

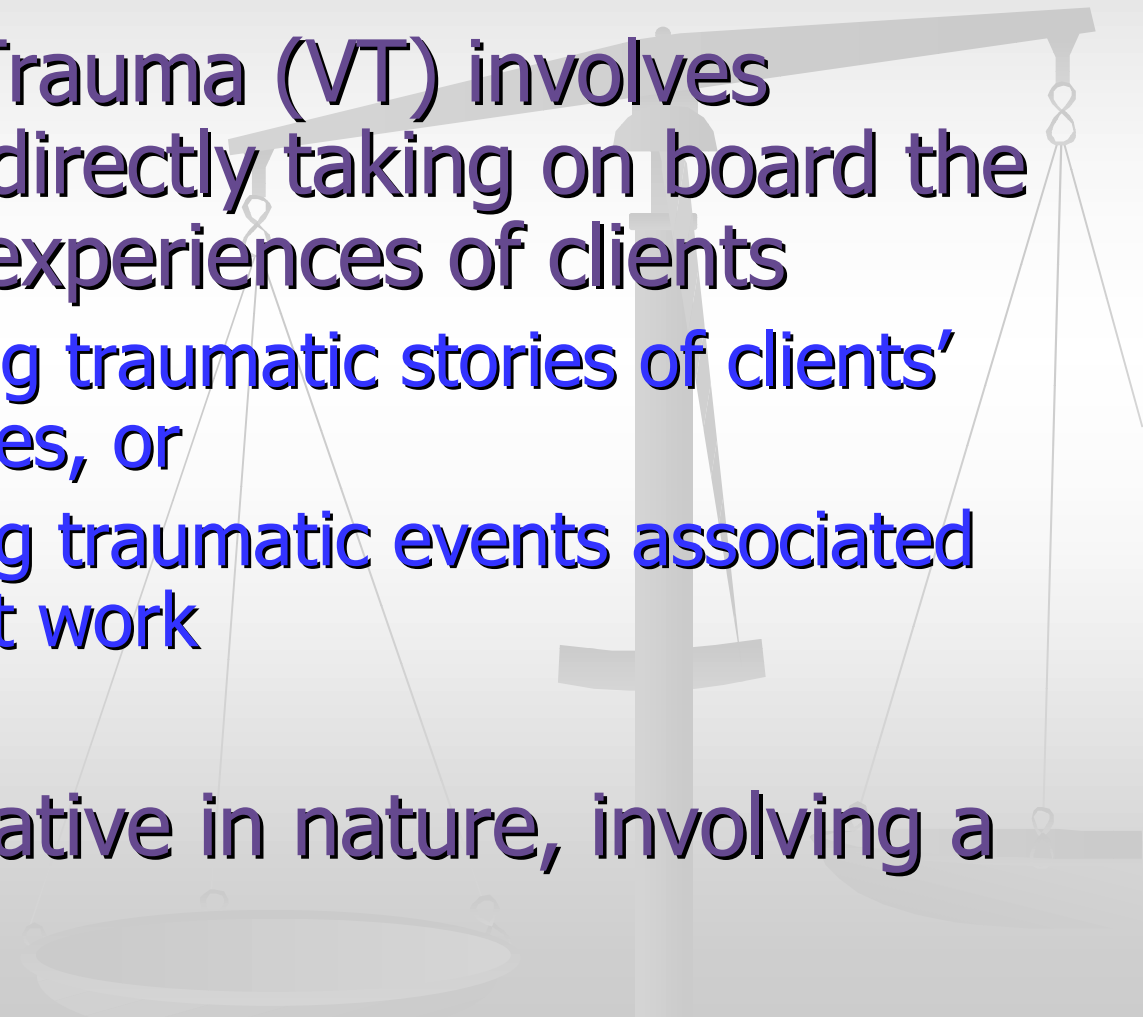
# Vicarious Traumatisation

- What is it?
- Who is at risk?
- What can we do about it?

