



Invitation *to* **Wellness**

A WORKBOOK FOR
ANTI-VIOLENCE WORKERS

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Acknowledgements

This wellness workbook was created on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, where the office of the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) is located.

Thank you to our staff for the vision and creation of this workbook and special thank you to Amber Huva for consultation. Layout and design by Fernwood Creative.

We recognize that learning, discussing, and practicing wellness is a form of resisting harmful norms, and a commitment to create a more equitable community.

For keeping your sights set on wellness for yourselves and for others, *we thank you.*

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Department of Justice
Canada

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Honouring anti-violence workers

This workbook was inspired and informed by the wisdom of anti-violence workers, advocates, knowledge-holders, and leaders. The development of the workbook was guided by contributions shared by participants who attended the networking and wellness session at EVA BC's 2022 Annual Training Forum. We hoped the session would amplify anti-violence workers' voices and acknowledge existing wisdom and practices in the community. We told participants that we'd collect their contributions and share them back with the sector. This workbook aims to do that.

In our work, we have the privilege of witnessing the courage of survivors and anti-violence workers. In the context of wellness, anti-violence workers have graciously voiced and shared their experiences of navigating the impacts of cultural and systemic barriers, vicarious trauma, and burnout.



We hope this wellness workbook offers:

A resource to engage with when you need time for yourself

Ideas to guide conversations with your peers and staff

A reminder to connect with trusted colleagues and supervisors to support wellness in the workplace

Acknowledging territory

Community-based anti-violence workers under EVA BC's provincial umbrella are located on many territories that Indigenous Peoples call home, across the province colonially known as British Columbia.

Acknowledging territory is recognizing Indigenous rights and self-determination. In the context of program support, it means that we have the responsibility to proactively seek opportunities and stand with Indigenous communities in resisting and dismantling colonial systems and structures, which are linked to systemic and interpersonal racism and discrimination, poverty, cultural separation, gender-based violence, harassment and hate.

Standing with Indigenous Peoples also means recognizing diverse cultures, histories, and rights to self-determination. We share gratitude for Indigenous peoples' activism and knowledge which continues to shape how we perceive our relations to many things in our lives, including seeing the notion of wellness outside of the dominant western worldview.

With that, we gently invite you to consider the following reflection questions with us:

- * *How does acknowledging the land you are on shape the way you do anti-violence work?*
- * *What is your perspective on wellness and what worldviews have informed those perspectives?*

We encourage you to seek out the many readings and resources available through Indigenous-led organizations and communities.

CONCEPTUALIZING *wellness*

*What does wellness mean to you?
What words do you associate with the
concept of wellness?*

We conceptualize wellness in ways that support us to be imperfect in our journeys to wellness, compassionate as we explore familiar and new ways of caring for ourselves and each other, flexible and open to adjusting our approaches to wellness as we grow, and open to perspectives that move us beyond the individual and towards the collective when envisioning strategies to support wellness.

In a world where we are all interconnected, care is a collective responsibility, acknowledging the diversity and fluidity of our needs and capacity in different areas of our lives. We see that wellness is an ongoing and collective effort to support each other in our organizations and across the anti-violence sector to be as well as possible, while we support survivors of gender-based violence in their own journeys towards safety and wellness.

The format of this workbook was informed by more than 100 anti-violence workers' responses to the question "What does wellness mean to you?" Themes from their responses are aligned with the concepts of awareness, balance, and connection, and the workbook also aligns with these concepts.

Anti-violence workers do profound work that has immeasurable impacts on survivors' lives, and doing anti-violence work has impacts that can challenge service providers. There are many words that have been used to describe the impacts of trauma exposure and cultural and systemic inequities on helping professionals. Anti-violence work can change us in ways that may not serve our wellness, but there are also many ways that this work changes us in ways that support our growth and resilience.

There are many overlapping terms that describe the impacts of working with survivors of violence and trauma, such as vicarious traumatization, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious resilience, vicarious posttraumatic growth, burnout, and trauma stewardship. While mainstream approaches are heavily influenced by academic, clinical, and western concepts, they might never capture the full range of human experience. Below are some concepts and words that may be familiar to you. You may also use additional terms or concepts to describe the impacts of trauma work and make meaning of your own experiences.



