NASTAD

Workforce Wellness

TOOLKIT



Background

As health departments become more person-centered, responding to funding fluctuations, optimizing efficiency with their service delivery, and taking a syndemic approach will become imperative to meet the needs of community members and better utilize resources.

As a result, many staff will be tasked with taking on additional responsibilities, flexing their skillsets to meet a range of needs to support a syndemic approach, and being asked to do more with fewer resources. Additionally, the health department workforce is not only serving people impacted by the syndemics but are impacted by the syndemics themselves. Although many within the health department workforce have a true commitment to this work, health departments still need to be trauma-informed and person-centered to reduce burnout, foster supportive work environments, and create pathways for professional development.

Purpose

NASTAD is committed to fostering a culture of wellness for the workforce among health department members, and as such, created this resource.

Workplace wellness is a central tenet of a trauma-informed approach, and attends to both protective factors (e.g., training, supervision, and a manageable workload) and risk factors (e.g., personal trauma history, isolation, and length of employment) among employees. Workforce wellness builds on the workforce's resilience and remedies the psychological impacts of working in health and social services, such as vicarious trauma and burnout.

This toolkit is for both supervisors and the broader staff in health department syndemic programs. Throughout this toolkit, the target audience for the respective section will be clearly identified. As a part of this toolkit, three evidence-based strategies have been identified to support the wellness of our public health workforce; **Stay Interviews**, **Vicarious Trauma Prevention** and **Mitigation**, and **Interventional Journaling**.



Stay Interviews allow supervisors to better understand the unique experiences of every individual supporting syndemic activities. The purpose of these semi-structured meetings is to solicit direct feedback from staff and to gain insight into what motivates staff to continue to show up to work each day and proactively increase retention and wellness.



The **Vicarious Trauma Assessment** is completed by individual staff members and can be used to self-assess the level of burnout and vicarious trauma. This tool also acts as a mechanism for supervisors and the organization to consider practices, policies, and employee benefits that could be implemented to mitigate burnout and increase overall wellbeing.



Interventional Journaling focuses on your thoughts and feelings about daily events. This type of journaling can offer health department staff an opportunity to unpack events taking place at work and be more reflective about them to better inform their next steps on how to handle the event, or to better understand why they may be experiencing certain emotions regarding the event. This resource presents two approaches to interventional journaling that can be used as partner resources to the other strategies shared in the Workforce Wellness toolkit.

Key Terms

- **Person-Centered:** is an approach which "values the social network of each patient, promotes quality of life and personal goals not only health status improvement, and implements structural reforms to improve patients' experience of interacting with the healthcare system" [1].
- **Syndemics:** A "population-level clustering of social and health problems" [2].
- **Trauma-Informed:** Being trauma-informed is an approach to administering services in care and prevention, and to interacting with colleagues, that acknowledges that traumas may have occurred or may be active in individuals' lives, and that those traumas can manifest physically, mentally, and/or behaviorally.
- **Vicarious Trauma:** A "profound shift in worldview that occurs in helping professionals when they work with individuals who have experienced trauma. Helpers notice that their fundamental beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by being repeatedly exposed to traumatic material" [3].
- **Dominant Culture:** "Refers to the norms, values, and preferences established as the standard for an entire group of people, often regardless of whether they contradict what is usual for other group members" [4].
- **Motivational Interviewing:** "A collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change" [5].

Acknowledgements

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Table Of Contents

Stay Interviews 5

Vicarious Trauma Assessment 11

Interventional Journaling 12

Appendices 15

Appendix 1: Sample Stay Interview Questions 15

Appendix 2: Stay Interview Action Plan 18

Appendix 3: Workplace Wellness Strategies 19

Appendix 4: Vicarious Trauma Assessment 23

Appendix 5: References 27

Stay Interviews

INTENDED USER
Supervisors will conduct the Stay Interview with their staff.

PURPOSE
To take a proactive approach to ensure staff wellness and reduce burnout and vicarious trauma within the workplace. Stay Interviews should not be used with staff who have already indicated they plan to leave the workplace.

WHEN TO USE IT
For new staff, supervisors should conduct the Stay Interview within the first 3 months after being hired. For current staff, supervisors should conduct the Stay Interview at least annually and 6 months before or after the performance evaluation period. Interviews should be between 30 - 45 minutes.



Stay interviews are a way to better understand the unique experiences of every individual supporting syndemic approaches. Ideally, interviews should be conducted before a change in morale occurs. This is a proactive measure to mitigate any challenges or concerns before they have a larger impact on an individual's choice to stay within their role. Normalizing these conversations positively impacts workplace culture, leading to lower employee turnover.

Prior to implementing Stay Interviews, there needs to be a high level of trust and transparency between supervisors and staff. The supervisor must be committed to "acting" on the feedback received from staff. "Acting" on feedback should be within the range of power in the supervisor's role and in alignment with requirements set forth by the labor union and Human Resources.

Recommended Practices

- The Stay Interview and Stay Interview Action Plan differ from a performance improvement meeting and a performance improvement plan. Stay Interviews should not coincide with the performance evaluation period. The purpose of the Stay Interview is to address well-being in the workplace and not to assess staff performance based on their experiences within the workplace.
- Stay Interviews should be one-on-one meetings between a supervisor and staff. The interviews should not include Human Resources. Supervisors should engage human resources, if needed, to address the concerns of staff where appropriate (i.e., salary increases, time off, wellness initiatives, benefits). Maintain the anonymity of staff by not naming staff directly and giving general feedback to Human Resources. Supervisors can use feedback from multiple staff to determine key themes to formulate action steps, and if appropriate, share with other decision makers. (See "Following Up After the Stay Interview" section).
- If your agency has a labor union, abide by the terms of the union contract where anything included in this resource contradicts.