Presenter: Merike Mannik  
Program Manager  
Healthy Lifestyles



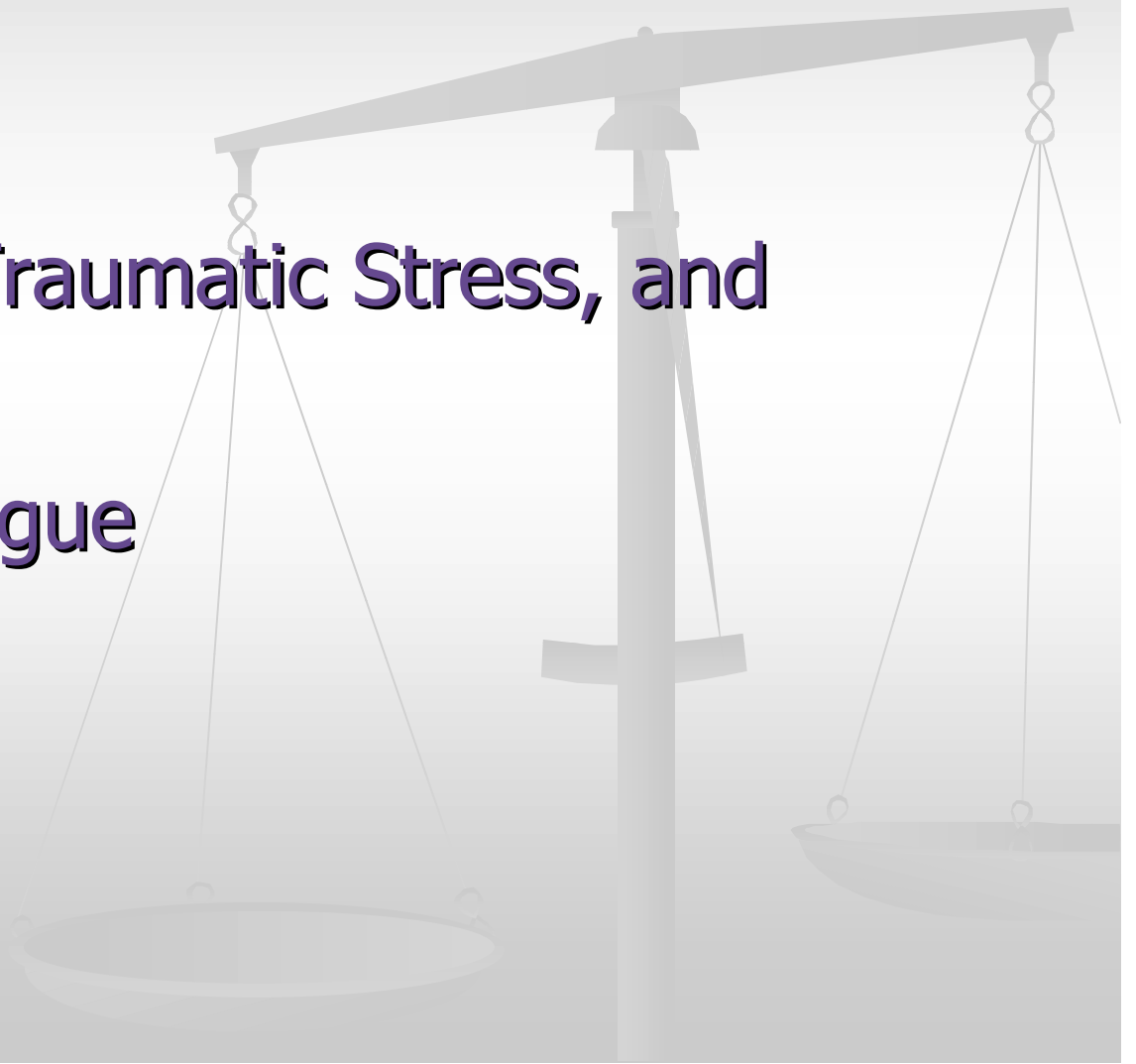
# What is Vicarious Traumatization?

- Vicarious Trauma (VT) involves workers indirectly taking on board the traumatic experiences of clients
    - via hearing traumatic stories of clients' experiences, or
    - Witnessing traumatic events associated with client work
  - It is cumulative in nature, involving a build up.
- 

# Other terminology used

VT is also known:

- as Secondary Traumatic Stress, and
- Compassion fatigue



# VT is multi-factorial

It results from an interplay of the following factors:

1) **Aspects of work**

- Nature of clientele
- Specific facts of the traumatic event
- Social/cultural issues, and

2) **Workers characteristics**

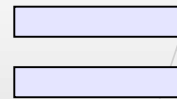
- Personality
- Personal history
- Current personal circumstances
- Level of professional development