*Which of the concepts and words below resonate with you most?
What additional words would you use to describe your experience?*

Vicarious traumatization

LISA MCCANN & LAURIE PEARLMAN

The cumulative and transformative impacts of trauma exposure on our beliefs and worldviews. Vicarious trauma develops over time and can impact our capacity to set and maintain boundaries, make decisions, and provide quality services to survivors.

Vicarious resilience

PILAR HERNÁNDEZ, DAVID ENGSTROM & DAVID GANGSEI

A sense of strength and resilience when facing challenges in our own lives that develops from working with survivors and witnessing their own strength and resilience in the face of trauma and injustice.

Burnout

HERBERT FREUDENBERGER

Emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual exhaustion felt as a result of poor working conditions, low wages, and overwork. Burnout is not unique to anti-violence workers, but is common in the anti-violence sector.

Trauma stewardship

LAURA VAN DERNOOT LIPSKY

A transformative and reflexive practice that involves caring for and supporting survivors in their journey with intention and self-compassion.

When we experience some of the impacts of doing anti-violence work, our awareness may become limited and we may experience a sense of imbalance or disconnection. It is not uncommon to experience waves of emotions and impacts, and we may notice some of these signs at different times in our lives, at work or outside of work. However, it is important to be aware of the signs, notice when we are experiencing more of them or experiencing them more often, and check in with ourselves.

Which of these signs have you experienced?

- * Emotional numbing
- * Sense of powerlessness
- * Feelings of isolation
- * Agitation or irritation
- * Lack of energy
- * Difficulty sleeping
- * Cynicism
- * Difficulty setting boundaries
- * Difficulty making decisions
- * Using less healthy coping strategies
- * Missing work, or regularly showing up late
- * Feeling obligated to show up for others
- * Deprioritizing your own needs
- * Feeling guilty when spending time doing things you enjoy
- * Feeling overstimulated or understimulated
- * Feeling unsupported and unvalidated
- * Noticing limited opportunities for spiritual and cultural practices

When we become aware of imbalances in our lives, whether at work or at home, and when we notice we are feeling disconnected from ourselves, from others, from our work, and from the world around us, we are invited to use that awareness to restore balance and reconnect. We hope this workbook will support you to achieve greater awareness, balance, and connection to sustain you in this work.

AWARENESS

INTRODUCTION AND *reflection*

Anti-violence work is often unpredictable, fast-paced and emotionally charged. In order to be fully present with our clients and to adapt to the ever-changing conditions of our work, we might get used to turning much of our attention and energy outwards rather than inwards. If we think of our awareness as a radio, we might find that over time we're always tuned into the same station — our clients' circumstances. However, our awareness can help us tune into so many other important facets of our day-to-day experience that are meaningful. Other "stations" worth listening to might include:

How you define wellness, and how your definition of wellness changes over time or is context-specific

The diversity of needs you or your colleagues might be experiencing in the workplace, as well as the diversity of practices and knowledge

Have you experienced any "wins" lately? Are you tracking your successes as well as your challenges?

How you experience wellness in different areas of your life (e.g., physical, mental, spiritual)

Your general state of being: Do you find yourself feeling overstimulated or overtired? Have you been feeling more hopeful or hopeless lately? Do you feel like your work matters?

Taking time to slow down and turn our awareness inwards is a legitimate need and a way to honour ourselves. Being aware does not necessarily mean being comfortable, as noticing our needs or the needs of our community and taking a closer look at our thoughts and behaviours can be a challenging and complicated process. It can also be healing because it gives us an opportunity to be more grounded and in tune with our truths, and to re-imagine a new way to engage with this work if needed.

MEANING-MAKING

What does awareness mean to you?

SELF-REFLECTION

What makes it easier to increase awareness? What makes it more difficult?

WHAT HELPS YOU ACCESS GREATER AWARENESS?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING ALREADY?

Ideas and practices

What anti-violence workers shared about wellness connected to the theme of awareness.

