

## Do You Want to Talk About It?

By Cassie Gillespie, LICSW

If you have ever groaned or rolled your eyes at the mention of "Self-Care" ... this group is for you! So often, legal work is trauma work, and attorneys are regularly exposed to human suffering. The impact of this exposure can be significant; and cause emotional, psychological, and even physical harm if left untreated.

One of my main interests as a licensed clinical social worker and academic (University of Vermont Social Work Department) is helping individuals who are experiencing chronic workplace stress and workplace trauma. I provide training, coaching, and consultation to professionals of all types, including mental health and medical providers, conservation staff, social workers, educators, librarians, government professionals and, importantly, legal professionals. I have had an opportunity now to teach at several VBA meetings on various topics relating to coping with the demands of lawyering and had an opportunity to meet many of you. Hello! I always enjoy these encounters. They have often included requests for more information and sources of support, especially from attorneys who are working alone, or with a very small group.

My professional interest dovetails with the VBA's interest in supporting attorney well-being and this is the genesis of a new program that we will be trialing this year.

Most attorneys have not been trained in trauma responsive lawyering and have not been supported to engage in care practices for their well-being. Solo practitioners and attorneys working in small firms, experience an increased risk for occupational trauma and workplace distress since they practice without the support of a team. **This group will address that gap by providing a space for connection and collective care, not self-care!**

Collective Care Group Details:

Who: The program is being provided as a VBA member benefit (at no additional charge) and is thus open only to VBA members. Our cohort, for starters at least, will be those who work in solo or small firms or small government offices. (e.g., state's attorneys in small offices). What do we mean by small? If you would define your practice as "small" that will qualify you to participate.

Group size will be limited to the first 25 people to register.

When:

The VBA Small Firm & Solo Practitioner Collective Care Group will meet for the first time on Monday March 16th via Zoom from 12:30-2:00. No preparation is needed to attend. The fourth date and time is TBD, pending discussion with the group. Once we've met at least four times, we will assess the project. Continue? Change? Expand? We will be looking for participants to provide feedback.

What:

I will facilitate, and guide discussion focused on coping with trauma or other personally distressing material that emerges in lawyer work with the goal of limiting the ways and degree to which that material intrudes into attorney's lives outside the office. We will discuss how to handle difficult clients, for example, clients who are demanding, angry, or non-compliant. We may also discuss such topics as expressing emotion in the workplace or dealing with difficult opposing counsel or work-family balance. This could include what it's like to work with angry, demanding or withholding clients, or setting boundaries with clients, and how clients' trauma material impacts the attorneys. Please note: the groups are not therapy groups and will not provide legal advice or case supervision. They are not for CLE credit. The attorney ethics rules regarding safeguarding client confidentiality will be observed. Rather, they are opportunities for clarifying the above problems and having the benefit of mutual validation, support, and problem-solving worker-to-worker.

More About Me:

I have more than 15 years of experience serving children, youth, families, and helping professionals. I began my social work career as a child welfare worker for the State of Vermont's Department of Children and Families (DCF) Family Services Division, gaining experience in a variety of settings including work in schools, housing, crisis response, and residential sites. After spending many years in direct service roles, I pivoted to supporting social workers in addressing the impact their work has on them. As noted, I now provide training, coaching, and consultation to individuals and organizations in many sectors.

I have run groups like this with attorneys, paralegals, legal support staff, teachers, municipal staff, civil servants, librarians, health care staff (RNs, Doctors and site administrators) and of course with mental health practitioners and social workers! The response has been unanimously positive and I'm looking forward to meeting you all and learning about your work!

As noted, I am also a full-time faculty member in the University of Vermont's Social Work Department, and the host of The Social Work Lens podcast. I live with my family in Underhill, Vermont.

You might want to listen to my podcast moral injury with immigration attorney Anna Rodgers on a recent episode of The Social Work Lens here:

<https://vermontcwtp.org/podcast/>

Registration Information:

Interested? Please send your contact information to VBA programs coordinator Laura Welcome at [Lwelcome@vtbar.org](mailto:Lwelcome@vtbar.org) to receive a Zoom link to the March 16th meeting.