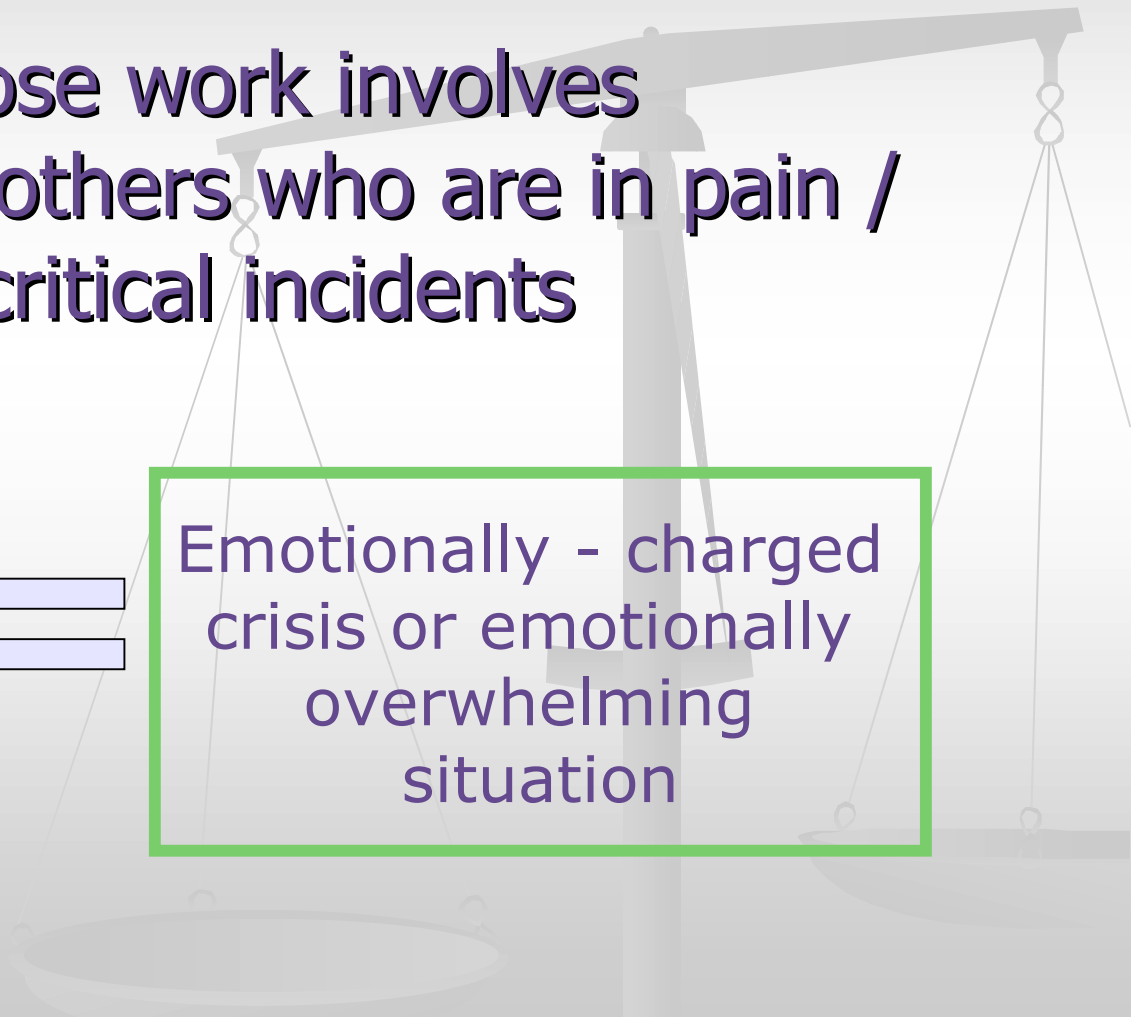
# Who is at Risk of VT?

- Anyone whose work involves listening to others who are in pain / witnessing critical incidents

Critical Incident

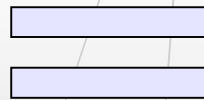


Emotionally - charged crisis or emotionally overwhelming situation



# VT – risk factors:

- > length of time in the job with trauma exposure
- > contact with traumatised clients
- > hours of work
- > history of personal trauma



> Likelihood of VT Symptoms



Risk for female helpers

# Physical Symptoms

**VT = a combination of:**

## 'Burnout' symptoms

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Sleep disturbance
- Loss of energy
- Eating problems
- Apathy
- Depression

## PTSD symptoms

- Hyperarousal
- Intrusive images
  - Flashbacks, Dreams
- Avoidance behaviours

# Symptoms of VT (cont):

- Physical Affect – increased heart rate, dizziness, migraine, high blood pressure
  - ↑ Emotional distress (*anger, guilt, fear, grief, despair, shame, irritability, paranoia & inability to contain intense emotions*)
  - ↑ Feelings of cynicism, sadness and seriousness
  - No time energy for self or others
  - ↑ Anxiety
- 

# Symptoms of VT (cont):

- Cognitive impairment
    - ↓ Decision – making capacity & attention span
    - ↑ Sense of vulnerability (*eg. When home alone / driving at night*)
    - ↑ Sensitivity to violence (*eg. When watching the news*)
  - Self destructive and or anti- social behaviour
- 

VT → PTSD

**“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can develop in persons who witness trauma on a daily basis or are subject to ‘persistent and unrelieved stress’ as part of their job”.**

*(Matsakis, 1996)*

# VT: Costs to the Organisation



Employee Health



Work Efficiency & Job Satisfaction



Staff Turnover



Quality of client care



Levels of absenteeism



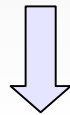
Cost (sick leave, workers compensation)



# Preventative Strategies

## Critical Incident Stress

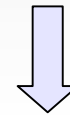
### "Defusings"