- * Supervision
- * Debriefing
- * Clarity in thinking
- * Knowing when to step back
- * Taking care of yourself like you would take care of someone else
- * Being present in different areas of life after doing this work
- * Recognizing the importance of wellness
- * Creating structures to support wellness
- * Slowing down
- * Making sense of experiences
- * Feeling our feelings
- * Routines that nurture and give purpose
- * Noticing signals in the body
- * Checking in with feelings
- * Holding healthy boundaries
- * Self-awareness
- * Feeling joy, gratitude
- * Safety planning for ourselves
- * Being honest with your own needs and honouring them
- * Feeling settled, capable, grounded
- * Absence of obligation
- * Using energy and compassion
- * Recognizing our own needs
- * Being able to check in with yourself
- * Recognizing the signs when wellness is slipping



“Self-care was so difficult during the deep end of the pandemic. Part of self-care now is feeling into the contrast of the expansion of now, as compared to the compression of then.”



“Wellness practices can change as you grow and change. If certain practices aren’t serving you and your soul, try something new.”



DIVING *inward*

PRACTICE

Sometimes, putting our bodily signals aside is us doing the best we could at the time - getting through the moment. However, being aware of these signals could support us to notice things that are “off” as soon as they happen, which can help us to ensure our actions are aligned with our values.

In an as-safe-as-possible space, when you feel ready, note down how your emotions show up in your body. Take a moment to remember the last time you witnessed something that frustrated or saddened you. It could be anything – interpersonal conflict, collective trauma, systemic injustice, or something else.

What emotions did you feel, and where did it show up in your body?

Then, take a moment to ground yourself, before asking: what does your body feel like when you feel safe?

LETTER *writing*

PRACTICE

Writing a letter can be therapeutic as there is power in telling your story. It allows us to reflect deeply and record where we are in the moment.

In the space provided, we invite you to write a letter to yourself from the future. →

*What would you say about how you are doing right now?
What do you need from your future self to keep you well?
What do you want your future self to remember?*

(note: try writing the letter with self-compassion.)

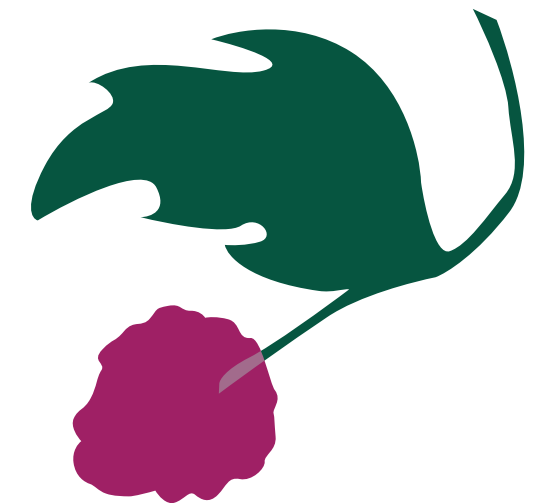
BALANCE

INTRODUCTION AND *reflection*

We see the concept of wellness from a more holistic perspective that acknowledges the nuances and richness of your experiences. Working in a helping profession can in itself contribute to a sense of imbalance.

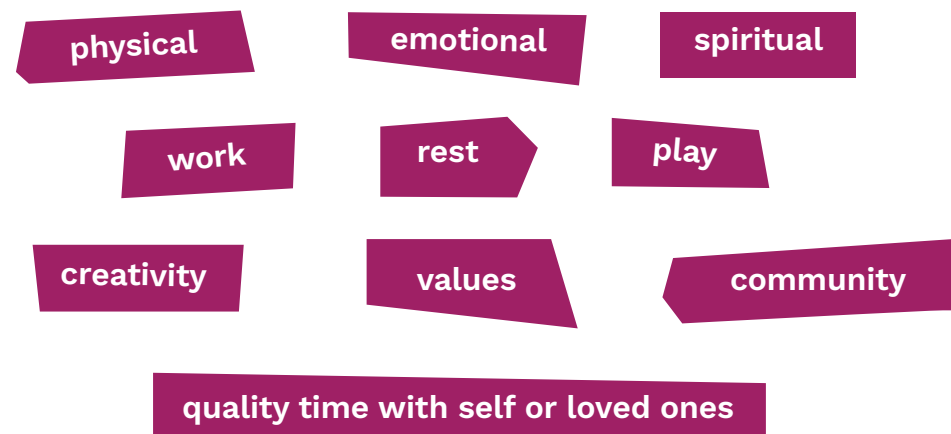
Our professional training asks us to uphold a certain set of values that gets undermined regularly by the actual conditions of our day-to-day work. Working to resolve those conditions is exhausting and unpredictable. When our work focuses on trauma, it can feel challenging to create and maintain a sense of balance in our bodies and minds. When we lack balance, we might notice that all (or too many) of our internal resources are being funneled into our clients or workplace.