Preparing for Stay Interviews

Reflecting on Our Experiences

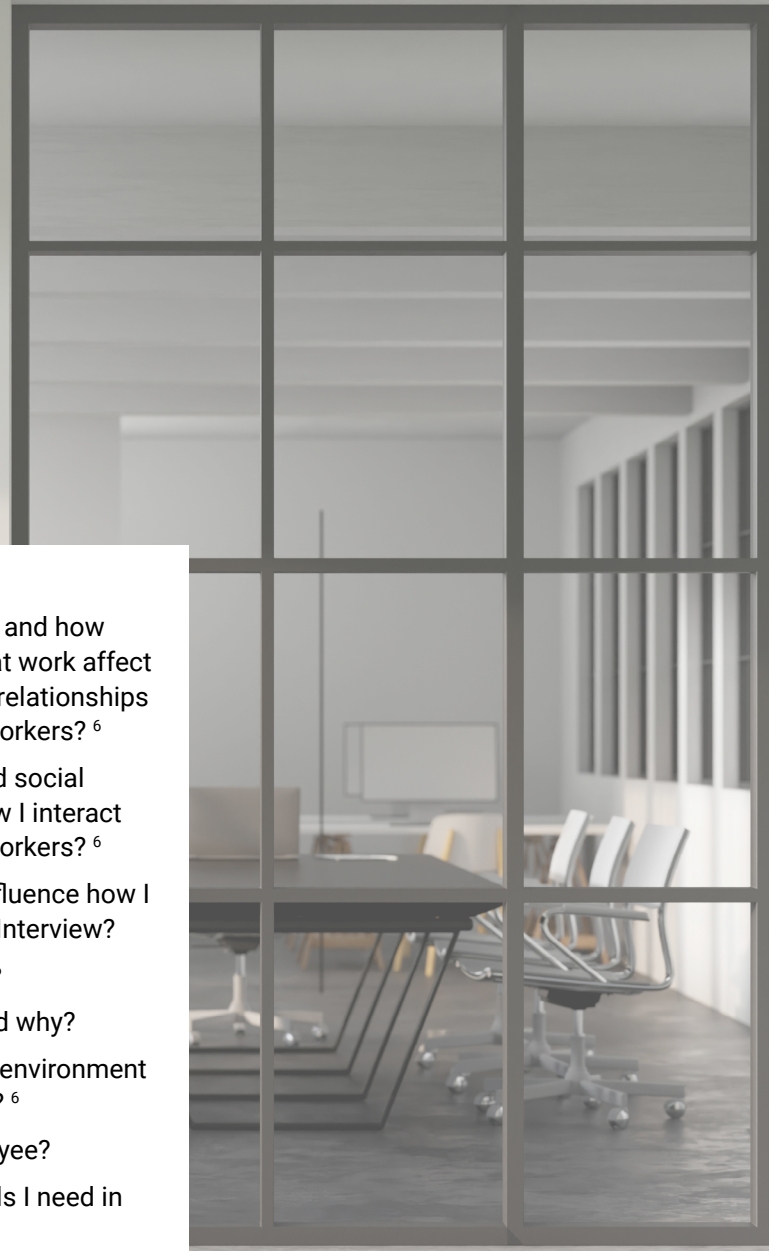
Supervisors and staff should prepare for Stay Interviews by reflecting on the following questions[5]:

SUPERVISORS

- What assumptions and power dynamics are at play and influence how I am showing up and experiencing this supervisory relationship? [6]
- What norms, practices, and social dynamics do we have in the workplace that influence this supervisory relationship? [6]
- What other factors might influence how I am showing up to this Stay Interview? [6]
- How am I best incorporating the lived experience of the colleague? [6]
- What am I doing to earn trust with this employee? [6]

STAFF

- What things am I assuming, and how does the balance of power at work affect the way I act and feel in my relationships with my supervisor and coworkers? [6]
- What usual habits, rules, and social behaviors at work affect how I interact with my supervisor and coworkers? [6]
- What other factors might influence how I am showing up to this Stay Interview?
- Am I satisfied with my job? [6]
- Is my job fulfilling or not, and why?
- What things about my work environment would I want to see change? [6]
- What do I want as an employee?
- Do I have the resources/tools I need in my job? [6]



Selecting Staff

Staff of high priority are those:

- Supporting the most syndemic activities (e.g., disease investigation specialist, peer workers, case managers),
- Working with community members,
- With lived experience,
- Supporting syndemic activities the longest and have consistently done well in their performance reviews, and
- Whose positions are critical or difficult to replace.

> **Staff should also be encouraged to use Employee Best Practices[7] to prepare to provide open and direct feedback to their supervisor. Staff may also consider (although not required) using data to reinforce points made, staff can review an example of doing this here.[7]**

For supervisors, please note that the opinions of staff are as valuable as, if not more, data that can be produced to confirm what a staff member is sharing. Relying only on data is linked to a dominant culture principle focused on "worshiping the written the word" over the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of the individual.

Process

Clearly communicate why and how Stay Interviews will be used in your health department. Staff should understand that these conversations are part of an effort to create an environment where everyone feels safe enough to share their experiences, these are not associated with performance evaluation activities, and conversations are confidential.

> **Staff should also be encouraged to reflect on their work-related values (e.g., transparency, salary, professional-personal balance), challenges, and successes.**

Determining the Frequency, Length, and Setting

FREQUENCY

With staff who are new to supporting syndemic activities, a stay interview should occur within the first few months of starting in their role. Typically, between 11 - 14 months in a new position, staff are reflecting on their experience and whether staying in their role is a good fit.[8]

For staff currently supporting syndemic activities, Stay Interviews should be conducted at least annually, but they should be separate from (6 months before/after) performance reviews.

LENGTH

Each conversation between supervisors and their direct reports should last for about 30 minutes (ideally, no longer than 45 minutes)[6]. Supervisors and staff may choose to use regular scheduled meetings to discuss other items that were not addressed during the initial interview. These secondary interviews should also not exceed more than 45 minutes.

SETTING

Ideally, the Stay Interview will occur in-person. The setting should be a safe, private environment where staff can speak freely. If the Stay Interview is conducted virtually, refrain from recording the meeting and rely on written notes only.

Preparing to Actively Listen

Though the activity is termed as an interview, the role of a supervisor is to listen and learn. Supervisors should spend 80% of the meeting practicing active listening, with the remaining 20% dedicated to asking follow-up questions and moving the conversation forward.[8] Use eye contact, body language, verbal affirmations, and repeating back what you heard to demonstrate active listening.[8] This is an opportunity to utilize your motivational interviewing skills.