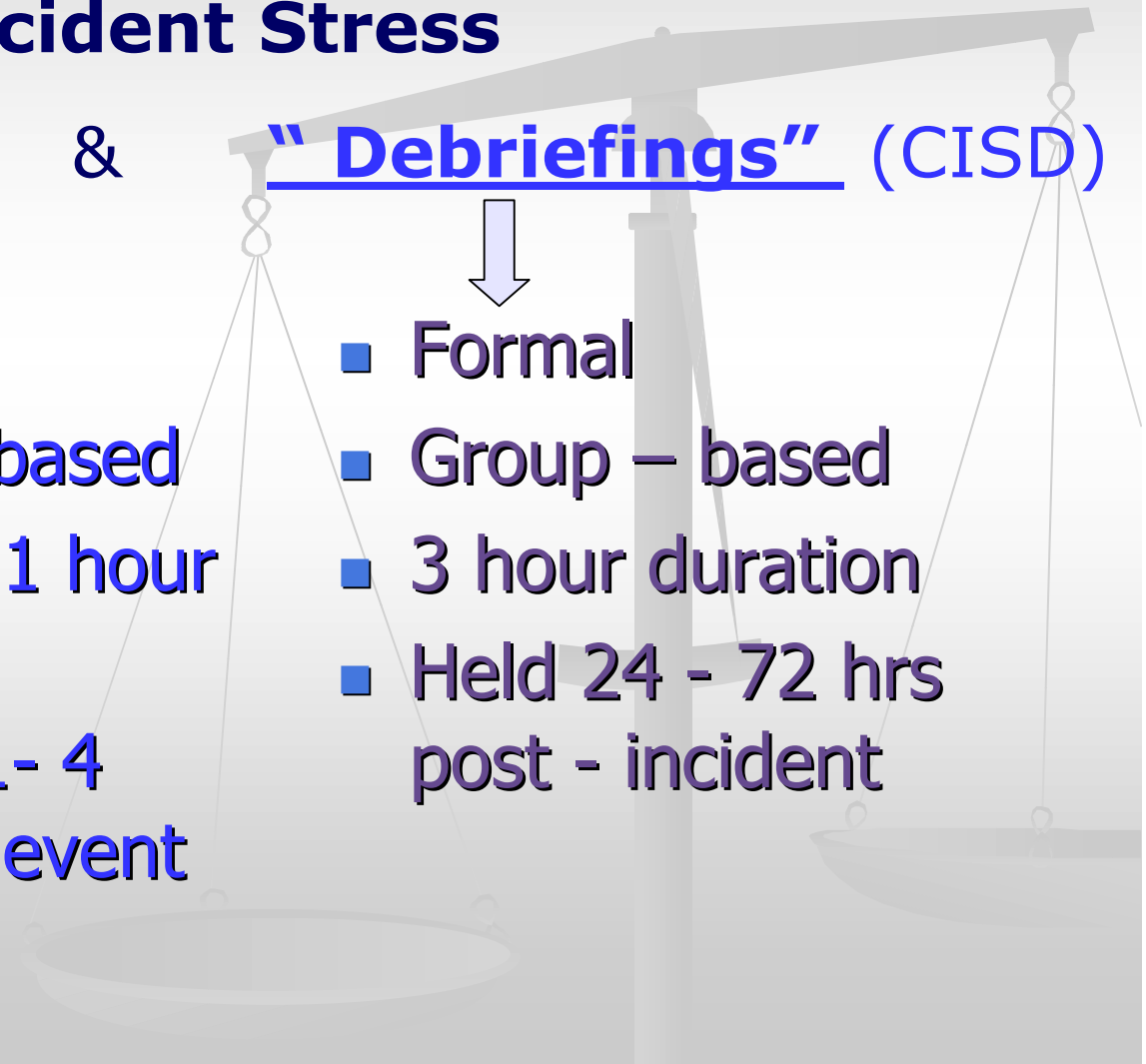
- Informal
- Individual – based
- Short (up to 1 hour duration)
- Held within 1- 4 hours of the event