We might find that we're too tired to enjoy our hobbies or recreational activities, or that we notice we have less patience or presence in our personal relationships.



The first step towards creating balance is awareness. Awareness helps us notice when things are off balance. Balance in the context of wellness could be tuning in and satisfying the needs in different areas of our lives.

What areas are incorporated in your practice?



It is important to acknowledge that balance is not a destination we must arrive at, but a journey. Perhaps there is something useful – even beautiful – about exploring experiences of imbalance to see what messages they are trying to communicate.

We hope the reflection questions and practices on the following page support you to continue embarking on this journey to find balance.

MEANING-MAKING

What does balance mean to you?

SELF-REFLECTION

*How do you know when you need to find greater balance in your life?
(try to explore different areas)*



Ideas and practices

What anti-violence workers shared about wellness connected to the theme of balance.

- * *“Awesome days” instead of “sick days”*
- * *Paid wellness days*
- * *Cultivating joy*
- * *Spending time alone*
- * *Going for a walk*
- * *Flexibility and options*
- * *Choice of online or in-person*
- * *Travelling*
- * *Meditation*
- * *Mindfulness*
- * *Taking the time to honour yourself*
- * *Swimming*
- * *Singing*
- * *Social events for workplaces*
- * *Sleep*
- * *Exercise*
- * *Balanced nutrition*
- * *Taking the time to care for ourselves in the midst of difficult times*
- * *Having fun*
- * *Laughing*
- * *Dancing*
- * *Being in the window of tolerance*
- * *Deep spiritual connection practices/rituals*
- * *Authenticity*
- * *Playing music on the radio LOUD when I drive home*
- * *Taking time for hobbies (photography)*
- * *Taking care of yourself*
- * *Walking in nature*
- * *Yoga*
- * *Dining out*



“Practices and habits that help us to thrive, not just survive.”



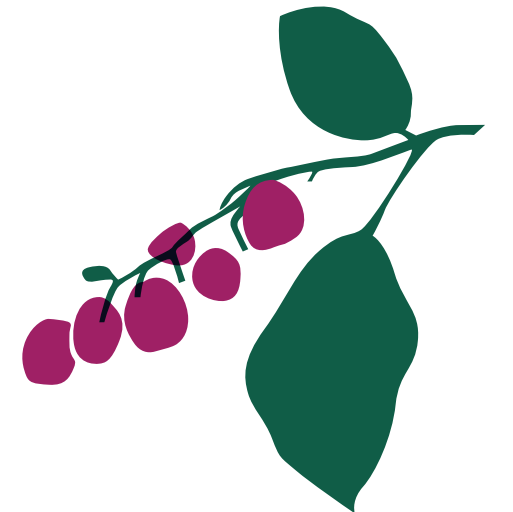
“Trying to find a balance of energy/support being given outwards to energy/support we bring inwards, including from our organizations.”

Envisioning

Let ideas flow freely through you. What practices, hobbies, or ideas are you curious about? Whisper or say the ideas out loud, even though they may sound unrealistic to you at this moment. These ideas can be related to different aspects of your life (e.g., physical, emotional, spiritual, work, rest, play, creativity, values, community, quality time with self or loved ones).