Selecting Questions

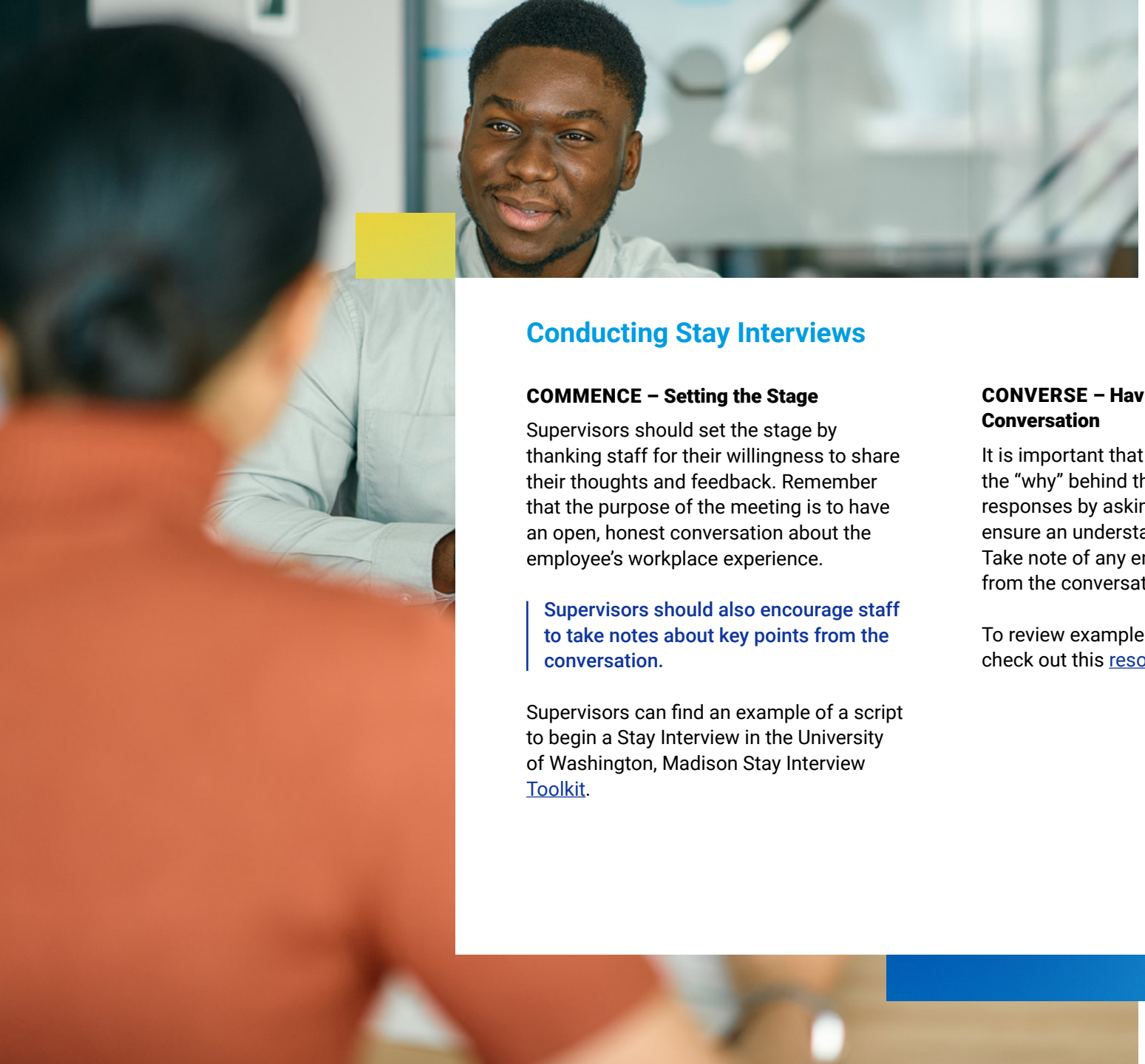
Supervisors should select 4 to 5 questions from the NASTAD Stay Interview Questions and send them to staff one week prior to the meeting.[8] This will give staff time to reflect on the questions and come to the Stay Interview with thoughtful responses. Once the questions are sent, the supervisor should confirm that the staff agree to and feel comfortable responding to the questions selected by the supervisor. Staff should be encouraged to refer to notes when needed, but not to read prepared responses.

Supervisors conducting multiple stay interviews with syndemic staff may choose to use some of the same questions across interviews to more easily identify trends amongst staff members. In that instance, be mindful when synthesizing and avoid generalizing if trends are identified.

Planning to Take Notes

Taking extensive notes allows supervisors to accurately summarize feedback and create effective plans of action. It is recommended that supervisors take written notes during stay interviews to aid in creating an open environment and promoting a more focused, relaxed interaction during the conversation.





Conducting Stay Interviews

COMMENCE – Setting the Stage

Supervisors should set the stage by thanking staff for their willingness to share their thoughts and feedback. Remember that the purpose of the meeting is to have an open, honest conversation about the employee's workplace experience.

> **Supervisors should also encourage staff to take notes about key points from the conversation.**

Supervisors can find an example of a script to begin a Stay Interview in the University of Washington, Madison Stay Interview Toolkit.

CONVERSE – Having an Open and Honest Conversation

It is important that supervisors capture the "why" behind the answers. Explore responses by asking follow-up questions to ensure an understanding of what is shared. Take note of any emotional trigger points from the conversation.

To review examples of follow-up questions, check out this resource.

CONCLUDE – Summarizing Key Points

At the end of the conversation, feedback should be summarized to ensure clarity and understanding of the key themes that were discussed. Staff should feel confident that their feedback will be reviewed and positive action will occur. Be mindful not to make promises about actions that you cannot guarantee will happen, and to be open about the potential challenges of implementing feedback received.

If an employee reports experiencing burnout and/or vicarious trauma, do the following:

1. Encourage them to complete NASTAD's Vicarious Trauma assessment.
2. Implement the mitigation strategies in the Vicarious Trauma assessment.
3. Connect them to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
4. Encourage them to seek professional therapeutic assistance, if appropriate.

Following Up After the Stay Interview

Feedback Review and Analysis

After all Stay Interviews have been completed, supervisors should compile the feedback received from each staff to review and analysis. If interviews with multiple staff have occurred during the same time, the supervisor may choose to identify themes across the interviews. Leadership should identify common motivators, goals, and challenges, then develop action plans to reinforce the positives and address concerns. Feedback summaries should be shared with staff, along with a public "thank you" to show appreciation for the thoughts, ideas, and suggestions received.

Create a Stay Interview Action Plan

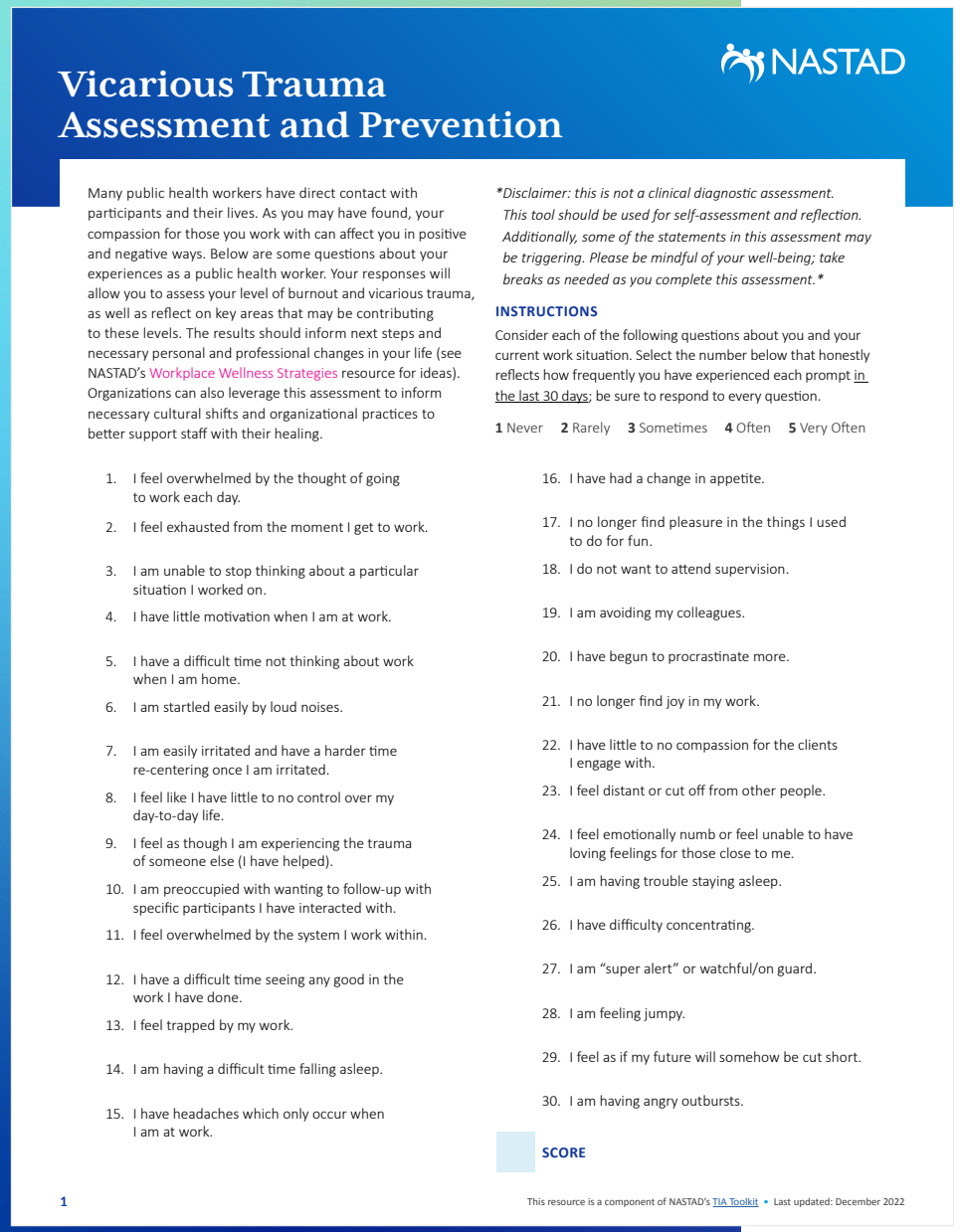
Organizations can only experience the benefits of stay interview implementation if employee feedback is taken seriously and acted upon effectively. Stay Interview Action Plans can be applied at individual, team, and/or organizational levels, and all plans should have clear, attainable goals and concrete steps for success. Stay Interview Action Plans should not be submitted to Human Resources. Supervisors and staff should co-create the Stay Interview Action Plan with staff. The Stay Interview Action Plan should include:

- No more than three action items to facilitate the employee's engagement/ retention
- Actions the supervisor will take to support each action item
- Actions the employee will take to support each action item
- Dates for accomplishing each action item

Monitor And Update The Stay Plan

The Stay Interview Action Plan should be updated and saved in a space that is accessible to the supervisor and staff. The Stay Interview Action Plan should be reviewed periodically during regular supervisory check-ins to assess progress or update the plan as needed.

Stay Interview Action Plans may provide a guided practice to gather, implement, and evaluate action items that may have been shared in the stay interview. For some staff a stay plan may not be appropriate or desired by all staff. At the very least, the supervisor should take thorough notes and develop their own action items to address the needs of staff.



NASTAD

Vicarious Trauma Assessment and Prevention

Many public health workers have direct contact with participants and their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you work with can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences as a public health worker. Your responses will allow you to assess your level of burnout and vicarious trauma, as well as reflect on key areas that may be contributing to these levels. The results should inform next steps and necessary personal and professional changes in your life (see NASTAD's Workplace Wellness Strategies resource for ideas). Organizations can also leverage this assessment to inform necessary cultural shifts and organizational practices to better support staff with their healing.

Disclaimer: this is not a clinical diagnostic assessment. This tool should be used for self-assessment and reflection. Additionally, some of the statements in this assessment may be triggering. Please be mindful of your well-being; take breaks as needed as you complete this assessment.

INSTRUCTIONS

Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number below that honestly reflects how frequently you have experienced each prompt in the last 30 days; be sure to respond to every question.

1 Never **2** Rarely **3** Sometimes **4** Often **5** Very Often

1. I feel overwhelmed by the thought of going to work each day.
2. I feel exhausted from the moment I get to work.
3. I am unable to stop thinking about a particular situation I worked on.
4. I have little motivation when I am at work.
5. I have a difficult time not thinking about work when I am home.
6. I am startled easily by loud noises.
7. I am easily irritated and have a harder time re-centering once I am irritated.
8. I feel like I have little to no control over my day-to-day life.
9. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone else (I have helped).
10. I am preoccupied with wanting to follow-up with specific participants I have interacted with.
11. I feel overwhelmed by the system I work within.
12. I have a difficult time seeing any good in the work I have done.
13. I feel trapped by my work.
14. I am having a difficult time falling asleep.
15. I have headaches which only occur when I am at work.
16. I have had a change in appetite.
17. I no longer find pleasure in the things I used to do for fun.
18. I do not want to attend supervision.
19. I am avoiding my colleagues.
20. I have begun to procrastinate more.
21. I no longer find joy in my work.
22. I have little to no compassion for the clients I engage with.
23. I feel distant or cut off from other people.
24. I feel emotionally numb or feel unable to have loving feelings for those close to me.
25. I am having trouble staying asleep.
26. I have difficulty concentrating.
27. I am "super alert" or watchful/on guard.
28. I am feeling jumpy.
29. I feel as if my future will somehow be cut short.
30. I am having angry outbursts.

SCORE

This resource is a component of NASTAD's TIA Toolkit • Last updated: December 2022

Vicarious Trauma Assessment

In addition to Stay Interviews, organizations may also use NASTAD's Vicarious Trauma Assessment to determine how staff are being impacted. This is a resource that can be used with the Stay Interview if staff mention instances of vicarious trauma. This resource can also be used on its own without conducting a Stay Interview.

Utilizing a Vicarious Trauma Assessment to Support Staff

Many people within the syndemic workforce come in direct contact with participants who have historically or are actively experiencing trauma. As a compassionate public health workforce, it is common to empathize with participants, which can impact staff in positive or negative ways. The Vicarious Trauma Assessment allows the syndemic workforce to assess their level of burnout and vicarious trauma to reflect and identify areas that are contributing to these levels.

Additionally, NASTAD's Vicarious Trauma Assessment engages supervisors and the larger organization to build a workplace culture focused on peer support and providing tangible strategies to uplift the wellness of the syndemic workforce.

***Disclaimer: It is not a supervisor's role to provide any level of therapeutic support to staff who are experiencing high levels of trauma. Clinical Supervision can only be provided by individuals who are appropriately credentialed and licensed. For staff already receiving therapeutic services to treat trauma they have experienced, supervisors are encouraged to ask the staff how they can support. ***

Interventional Journaling

Interventional Journaling for Stay Interviews

INTENDED USER
Supervisors

PURPOSE
Reflect on one's management style

WHEN TO USE IT
4 times per week for 15-20 minutes

Once supervisors complete a round of Stay Interviews with their staff, it may be a good time to carve out reflection and debrief time. The guided autobiography approach (GAB) to interventional journaling may be best in this situation.[9]

James Birren, an American academic and researcher who is widely considered the father of modern gerontology, created GAB - a subject he researched and championed for more than 30 years. This type of journaling can be used to reflect on one's management style and "autobiography" as a leader . It encourages the writer to examine themselves from three perspectives: actual self (how we are), ideal self (how we ideally want to be), and social self (how others see us).

Journaling Prompt: Think about an issue, challenge, or project that came up during the Stay Interviews you conducted.

- Write continuously about how you feel you are approaching it, how you would describe your leadership style, how you are handling things, and how you are interacting with others.
- In a second writing session, write continuously about how you might "ideally" approach the situation.
- In a third writing session, write continuously about how you think your colleagues perceive your handling of the situation.
- In a fourth writing session, think about what it would mean to bring these three aspects together – your actual, ideal, and social self in this situation – describe what is preventing these three from coming into alignment.

