trauma
- ❖ Cognitive and behavioural avoidance strategies
- ❖ Dissociative experiences of depersonalization
- ❖ Impaired self-reference or low self-esteem

## VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION

### STRATEGIES:

- ❖ Awareness of one's experience
- ❖ Balance in work, play, and rest activities
- ❖ Maintaining connection to self and others
- ❖ Individual positive coping style (Self-Care Strategies)
- ❖ Specific and continuous training and education sessions
- ❖ Workplace culture and environment attuned to minimizing VT occurrences

## CHOICE & PAPs

- ❖ Choice leads to opportunity for personal growth
- ❖ Awareness of emotions and feelings permit choice
- ❖ Personally Accountable Person/People (PAPs)
- ❖ Responsibility for one's emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural reactions
- ❖ Blame of others lies in "Victim Mentality" which justifies being upset and condones negativity

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

- ❖ Optimal human functioning through personal growth
- ❖ Seeks to discover what is right as well as what is not so right
- ❖ Focus on positive subjective states, positive traits or character strengths, positive institutions
- ❖ The meaningful life, the engaged life, and the pleasant life



## POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

- ❖ Build, enhance, and enjoy the positive emotional affects
- ❖ Based upon utilizing one's primary character strengths
- ❖ Confirms a purpose and meaning in life
- ❖ Positivity counteracts negativity

## PERSONAL & POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

- ❖ Personal Growth is the development and enhancement of the "self"
- ❖ Occurs when growth cognitions become growth actions
- ❖ Posttraumatic Growth is positive psychological changes following trauma

## PERSONAL & POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

- ❖ Depends on the subjective experience of the event and not the event
- ❖ Character Strengths co-relate with the domains of posttraumatic growth
- ❖ Domains of improved relationships with others, openness to new possibilities, greater appreciation of life, enhanced sense of personal strength, and spiritual development

## SPIRITUALITY

- ❖ A human belonging and attachment to a higher entity larger than self
- ❖ Centered in the self and intrinsically motivated
- ❖ Freedom of self-expression and self-exploration
- ❖ Differs from religiousness which is centered in institutions and doctrines
- ❖ Accomplishes self-growth through emotional self-fulfillment

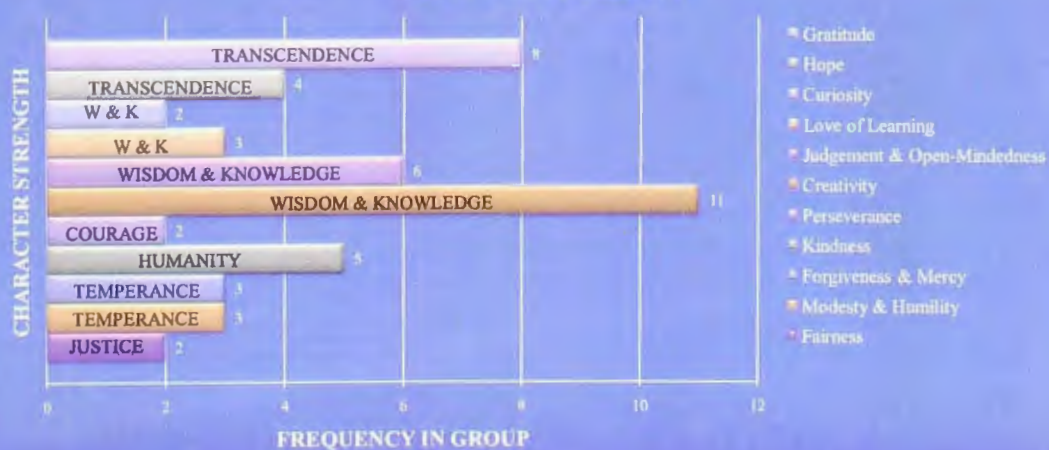


## SELF-CARE

- ❖ Embrace the self-care movement and not just acknowledge its existence
- ❖ DO IT; DON'T JUST KNOW IT
- ❖ Maintains a balance between and among personal, academic, and occupational life
- ❖ Founded in self-awareness, critical self-reflection, and self-care activities
- ❖ An ethical necessity, a moral imperative, and a professional requirement

## SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

GROUP HISTOGRAM



## EXERCISING YOUR CHARACTER STRENGTHS

*“A Personally Customized Self-Care Program Utilizing  
Positive Psychology Strategies”*

*Patricia (Trish) Pilonis, BSW, MEd.*

## WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE EXERCISES

### CURIOSITY:

- ❖ Attend a CNC/UNBC event in a field of education different than your own
- ❖ Have a meal at China Sail, Tandori, or Sakura Steak House to partake in cuisine not common to your everyday diet
- ❖ Delve into an activity you have not previously experienced before such as gardening, cooking, exotic dancing, using different means of exploration
- ❖ Find someone with an interesting hobby and ask them to show you something about it



## WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE EXERCISES

### CREATIVITY:

- ❖ Use your imagination to create a personalized card for a family member, friend, or co-worker's special occasion
- ❖ Use recyclables, leftover food, or discarded clothing in new and novel ways
- ❖ Use your creative energy to brainstorm a solution to a personal challenge or challenges faced by family members, friends, or co-workers
- ❖ Create your own personalized fridge magnet with supplies from a craft store reflecting something from this workshop or from some other event

## WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE EXERCISES

### OPEN-MINDEDNESS:

- ❖ Mentor, befriend, or volunteer to assist someone from a different ethnic or religious background
- ❖ Think of an upcoming challenge, write down five different approaches to solve it and pick out the most realistic for your particular set of circumstances
- ❖ Start a new activity and ask yourself why you are doing it the way you are doing it, explore how you might do it differently, and then embrace the new way of doing
- ❖ Attend a place of worship that is of a different denomination and note the similarities and differences

## WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE EXERCISES

### LOVE OF LEARNING:

- ❖ Visit the PG Public Library and research your favourite subject or a new interest
- ❖ Visit the Railway Museum, Exploration Place, or other venue where you can increase your knowledge
- ❖ Find four Reader's Digest magazines and learn the words and their meanings in the "Word Power" section
- ❖ Take a tour of Canfor, West Fraser, or Pacific Breweries to understand their process of production

## WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE EXERCISES

### PERSPECTIVE:

- ❖ Explore the moral implications of cheating whether it be on a homework assignment, exam, taxes, or significant other with respect to your personal philosophy
- ❖ Develop a network of friends and colleagues with differing perspectives and seek their opinions when you need a third party opinion
- ❖ Offer to counsel a friend and after careful deliberation of the issue, write down what you would say to that person taking into account their perspective (put yourself in their shoes)
- ❖ Collect Chinese Fortune Cookies and see how many different "fortunes" you can connect to your life



## COURAGE EXERCISES

### BRAVERY:

- ❖ Think about an action you could perform that overcomes the peer pressure for you to do something that is not congruent
- ❖ Overcome your fear of confrontation and approach the person respectfully to resolve an issue that has been of concern
- ❖ Try out a new sport that you not so adept at or that you have avoided trying because you are afraid you'll look silly
- ❖ Write, speak out, join an activist organization, or participate in such events like the "Take Back the Night" walk, "Chilli Blanket," or other social justice demonstration

## COURAGE EXERCISES

### PERSISTENCE:

- ❖ Describe a task that you have been procrastinating on and then go and get it done
- ❖ Generate a two-year plan for something that you would like to accomplish and break it into quarterly goals or manageable pieces
- ❖ For two weeks, make a daily "to do" list and at the end of the two weeks, see how many items you finished each day
- ❖ Keep a log of every penny you spend for a month and then share this information with someone you know and trust