CREATIVE expression

On the following pages, we invite you to create a vision board of what a balanced life looks like to you. You can do this exercise with whatever creative means you see fit (photographs, images, drawing, poems, etc).



Can this vision board provide reassurance and comfort in a moment of future stress?

Does it help to remind yourself of your vision for a balanced life?

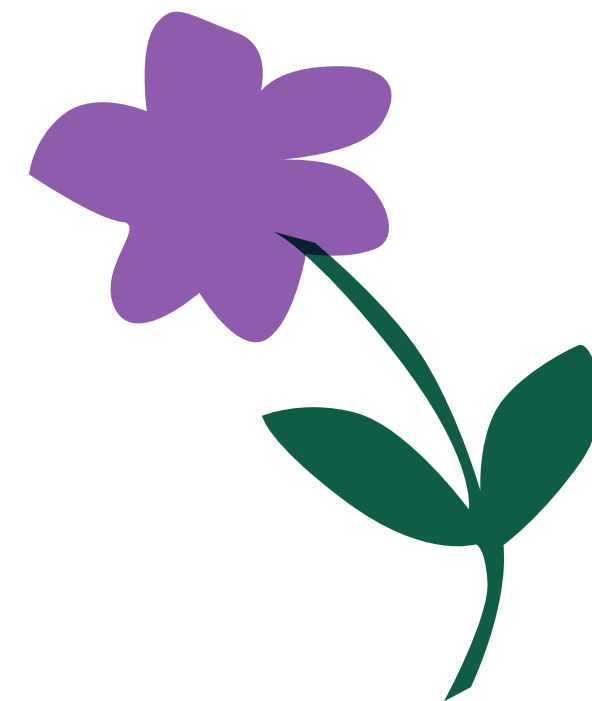


CONNECTION

INTRODUCTION AND *reflection*

Building, maintaining, and facilitating connection is a vital part of anti-violence work. While we often prioritize connection and relationship building for our clients, we sometimes put our own needs for connection and relationship building aside. Connection is an integral part of supporting our wellness, as it enables us to feel a sense of belonging, love, and community.

It is important to remember that connection doesn't always have to be with another person. Connections can come in many different forms. Connection is all around us, and it can be felt in many ways. Connection with nature, animals, our culture(s), and the land is a powerful way to support our wellness, reminding us that we belong to something larger than ourselves. We are all connected by our goal to end gender-based violence and can lean on each other as we work together towards this goal.



Social connections can be as simple as sending a message to a loved one to let them know how much they mean to you.

We encourage you to explore different types of social connection from joyful laughter and singing, to meaningful conversations built on honesty and respect to support each other. For most of us, colleagues, like-minded individuals, family and/or friends are our safe space and whether it's speaking on a phone call or attending large parties with them, making contact can contribute to our feeling of connection.

Social engagement with people who have diverse lived experiences can also contribute to our wellness by expanding our knowledge and worldviews.

While practicing connecting to people, culture, and nature, it is important to practice consent with ourselves, recognizing that we also have the freedom to end connections when they are no longer serving us and supporting our wellness.

Each of us has different needs and our needs will change.

MEANING-MAKING

*How do you practice connection? What new connections are you hoping to make?
What existing connections are you hoping to maintain and/or strengthen?*

SELF-REFLECTION

*What helps you to access or create more opportunities for connection?
What are you doing already?*

STRENGTHS
(E.G., REACHING OUT TO OTHERS)

STRATEGIES
(E.G., REGULAR WALKS, SOCIAL GATHERINGS)

Ideas and practices

What anti-violence workers shared about wellness connected to the theme of connection.

- * *Having a supportive team*
- * *Spending time with like-minded people*
- * *Debriefing with colleagues*
- * *Supervision*
- * *Social supports*
- * *Support groups*
- * *Taking a wellness day with an activity as a group*
- * *Support system outside of work*
- * *Spending time with pets*
- * *Somatic trauma work*
- * *Healing touch*
- * *Having a person who can maintain your accountability*
- * *Connecting to self and others*
- * *Connecting with family for support and grounding*
- * *Connecting with childlike joy and wonder with grandchildren*
- * *Support within the workplace and in our personal lives*



“Care of my spiritual being as it is foundational for my physical, mental and emotional self.”