Considerations

- Emotional contagion, (e.g., "I'm with you") can make a person feel the exact emotion as the person they are trying to support, versus empathetic concern, which acknowledges the other person is having a reaction, but it is not happening to you.
- When doing expressive writing, it's important to write continuously, do not edit the writing, and do not censor yourself. No one should see the journal writings.
- Schedule journaling at a time where you have spaciousness in your schedule for aftercare.

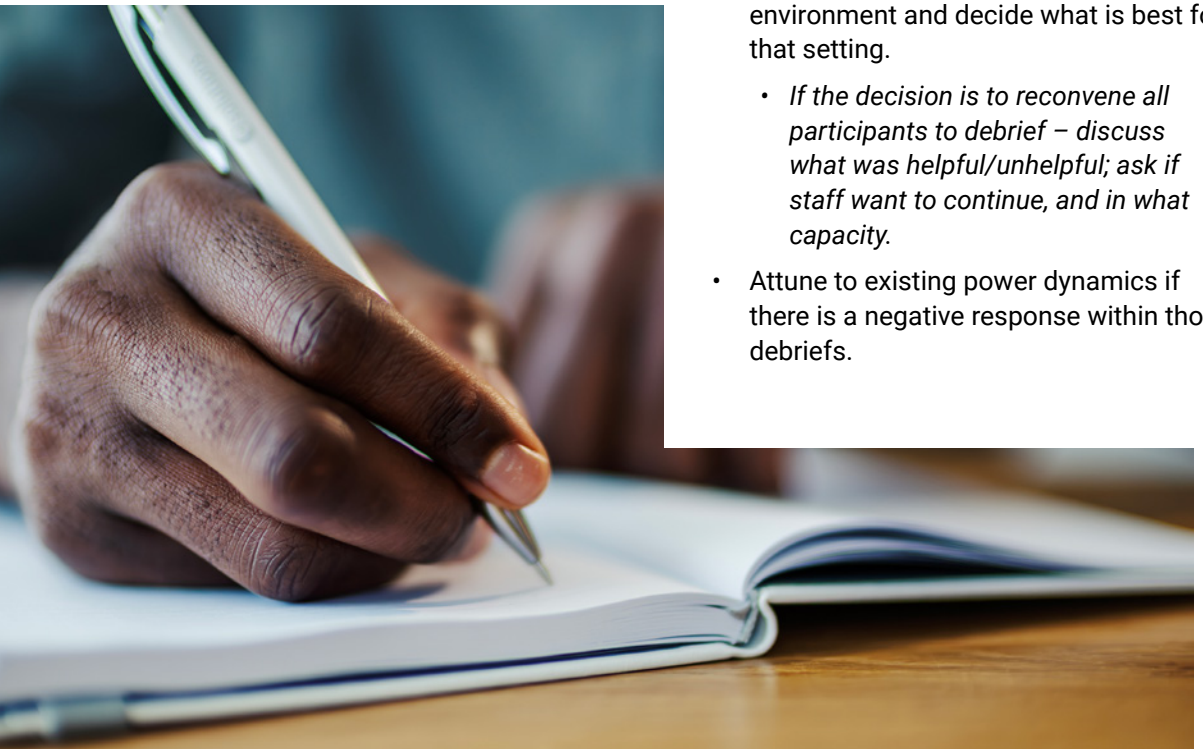
Interventional journaling can bring up hard things for people. It's important to validate that; it's okay – you're okay, people can handle that. Emotional expression is healthier than emotional suppression.

As part of NASTAD's 2025 – 2026 Chair's Campaign, Board Chair Sarah Braunstein and Dr. Sarit Golub called on NASTAD membership to practice interventional journaling. They proposed an adaptation of GAB to a workplace-specific context guided by prompts instead of facilitator-guided journaling; that model of GAB is what is included in this Toolkit.

Determining Frequency, Follow Up, and Self Care

FREQUENCY

It is recommended to write for 15 minutes per day, at least 4 times per week, for five consecutive weeks. Allow an additional 5-minutes for this exercise to account for bookending the activity on the front and back end.



FOLLOW UP

After five consecutive weeks of journaling, consider debriefing this exercise. If not debriefed, lessons learned may be lost, or you may miss an opportunity to identify themes across the bureau.

- Debriefs can be done in a large team or one-on-one; consider your specific environment and decide what is best for that setting.
  - *If the decision is to reconvene all participants to debrief – discuss what was helpful/unhelpful; ask if staff want to continue, and in what capacity.*
- Attune to existing power dynamics if there is a negative response within those debriefs.
- Consider someone neutral (e.g., human resources or a section chief) to lead the debrief. An external individual may work as well (e.g., someone from another team, a consultant, or NASTAD).
- Incorporate trauma-informed meeting practices[10]
- The debrief can be in community with supervisors in syndemic health department roles – you may find commons themes and be able to lean on one another to develop shared solutions.

SELF CARE

After writing about something bad, staff may feel uneasy – with space and time, this will abate. There are also activities that staff can implement when journaling that can help to process the exercise:

- Bookend journaling by creating an activity that indicates the start and finish of the exercise, such as breathwork, listening to music, or going for a walk.
- Write at a time that will maximize impact (e.g., at the beginning of the week and the end of the week, or after a meeting that will cause stress)
- Do mindfulness exercises (e.g., deep breathing, a body scan, or yoga)

Interventional Journaling for Vicarious Trauma

INTENDED USER
Anyone who has taken the Vicarious Trauma Assessment

PURPOSE
To self-reflect on individual's Vicarious Trauma Assessment score and/ or how vicarious trauma is impacting them in the workplace.

WHEN TO USE IT
After completing the Vicarious Trauma Assessment, journal for 15 minutes four times per week for five weeks.

Upon completion of NASTAD's Vicarious Trauma Assessment, health department staff may want to reflect on why they are experiencing heightened scores, leading to a "burnout" or "vicarious trauma" score range. The journaling method of Expressive Writing is the most suitable option to reflect on the assessment results.

Dr. James Pennebaker, an American social psychologist and pioneer of this therapeutic technique, created expressive writing because "when people transform their feelings and thoughts about personally upsetting experiences into language, their physical and mental health often improve."[11] Standard expressive writing focuses on an individual's deepest thoughts and feelings, particularly helpful to address burnout, emotional fatigue, and depression. It also generates insight that allows enhanced coping, resolution of anger, and adaptive strategies. This makes it a great fit for processing vicarious trauma or burnout that health department staff may be experiencing.

Journaling Prompt: Write continuously about an issue or experience (or different issues) at work that is particularly traumatic or painful to you.

- Discuss your deepest thoughts and feelings about the issue or experience. Consider how these multiple instances of vicarious trauma are impacting you now.

Frequency

It is recommended to journal for 15-minutes per day, at least 4 times per week, for 5 consecutive weeks. Allow an additional 5-minutes for this exercise to account for bookending the activity on the front and backend.

Considerations

- Supervisors should offer to support staff by meeting to address what came up in the assessment or related journaling exercise.
- Journaling should be scheduled at a time where there is spaciousness in a person's schedule for after care.

Appendix 1:

Sample Stay Interview Questions

Guidance: The following questions have been divided into two sections: staff working directly with community, and staff in administrative roles; choose the questions that align with the employee's job function. There are four categories of questions that you can select from as you formulate the Stay Interview: personal motivation and job satisfaction, professional development and growth, providing support and recognition, and assessing retention. Select 4 - 5 questions from the list for an interview. Questions can come from one or multiple categories.