## COURAGE EXERCISES

### INTEGRITY:

- ❖ Learn your responsibilities in accordance with the professional body to which you belong and find instances to practice them (e.g.CPA Code of Ethics)
- ❖ Keep track of your participation in idle gossip and resolve to diminish these instances over the next two weeks
- ❖ Think of ways to relate to others that is congruent to your moral and ethical convictions
- ❖ Think of a recent conversation in which you were not totally honest and confess your dishonesty to that particular individual

## COURAGE EXERCISES

### VITALITY:

- ❖ Go hiking, biking, kayaking, golfing, or participate in a team sport at least once or twice a week
- ❖ Establish good sleeping habits by going to bed at a regular time each night, eat 3 – 4 hours before sleeping, do not have caffeine after supper, and refrain from doing any work in bed
- ❖ Attend the Blues Underground, CNC's Film Festival, or Theatre Northwest
- ❖ Do a physical activity of your choice that isn't a "have to" for the pure enjoyment of doing it



## HUMILITY EXERCISES

### LOVE:

- ❖ Hug, Kiss, cuddle, touch those near and dear to let them know you care
- ❖ Look for ways to creatively express your love through writing a poem, a quote, little love notes, or a scrapbook that depicts your feelings
- ❖ Make a romantic date with your significant other at a new venue
- ❖ Help your loved ones with a goal such as weight loss, exercise plan, a purchase, or assignment

## HUMILITY EXERCISES

### KINDNESS:

- ❖ Make a special visit to the hospital and visit with someone you don't know
- ❖ Pay it forward by paying for the person behind you in the Tim Horton's coffee line
- ❖ Sort through your clothes and take unwanted items to a women's shelter or a charitable organization
- ❖ Express yourself in a kinder way when interacting with others whether in person, via email, letters or talking on the phone

## HUMILITY EXERCISES

### SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE:

- ❖ Acknowledge three sincere gestures of a family member, friend, or co-worker
- ❖ Listen to others with unconditional positive regard and withhold your judgments and then explore why you thought what you did
- ❖ If someone offends you, attempt to find at least one positive element in their motives or analyze the situation from their perspective
- ❖ Think of the last time you were harsh and critical of someone; write down an alternative and more appropriate manner in which you could have gotten your message across

## JUSTICE EXERCISES

### CITIZENSHIP:

- ❖ Invite a friend, family member, co-worker, or neighbour to your home for your favourite meal
- ❖ Attend a council meeting or attend a presentation on air quality or on the Pine Beetle
- ❖ Volunteer to participate in one community event
- ❖ Support such organizations as the Blues Underground, Theatre Northwest, Cancer Society, or the Coalition for Clean Air



## JUSTICE EXERCISES

### FAIRNESS & EQUITY:

- ❖ Be aware of thinking about or treating people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds with respect and genuine regard
- ❖ In the next group discussion, step forward to ensure that everyone involved has the chance to submit their point of view
- ❖ Discuss with a co-worker over lunch how you can better display fairness towards them
- ❖ Write a letter to the Citizen or Daily News to speak up on an important social justice issue

## JUSTICE EXERCISES

### LEADERSHIP:

- ❖ Read a book on leadership or attend a leadership workshop
- ❖ Mentor a child, student, or individual who would benefit from your skills and knowledge
- ❖ Organize a "friends night out" with two or three co-workers
- ❖ At work, survey your co-workers on ideas on improving the workplace, write a brief report, and present it to your supervisor

## TEMPERANCE EXERCISES

### **FORGIVENESS & MERCY:**

- ❖ Write down what you would say to someone who has offended you when you decide to forgive them and then go tell them
- ❖ Write a letter to yourself asking for forgiveness for a particular offence you made against someone
- ❖ Ask for forgiveness from a Divine power according to your faith and assess how you feel afterwards
- ❖ Reflect on how maintaining a grudge affects you and decide whether it is worth holding on to