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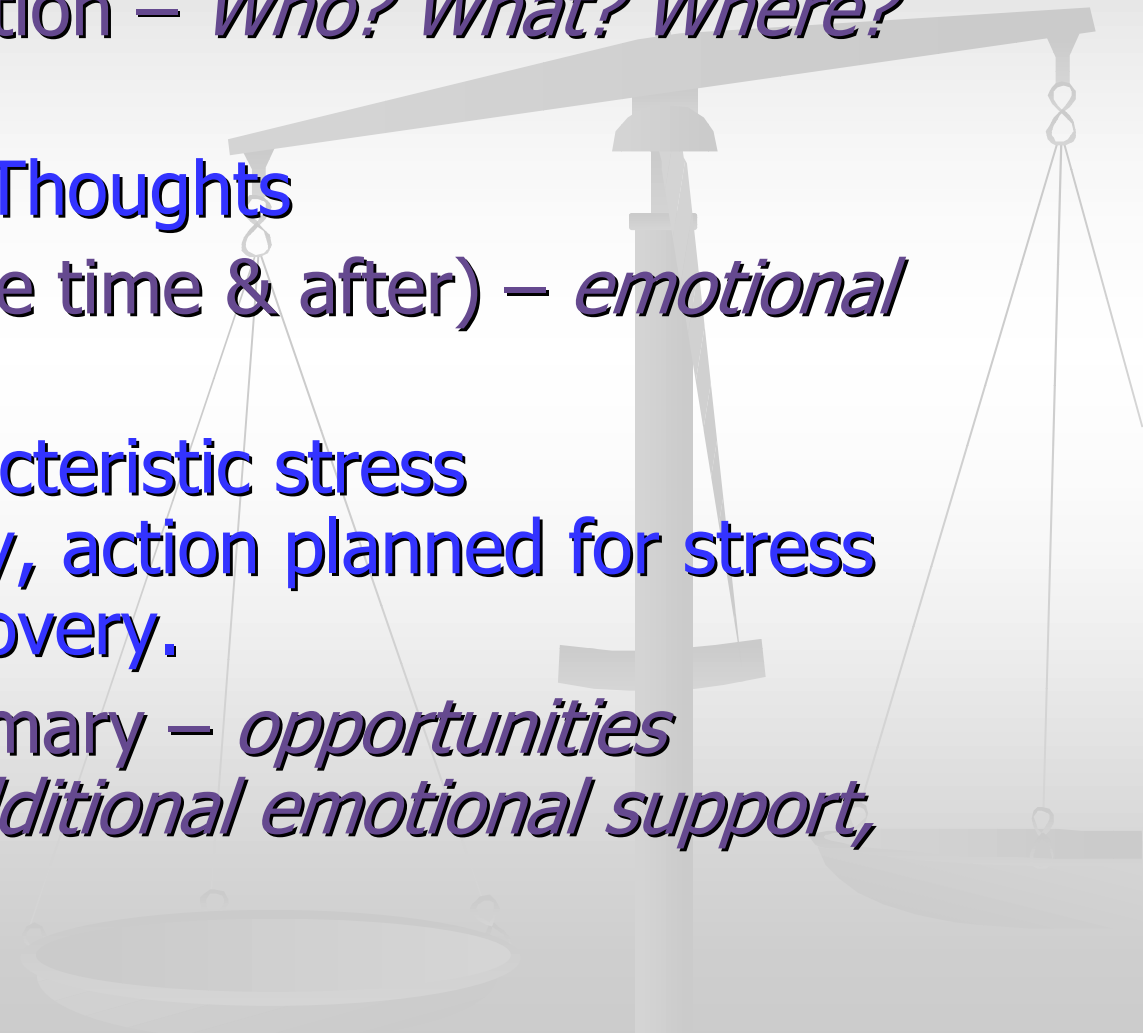
### "Debriefings" (CISD)