Questions for Community Facing Staff

PERSONAL MOTIVATION AND JOB SATISFACTION

Ask these questions to bring the employee's mind to the present and help set a baseline for what aspects of the employee's work they enjoy or dislike. The employee's response can also key the supervisor into tasks and responsibilities they may want to take on in the future.

- When you are getting ready to start the workday, how are you feeling?
- How can I create an environment where you feel more connected on a personal level to others that you work with?
- Do you feel your lived experience and perspective are valued in how we design or deliver programs?
- What is the most exciting part about being involved in community facing activities that address the syndemic?
- Do you feel a strong sense of purpose in your job, and what is most meaningful to you about working with community members?
- What is working well in your role, or what would you like to do more of?
- How would you like to be involved in the syndemic approach work within our team?
- How do you feel about the balance between client-centered work and any administrative demands, and how could this balance be improved?
- What challenges or barriers to your productivity have you come across lately?
- In your role, you have rich knowledge about the complexities of working with clients impacted by multiple conditions. What methods would be helpful so we can hear more about your ideas to improve our client facing syndemic activities?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Ask these questions to get an understanding of the employee's development progress and needs. Employee development is vitally important for engaging employees and influencing them to stay.

- Are there specific training or professional development opportunities related to your role, working with community members, understanding syndemic approaches or other relevant topics that you'd like to pursue?
- What skills or talents do you have that are not being best used in your current role?
- How have we utilized your lived experience to grow within your role?
- Are there individuals or teams that you would like to receive cross-training from that you think would benefit you in your role?
- What would help you feel better oriented to the health department and/or your role?
- Are there specific policies or operational aspects related to our syndemic activities (e.g., naloxone distribution, "meeting people where they are at") that you feel are working well or need improvement?

Appendix 1: Sample Stay Interview Questions

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION

Ask these questions to get at core frustrations and pain points an employee may be experiencing, and at the same time bring the conversation back around to a constructive angle for fostering retention. Here, the supervisor encourages the employees to consider methods of support to create an ideal scenario that would bring their current situation more in line with these desires.

- What one change would have the biggest positive impact on your work-life balance?
- How well do you think our organizational culture supports your mental health and well-being given the challenging nature of the work?
- What type of recognition or rewards resonate most with you?
- How would you like to be supported by peers when managing personal stress and avoiding burnout? (e.g., formal supervision, peer debriefing)
- Tell me about a recent interaction working with community members that has stayed on your mind? What about that interaction has you still thinking about it?
- How can I and our team support you when you are working with community members experiencing challenges (e.g., clients who are impacted by immigration, clients losing medical coverage etc.)?

ASSESSING RETENTION

Ask this question to uncover key reasons that contribute to the employee's likelihood of leaving and how those reasons might be addressed to prevent their departure.

- At any point, have you found yourself considering other opportunities? What influenced that? (e.g., inadequate pipeline for promotion)
- Since our last conversation, have you thought about leaving? If so, what prompted it?
- Since our last conversation, what improvements have you seen or felt within the workplace?
- How can I (as your manager) better support you?

Questions for Administrative Staff

PERSONAL MOTIVATION AND JOB SATISFACTION

Ask these questions to bring the employee's mind to the present and help set a baseline for what aspects of the employee's work they enjoy or dislike. The employee's response can also key the supervisor into tasks and responsibilities they may want to take on in the future.

- When you are getting ready to start the work day, how are you feeling?
- How can I create an environment where you feel more connected on a personal level to others that you work with?
- Do you feel your lived experience and perspective are valued in how we design or deliver programs?
- What is the most exciting part about supporting activities that address multiple syndemics?
- Do you feel a strong sense of purpose in your job, and what is most meaningful to you about working in a role that address syndemics?
- What is working well in your role, or what would you like to do more of?
- How would you like to be involved in the syndemic approach work within our team?
- How do you feel about the balance between administrative demands of syndemic work and competing priorities, and how could this balance be improved?
- What challenges or barriers to your productivity have you come across lately?
- Are there specific policies or operational aspects related to our syndemic activities (e.g., reporting activities, meeting with other program leads, planning activities) that you feel are working well or need improvement?
- In your role, you have rich knowledge about the complexities of working implementing and sustaining syndemic activities. What methods would be helpful so we can hear more about your ideas to improve our administrative syndemic activities?

Appendix 1: Sample Stay Interview Questions

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Ask these questions to get an understanding of the employee's development progress and needs. Employee development is vitally important for engaging employees and influencing them to stay.

- Are there specific training or professional development opportunities related to your role, working with community members, understanding syndemic approaches or other relevant topics that you'd like to pursue?
- What skills or talents do you have that are not being best used in your current role?
- How have we utilized your lived experience to grow within your role?
- Are there individuals or teams that you would like to receive cross-training from that you think would benefit you in your role?
- What would help you feel better oriented to the health department and/or your role?

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION

Ask these questions to get at core frustrations and pain points an employee may be experiencing, and at the same time bring the conversation back around to a constructive angle for fostering retention. Here, the supervisor encourages the employees to consider methods of support to create an ideal scenario that would bring their current situation more in line with these desires.

- What one change would have the biggest positive impact on your work-life balance?
- How well do you think our organizational culture supports your mental health and well-being given the challenging nature of the work?
- What type of recognition or rewards resonate most with you?
- How would you like to be supported by a network of peers or through formal supervision/ debriefing to manage personal stress and avoid burnout?

ASSESSING RETENTION

Ask this question to uncover key reasons that contribute to the employee's likelihood of leaving and how those reasons might be addressed to prevent their departure.

- At any point, have you found yourself considering other opportunities? What influenced that? (e.g., inadequate pipeline for promotion)
- Since our last conversation, have you thought about leaving? If so, what prompted it?
- Since our last conversation, what improvements have you seen or felt within the workplace?
- How can I (as your manager) better support you?

Appendix 2:

Stay Interview Action Plan

Employee Name	
Supervisor Name	
Interview Date	
Program/ Division	

Instructions: Following the Stay Interview it is recommended that the employee and supervisor co-create a Stay Plan. This document should outline the agreed upon actions that the employee and supervisor will take to achieve the identified initiative/ activity that will increase the employee's engagement and retention. As a best practice, **no more than three initiatives/ activities** should be identified after completing the Stay Interview.[5]

Stay Plans should be stored in location that are accessible to the employee and the supervisor. And both the employee and supervisor should refer to the Stay Plan throuhgout the year to monitor progress or make changes as needed. Like the Stay Interview, the Stay Plan does not need to be approved or shared with human resources or other entities outside of the employee and the supervisor.[5]

STAY PLAN TEMPLATE:

Initiative/ Activity	Supervisor Action	Employee Action	Completion Date

Appendix 3:

Workplace Wellness Strategies



There are a variety of policies, tools, and resources to support workplace wellness. Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Parts, HIV prevention programs, community-based organizations and other entities can implement and/or advocate for wellness supportive opportunities internal to their organization and incorporate requirements for workplace wellness into subrecipient contracts. Organizations should review state-level and union policies before making any changes.