## TEMPERANCE EXERCISES

### **HUMILITY:**

- ❖ In your next group discussion, attempt to be the very last one to speak
- ❖ Ask a trusted friend or co-worker to point out to you every time you are being boastful or trying to outdo someone in a conversation and have them do this for two weeks
- ❖ At the end of the day, for one solid month, keep a list of the events where you tried to impress someone in an immodest way
- ❖ Find one thing about five of your friends that you know they are better at than you and tell them



## TEMPERANCE EXERCISES

### PRUDENCE:

- ❖ Think of an upcoming decision you must make and write down the pros and cons of the decision
- ❖ For one entire day, count to five before you speak a single word
- ❖ Resolve to drive with caution obeying the rules of the road 100% of the time for one week
- ❖ For an upcoming meeting, make a list of the unexpected things that you think might surface during the discussions and be prepared to address them

## TEMPERANCE EXERCISES

### SELF-REGULATION:

- ❖ Establish a regular 15-minute interval of time (no more, no less) where you will do exactly what you want to do and stick to it for a month
- ❖ Choose one bad habit that you know you have and resolve to break it (Takes 27 days to break a bad habit)
- ❖ While at work, take only the mandated coffee breaks and ensure that your lunch hour is exactly the length it should be.
- ❖ After resisting an indulgence, acknowledge and congratulate yourself on your accomplishment

## TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISES

### APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY & EXCELLENCE:

- ❖ Attend local exhibits of antiques, arts, clothing, cultural artifacts or showings held at Books & Company, Studio 990, or Exhibition Place
- ❖ Every day for two weeks while on your way to work, stop somewhere and admire the scenery for five minutes
- ❖ Mindfully select one minute, five times a day to close your eyes and mentally visualize a scene of beauty
- ❖ Think of someone who performs a certain task at a very high level of competence and tell them how much you appreciate their ability

## TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISES

### GRATITUDE:

- ❖ Express your gratitude to someone by leaving a note or sending an email
- ❖ When you return home at night, take 10 minutes each day to revisit and savour one good thing that happened that day
- ❖ Think of the last time a door of opportunity closed on you and then think of how this resulted in another door opening
- ❖ Be creative and use your ingenuity to say thanks in silly and humorous ways



## TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISES

### HOPE:

- ❖ Before you leave for work each day, write down one good thing that you expect to happen that day
- ❖ Once a week make a list of three things that you expect to complete that week in an absolutely stellar fashion
- ❖ Once a week tell one of your friends about something good that you are looking forward to
- ❖ Take time to self-reflect on what makes you feel good about yourself and what has meaning to you and how great you'll feel when you reach your goals

## TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISES

### HUMOUR:

- ❖ Once a week send someone a funny email or card
- ❖ Participate in playful activities that are silly and frivolous at least once a week
- ❖ Invite a friend or co-worker over to watch a comedy on TV or rent a funny movie
- ❖ Organize and participate in theme parties such as Halloween, murder mysteries, or play Wii games

## TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISES

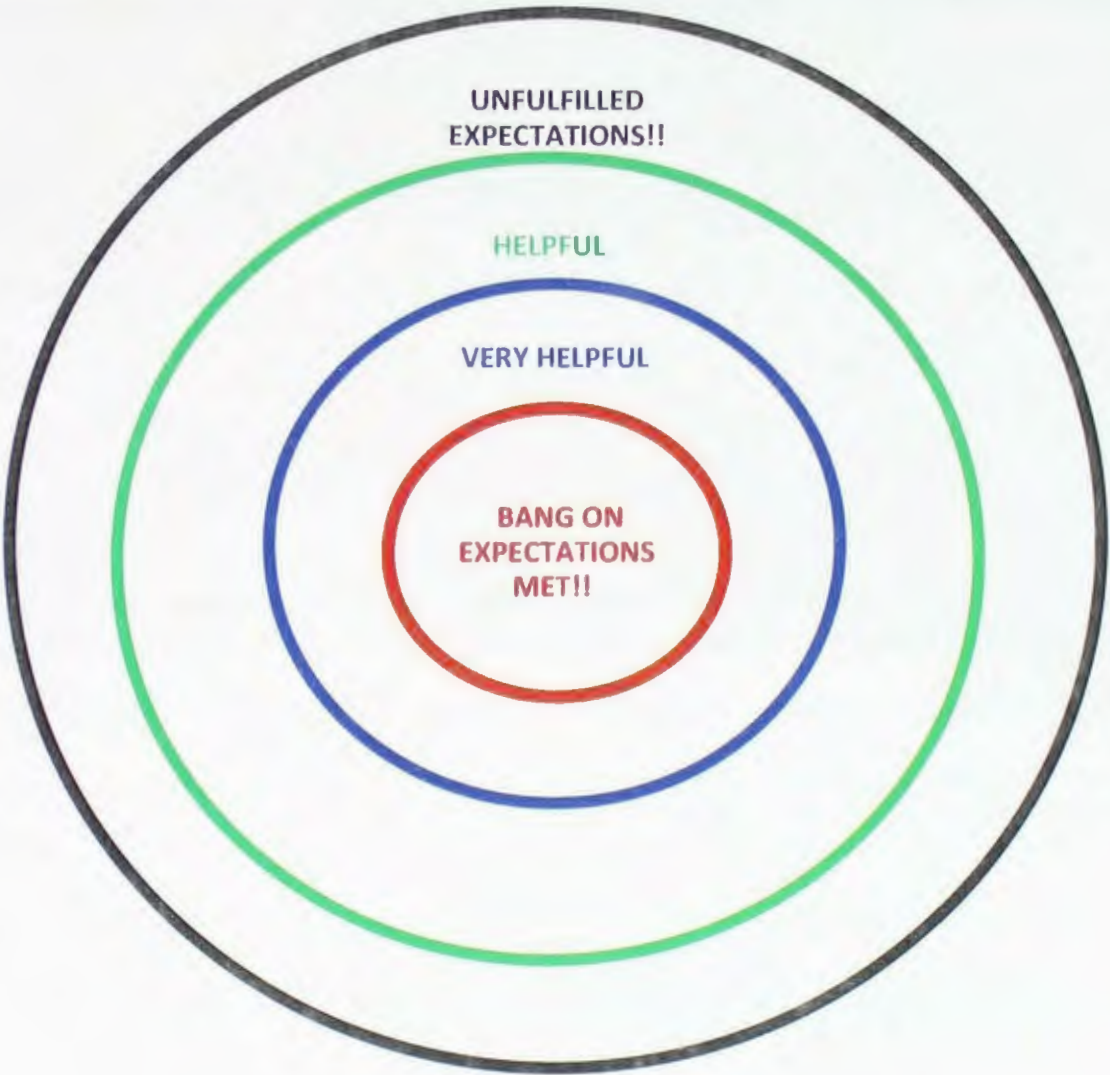
### SPIRITUALITY:

- ❖ Take five minutes every day to reflect on how you fit into this world and in the larger universe
- ❖ Reflect on all the good things you bring to those around you, and how you affect their lives and yours
- ❖ Explore the world of meditation and spend time breathing deeply, relaxing, and just 'being' one with the universe
- ❖ Write your story and think about how you would most likely be remembered and then think about how you would like to be remembered



Appendix F – Workshop Evaluation Form

Rating the “Positive Psychology Meets Self-Care Workshop”



What components of the workshop worked well for you and why do you think that is so?

What components of the workshop did not work so well for you and why do you think that is so?

Has your opinion about Self-Care changed and in what way?

Was the material, as presented, beneficial to you in your role as a helping professional?

What comments or suggestions do you feel would be useful in honing the delivery of the workshop or its content?

Would you recommend this workshop to others? Why or Why not?



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