“Doing wellness session days once a month... doing different activities and connecting with each other on how we debrief.”

**BRAINSTORM IDEAS
for later**

To cultivate connection, try brainstorming moments when you felt connected. If you're feeling stumped, maybe do a quick internet search; there are many ideas online. Consider putting the ideas you've written down into a container to pull out an idea when needed in the future.

**CONNECT WITH
nature**

One way to practice connection is by connecting with nature. Take a moment to think about what in nature brings you joy and/or healing. On a day when the weather feels supportive to your needs, consider spending some time outdoors and notice the beauty of nature, take a picture or pictures to revisit later. If spending time outdoors doesn't feel supportive to your needs, consider revisiting old photos of what you especially love about the land where you live and work, and the plants, animals, and people that you share the land with. As you engage in these activities, reflect on how you feel connected to nature and allow those feelings to deepen your sense of connection.



ORGANIZATIONAL *practices*

We are grateful for anti-violence workers and leaders who have been working to create change and build more supportive and equitable environments for clients and colleagues. Anti-violence workers support clients to nurture wellness in their lives, but workers in the sector do not always feel adequately supported. Repeatedly witnessing the injustices that clients face can be physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. That exhaustion can be exacerbated by inadequate sector or organizational resources and wellness practices. Anti-violence workers and leaders have stated that their capacity is limited by the lack of adequate and ongoing funding, staff roles, time, resources, and more.

Change is possible. Improving our working conditions and wellness is possible. The responsibility of constructing an as-supportive-as-possible workplace is an ongoing and collective process that requires shared responsibilities and accountability. This work does not fall on one person alone.

Take some time to read through the organizational practices below. We hope that these suggestions validate your own needs and experiences, and also inspire new ideas, discussion, and policy.

On the following pages, we reiterate what anti-violence workers and leaders shared about organizational practices that nurture balance, support individual wellness strategies, intentionally create connection, and foster a workplace culture of mutual care and wellbeing.

OPPORTUNITIES *to nurture balance*

*Levity, lightness, fun, and laughter
to help support the heaviness of
the work*

*Unconditional support when I need
to take time for myself*

*Fun huddle chats between staff
(shared photos, moments)*

*Mini music breaks in meetings to
encourage staff to get up and move*

*Support for and capacity to make
systemic change to help reduce
“moral injury”*

*Reduced caseloads and control
over caseloads*

Hybrid work model

Birthdays off

*Counselling and clinical
supervision*

*Being able to use sick days
as mental health days*

*Changing sick days to
wellness days*

Flex days and time off after difficult matters

*Auxiliary coverage for positions that need
coverage (transition houses, crisis lines)
so people can call in for wellness days
and know there will be other
coverage options*

OPPORTUNITIES

to engage in individual wellness strategies

Flexible engagement in wellness – some structured community care from organizations but also self-care time to engage in individual wellness activities (e.g., late start, longer lunch break)

Staff wellness retreats

Workshops on wellness

Wellness activities with coworkers and clients

Going for a walk and spending time with family

Health benefits

Agency trusting staff to do their work and to find balance

Recognizing personal life challenges and encouraging staff to take time off if they need it

Being honest with employers about the need to take a mental health day, and receiving a positive response

OPPORTUNITIES

for intentional connection

Supportive and understanding coworkers and supervisors/management

Recognizing when you are mentally drained and sharing that with your supervisor/manager

Celebrating each other (e.g., birthday celebrations, milestone celebrations)

Group discussions

Personal connection and flexibility based on skills/needs/abilities

Wellness committee and budget to support team building and fun activities

Read inspirational cards and share to bring out conversation and connect as a group

Morning or weekly meetings to share, collaborate, and check-in on wellness

Support from team and other workers

Debriefing with colleagues in anti-violence roles and supervisors/management when needed

Clinical counselling available, included in the budget, and paid for by employer

Creating time and space for staff to connect informally/socially/casually at work