KEY

For ease of reference, strategies will be noted as the following (some may fall into multiple categories) when appropriate:

- Mental/Emotional Wellbeing
- Physical Wellbeing
- Social Wellbeing

PRACTICES

Organizational practices offer creative opportunities to ritualize wellness and strengthen organizational identity and camaraderie among staff.

- ***Group support can be a powerful and skill-building aid for the team***. It may be particularly helpful when facilitated by someone outside of your organization.

- ***Peer support and mentoring*** can be powerful tools for organizational healing. Peer support gives staff an opportunity for collaboration and teamwork. Staff can benefit from being in community with folks impacted in the same way from their work which allows them to feel more connected. Staff may also seek out peer support or mentorship on their own, but organizations are encouraged to set up structures for peer support or mentors.

- ***Incorporate celebration and affirmation*** in all parts of the organization. Create tradition around celebration* of birthdays, life transitions, recovery anniversaries, and professional advancements. Provide space to create a joy board where staff are invited to share good news stories and photos that bring joy.
  ** Gain input and consent from staff on what life moments oraccomplishments will be celebrated. Provide opportunity for bodywork. Schedule practitioners toregularly provide free massage, acupuncture, or Reiki for staff.Take interest in staff physical health by providing healthy snacksand beverages.*

- ***Provide opportunity for bodywork.*** Schedule practitioners toregularly provide free massage, acupuncture, or Reiki for staff.Take interest in staff physical health by providing healthy snacks and beverages.

PEER EXAMPLES: STAFF RECOGNITION

- **Virginia: Recognizing teams and individual employees through a quarterly peer voting system. Full-time employees receive four hours of recognition leave and a certificate, contractors receive a certificate and prize provided be the internal workplace wellness group, and teams will receive certificates for all team members.**

Additional Resources

- ***Music, art, play and laughter*** are powerful vehicles for resilience and healing. Set aside time and space in your organization (such as Friday Fundays) to facilitate space for right brain (more visual, expressive, and creative than left brain) activities.
- ***Icebreakers*** provide an opportunity for staff to get to know one another better. Consider incorporating them, or some type of check-in, into meetings regularly.
- ***Use NASTAD's Vicarious Trauma Assessment*** and Prevention to monitor the level of vicarious trauma over time.
- ***Provide and prioritize trauma-informed supervision***, in both individual and group settings, for all staff. Ensure supervision is regular (at least weekly), predictable (in terms of discussion in supervision), and valued (supervisor is physically and emotionally present during the meeting). Ensure supervisors are trained in trauma-informed supervision and have a reasonable number of supervisees.
- ***Ritualize practice of mindfulness*** in your organization. Opportunities to practice mindfulness, even for just one or two minutes at the beginning of a meeting, strengthen resilience and healing for individuals.
- ***Utilize trauma-informed meeting*** principles.
- ***Separation of work and personal time*** is important as more organizations embrace telework. Tools for separation, whether working from home or in an office/clinic, include unplugging from technology, turning off phone notifications, or "book ending" the day (i.e., sharing of successes at beginning and end of the day). Discuss separation of work and home life during supervision.

PEER EXAMPLES: WELLNESS DAYS

- **Hawaii: One hour per week for wellness time that includes activities like playing board games with other staff and Zumba classes.**
- **Colorado: Wellness Wednesdays, where staff receive emails about wellness practices and reminders to promote building wellness into their weekly routine**
- **Colorado: Every 4th Wednesday, all case managers get together for a "Case Management Collaborative" where staff share and practice wellness activities, self -care, and coping skills.**
- **Connecticut: Mindful Mondays, which entails mindful meditation for staff from 12:00pm-12:30pm . And Feel-Good Fridays, which meets every Friday from 12:00pm -12:30pm to offer health department staff a way to re-adjust their mindset from the stress, uncertainties, and business from the week's focused energies and refresh and center themselves so that they can enter the weekend and enjoy their time off.**

PEER EXAMPLE: ORGANIZATION SPONSORED SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- **Hawaii: Paying for people's laundry, to assist with support for daily tasks.**

POLICIES

Policies are an important tool for ensuring standardization of a culture of wellness in an organization.

- Assess organizational policies and procedures for eliciting unintentional trauma.
- Allow for flexible scheduling. For many, a standard 40-hour, Monday – Friday work week isn't viable. Flexible schedules allow staff to personalize work – personal time balance which helps to create a culture of trust by putting value on quality of work rather than time spent in the office. Organizations can provide flexible schedules in the form of alternative worktimes or telecommuting. Be explicit about your organization's commitment to flexible scheduling in job announcements.
- If your organization supports telecommuting, ensure staff have adequate technology and resources to work from home effectively and safely. Provide ergonomic support regardless of work location.
- Set realistic caseloads for case managers, social workers, and similar positions. Readjust budgets and identify additional resources to ensure your organization is not understaffed. Commit to organizational resilience and healing to reduce staff turnover.
- Establish "stay" (regular check-ins on what people need to stay) and "exit" (trauma-informed off-boarding when people wish to leave) interviews as a quality improvement exercise. Exit interviews can also be used to better understand reasons why staff are leaving and harvesting of helpful suggestions.
- Provide standards and resources for continuing education and mentorship.
- Commit to planning and development of professional development to understand staff needs and desires for growth and advancement. Incorporate wellness-related goals and activities in these plans.

PEER EXAMPLES: NO MEETING ZONES

- **Wisconsin: Creating a work culture where no meetings can be scheduled on every fifth Friday, so staff can use this time for their wellness or to catch up on work**
- **Colorado: Scheduling "no meeting zones" twice per week that occur between 8:00 am-11:00 am and 2:00 pm- 5:00 pm**

Additional Resources

BENEFITS

While a significant cost to organizations, provision of generous benefits for staff demonstrates commitment to organizational values and a healing-centered approach.

Provide competitive pay and raises that ensure a living wage for your community. Transparent decisions related to starting salaries and pay increases are important.

Offer comprehensive paid leave policies.

- Holidays – including federally recognized holidays and those in line with agency values(such as Juneteenth or non-Christian religious holidays).
- Ensure adequate paid leave is accessible from a person's start date (versus having to accruetime off). Offer paid family leave, bereavement leave, sabbatical policies, and "use it or lose it"vacation policies to incentivize time off. Separate sick leave from other paid leave so staff aren'tdisincentivized from taking time off for physical or emotional issues; normalize taking off formental health days. Finally, ensure a work culture where staff aren't penalized for taking timeoff by providing mechanisms for back-up and coverage while people are away. Leadershipshould model the importance of taking time off so staff feel empowered to do the same.
- Use a 1:1 compensatory time policy (one-hour compensatory time for each potential overtimehour worked) to disincentivize overtime. Ensure adequate staffing so overtime is an option oflast resort.

Offer comprehensive, affordable health insurance policies that include coverage for gender-affirming treatment therapies and alternative/complementary care, such as massage and acupuncture.

Provide access to comprehensive Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and other crisis intervention services. Ensure the EAP offers culturally and linguistically responsive providers for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color staff.