A true team spirit with everyone in the organization

Elder support

Regular individual and group/peer clinical supervision

Humour, sharing through email, group chats through the day

Team days

STRATEGIES THAT FOSTER A WORKPLACE CULTURE
of mutual care and wellbeing

Having time to discuss challenges and successes

Support and communication from leadership

More connection

Fostering a learning culture

Support to be well

More team building

Organization-wide staff surveys

Shift in the language - rather than sick days or burnout, calling it wellness or awesome days

Encouraging staff to show up as their "whole selves" and be vulnerable with one another

Wellness committee to identify needs and implement structured strategies

Working towards a living wage for all employees

ORGANIZATIONAL
practice activities

Which strategies and initiatives do you think would be beneficial to implement?

What actions can you and your colleagues take to promote wellness?

What wellness initiatives can your organization implement in a more formal way?

What are some of the barriers to implementing these actions/initiatives?

What are some possible solutions?

Who can you talk to about barriers and solutions? (e.g., colleagues, supervisor, EVA BC's program support team, anti-violence workers in other agencies across BC or outside BC)

WELLNESS *resources*

EVA BC ANTI-VIOLENCE WORKER WELLNES PROJECTS AND RESOURCES

* *Mitigating vicarious trauma*

<https://endingviolence.org/resources/new-resources-mitigating-vicarious-trauma/>

- Backgrounder: Overview and history of vicarious trauma
- Vicarious trauma tip sheet for Community-Based Victim Service workers
- Vicarious trauma tip sheet for Stopping the Violence Counsellors
- Vicarious trauma tip sheet for Stopping the Violence and Multicultural Outreach workers
- Vicarious trauma tip sheet for sexual assault centre workers
- Vicarious trauma tip sheet for anti-violence organizations

* *Vicarious trauma and resilience*

<https://endingviolence.org/resources/eva-notes-vicarious-resilience-dec-2017-2/>

* *Trauma-informed organizations and leadership*

<https://endingviolence.org/resources/trauma-informed-organizations-eva-notes/>

* *Community-based anti-violence worker wellness: A review of the literature and recommendations for the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime*

<https://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/CBAV-MTCV/index.html>

ADDITIONAL WORKFORCE WELLNESS PROJECTS AND RESOURCES

- * *Building supports for the gender-based violence workforce project (Ending Violence Association of Canada)*
<https://endingviolencecanada.org/current-projects/strengthening-community-based-anti-violence-worker-wellness-through-systemic-occupational-health-and-safety-supports/>
- * *Feminist brain drain project (Women's Shelters Canada)*
<https://endvaw.ca/feminist-brain-drain/>
- * *Revisiting vicarious trauma in gender-based violence work: Opportunities for fostering vicarious resilience & collective wellbeing (Learning Network, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Faculty of Education, Western University)*
<http://vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased-newsletters/issue-36/index.html>
- * *Workforce wellness – Task group on mental wellness (Thunderbird Foundation)*
<https://thunderbirdpf.org/?resources=workforce-wellness-task-group-on-mental-wellness>



LINKS TO ADDITIONAL WELLNESS SUPPORTS

- * *BC Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC)*
www.bcacc.ca
Directory of counsellors and clinical supervisors
- * *BCcampus*
www.bccampus.ca/projects/wellness/mental-health-and-wellness
Mental health and wellness resources and training for post-secondary institutions
- * *Canadian Mental Health Association (BC Division)*
www.cmha.bc.ca/workplace-mental-health
Workplace mental health program
- * *Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute (CTRI)*
www.ctrinstitute.com
Including free resources on trauma and mental health
- * *Foundry*
www.foundrybc.ca
Network of integrated health and wellness services for young people (ages 12-24)
- * *Healing in Colour*
www.healingincolour.com
Directory of BIPOC therapists committed to supporting BIPOC
- * *MindMapBC*
www.mindmapbc.ca
Database of outpatient mental health services (professional and peer)
- * *TEND Academy*
www.tendacademy.ca
Including free resources for helping professionals
- * *Trauma-Transformed*
www.traumatransformed.org
Advancing trauma-informed and healing-centred systems



endingviolence.org