Provide access to onsite opportunities for exercise and movement. Designate building space for exercise, yoga, meditation, or napping. Bring in exercise instructors or compensate staff who are qualified to lead classes. If space is a barrier, subsidize membership to a nearby gym or community center. Provide time outside of the lunch hour for exercise and rest.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Attunement and Self-Assessment in Supervision
- Momento – Surprise video gifts for when physical distance is a barrier for celebration.
- The Five Senses Worksheet or the 3-Step Mindfulness Worksheet
- Fifteen Art Therapy Activities, Exercises, and Ideas
- Work Life Balance

Appendix 4:

Vicarious Trauma Assessment and Prevention

Many public health workers have direct contact with participants and their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you work with can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences as a public health worker adapted from the Professional Quality of Life Scale and the PTSD CheckList – Civilian Version. Your responses will allow you to assess your level of burnout and vicarious trauma, as well as reflect on key areas that may be contributing to these levels. The results should inform next steps and necessary personal and professional changes in your life (see NASTAD's Workplace Wellness Strategies resource for ideas). Organizations can also leverage this assessment to inform necessary cultural shifts and organizational practices to better support staff with their healing.

Disclaimer: this is not a clinical diagnostic assessment. This tool should be used for self-assessment and reflection. Additionally, some of the statements in this assessment may be triggering. Please be mindful of your well-being; take breaks as needed as you complete this assessment.

INSTRUCTIONS

Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number below that honestly reflects how frequently you have experienced each prompt in the last 30 days; be sure to respond to every question.

1 Never **2** Rarely **3** Sometimes **4** Often **5** Very Often

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1. I feel overwhelmed by the thought of going to work each day.
2. I feel exhausted from the moment I get to work.
3. I am unable to stop thinking about a particular situation I worked on.
4. I have little motivation when I am at work.
5. I have a difficult time not thinking about work when I am home.
6. I am startled easily by loud noises.
7. I am easily irritated and have a harder time re-centering once I am irritated.
8. I feel like I have little to no control over my day-to-day life.
9. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone else (I have helped).
10. I am preoccupied with wanting to follow-up with specific participants I have interacted with.
11. I feel overwhelmed by the system I work within.
12. I have a difficult time seeing any good in the work I have done.
13. I feel trapped by my work.
14. I am having a difficult time falling asleep.

INSTRUCTIONS

Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number below that honestly reflects how frequently you have experienced each prompt in the last 30 days; be sure to respond to every question.

1 Never **2** Rarely **3** Sometimes **4** Often **5** Very Often

---

15. I have headaches which only occur when I am at work.
16. I have had a change in appetite.
17. I no longer find pleasure in the things I used to do for fun.
18. I do not want to attend supervision.
19. I am avoiding my colleagues.
20. I have begun to procrastinate more.
21. I no longer find joy in my work.
22. I have little to no compassion for the clients I engage with.
23. I feel distant or cut off from other people.
24. I feel emotionally numb or feel unable to have loving feelings for those close to me.
25. I am having trouble staying asleep.
26. I have difficulty concentrating.
27. I am “super alert” or watchful/on guard.
28. I am feeling jumpy.
29. I feel as if my future will somehow be cut short.
30. I am having angry outbursts.

0 **SCORE**

What does your score mean?

Score	Score Classification	What to do (i.e., for the individual, supervisor, or organization)
30-33	No signs of burnout	**INDIVIDUAL:** make note of how you are doing and what your day-to-day looks like to determine if there are any shifts for you in the future and how to address them before you begin to feel burnt out. **SUPERVISOR:** check-in at 1:1 meeting to assess if staff feel burnt out even if there are no clear signs. Supervisors can be proactive with their response rather than waiting for burnout to occur. The identification of these signs should never rest solely with the employee—that shifts responsibility to be communal/ relationship-based, rather than one person needing to state that personally.
34 - 62	Low risk of burnout unless some factors are particularly severe.	**SUPERVISOR:** supervisors should be touching base to determine the best ways to support you, ensuring increased levels of burnout do not occur. This can and should include decreased workload and/or additional time off, as well as connection to clinical supervision (i.e., supervision with someone who has a therapeutic background/credential), if possible.
63 - 75	High risk of burnout	In addition to the recommendations listed under the low risk of burnout, **INDIVIDUAL AND SUPERVISOR:** steps put in place for those beginning to experience burnout should be continued and tweaked as necessary. Additional time off, change in work schedule, and workload should be discussed and implemented. **SUPERVISOR:** taking responsibility and advocating on behalf of their staff to make the organization aware that the risk of burnout is high so that organizational change can start occurring and additional support can be offered to staff before burnout has occurred.
76 - 90	Burnout	In addition to the recommendations listed under the low and high risk of burnout, **INDIVIDUAL:** those falling into this category should provide their organization feedback so the organization can gain understanding of what led to burnout to be addressed at a structural level. **SUPERVISOR AND ORGANIZATION:** ensure staff who are burnt out have additional time off either each day or can end their week early. **ORGANIZATION:** provide access to free or low-cost counseling, e.g., employee assistance program (EAP), online counseling services, and insurance plans inclusive of accessible mental health benefits.
90 - 150	Vicarious trauma	In addition to the recommendations listed under the low, high-risk, and burnout, **ORGANIZATION:** to address and heal from vicarious trauma, having a substantial amount of time away from work may be necessary to re-center. Ongoing clinical supervision and connection to peers can also be helpful in addressing and dealing with vicarious trauma. Organizations should prepare and implement protocols to prevent vicarious trauma that include necessary time off with job security.

Key Definitions

PROFESSIONAL BURN-OUT

"Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and, reduced professional efficacy." (WHO)

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

"The profound shift in worldview that occurs in helping professionals when they work with individuals who have experienced trauma: helpers notice that their fundamental beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by being repeatedly exposed to traumatic material." (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)

Practices at different levels to prevent workforce burnout or vicarious trauma:

ORGANIZATION:

1. Be employee centered.
2. Incentivize taking time off.
3. Provide free counseling for staff who have most direct contact with clients.
4. Have clear and transparent job descriptions.
5. Lead by example.
6. Create a pool of time off so that some staff who may not utilize or need their personal time off as much can provide it for colleagues that do.
7. Provide ongoing options for working from home. Consider working hours that account for each individual's learning style, personal lifestyle, and lived experiences (i.e., flex hours).
8. Create a support group for supervisors.
9. Utilize NASTAD's Workplace Wellness Strategies resource.

SUPERVISOR:

1. Provide space within supervision for individuals to process work-related stress and any triggering interactions they may have had.
2. Recognize that hearing about a colleague's trauma might cause you to experience vicarious trauma. Ensure these experiences are addressed by tapping into the organization's support mechanisms for staff and supervisors specifically.
3. Have options available for individuals to adjust their workload as and provide time off as needed.
4. Be proactive when engaging with supervisees to help prevent burnout or reduce its impact prior to the supervisee precipitating to the point of vicarious trauma.

COLLEAGUES:

1. Check-in with your colleagues, ask how they are doing.
2. Share your own experiences. Lean into vulnerability.
3. Offer to talk through scenarios with colleagues that may be helpful for them.
4. Fill out and share the above section of this form with colleagues. Use it to check-in with one another.

INDIVIDUAL:

1. Practice self-compassion.

Appendix 5:

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