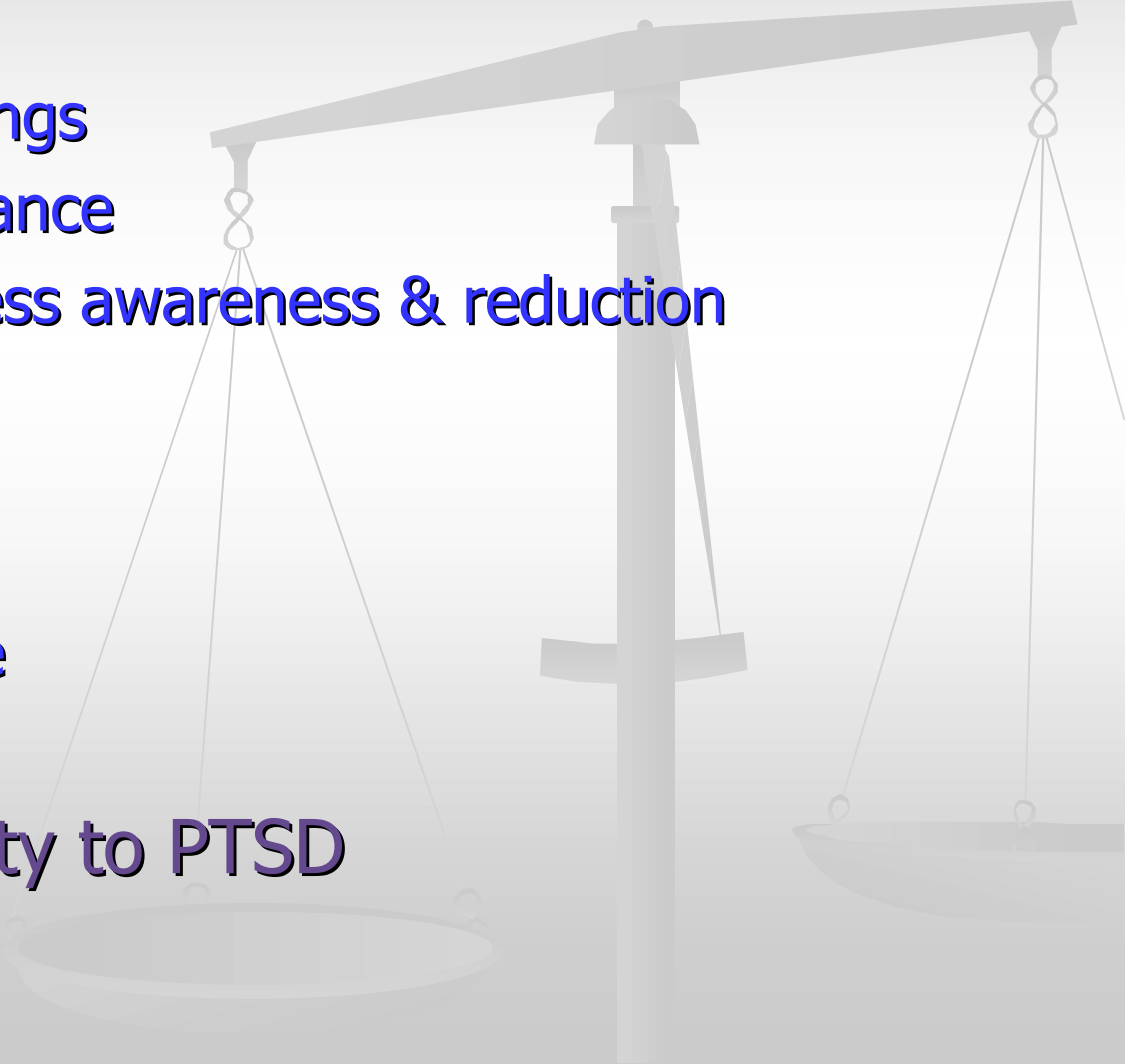
- Formal
- Group – based
- 3 hour duration
- Held 24 - 72 hrs post - incident



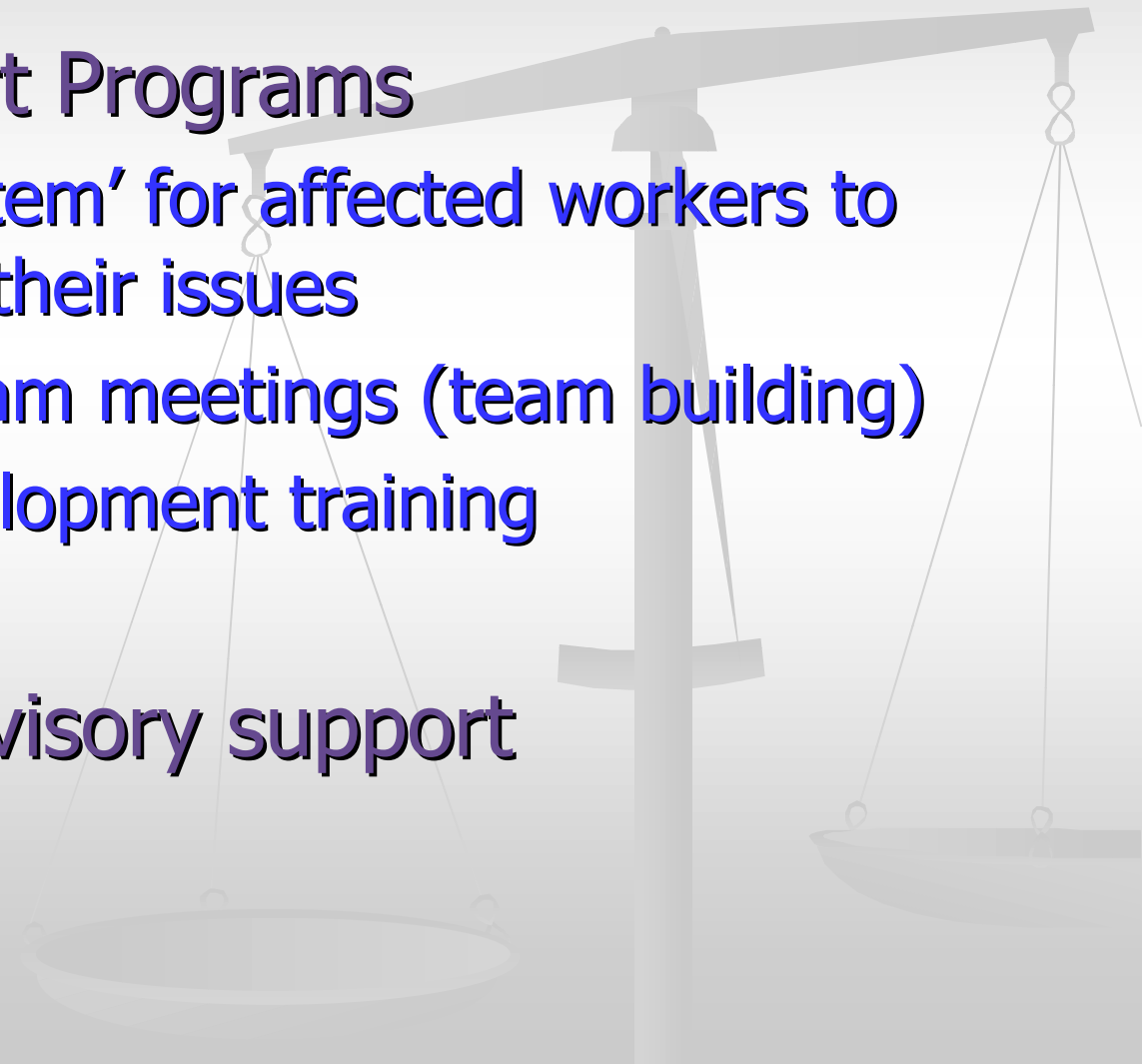
# CISD – Stages:

1. Incident Recreation – *Who? What? Where? How?*
  2. Initial Personal Thoughts
  3. Reactions (at the time & after) – *emotional & physical.*
  4. Review of characteristic stress symptomatology, action planned for stress reduction & recovery.
  5. Re-entry – summary – *opportunities identified for additional emotional support, if needed.*
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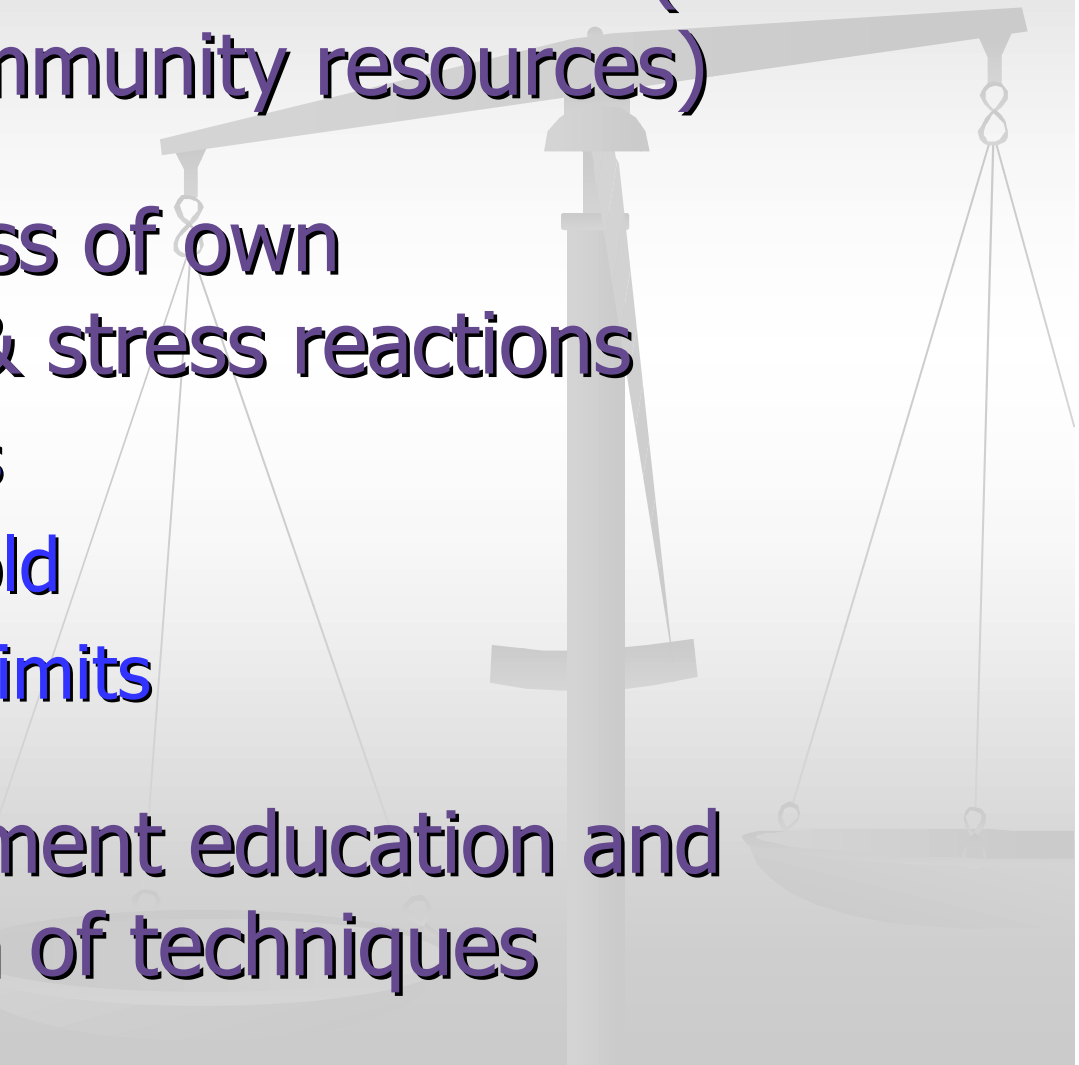
# CISD – Benefits:

- Provide:
    - Ventilation of feelings
    - Emotional reassurance
    - Education (re: stress awareness & reduction techniques)
    - Perspective
    - Consultation, &
    - Referral assistance
  - Reduce vulnerability to PTSD
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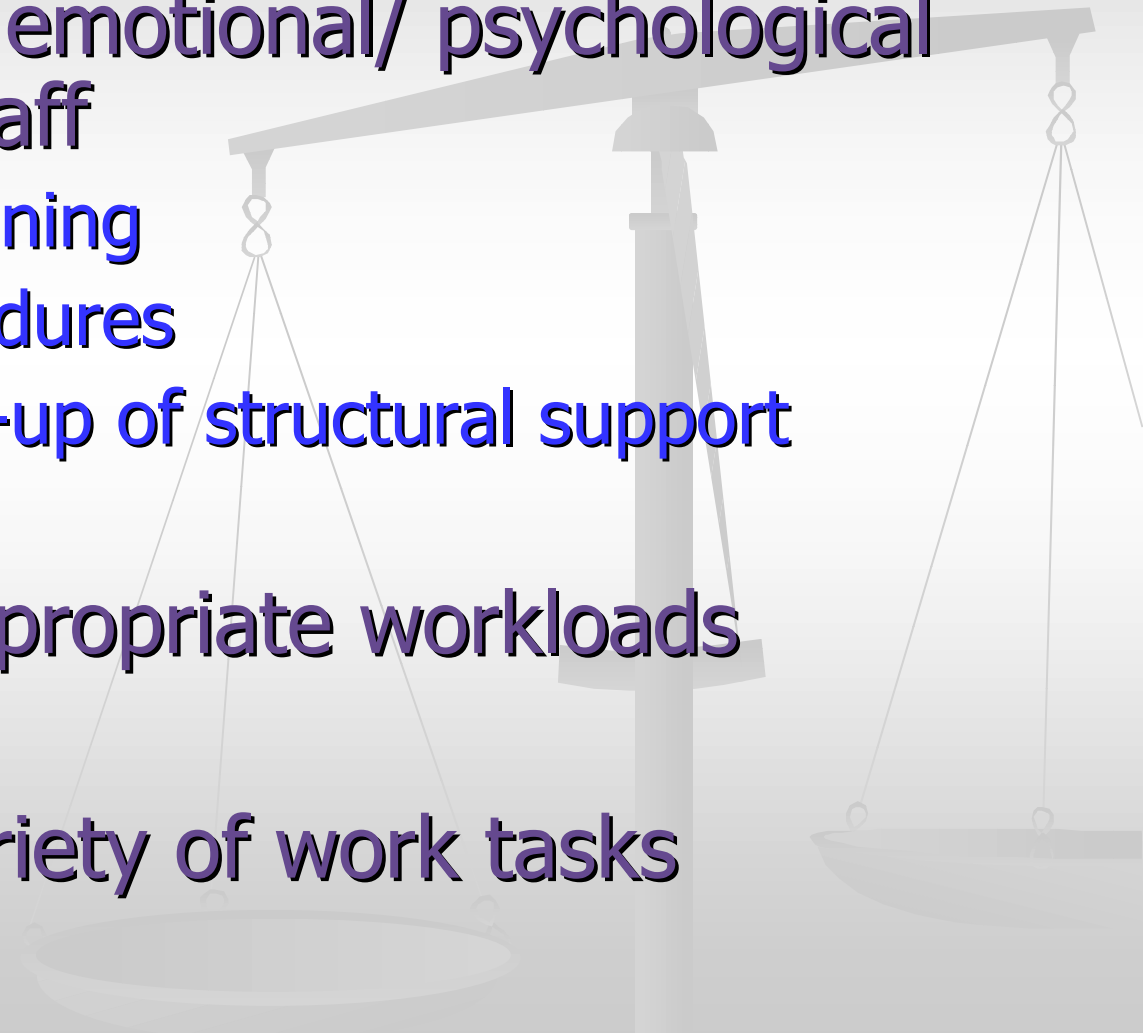
# Preventative Strategies (cont):

- Peer support Programs
    - 'buddy system' for affected workers to talk about their issues
    - Regular team meetings (team building)
    - Team development training
  - Good supervisory support
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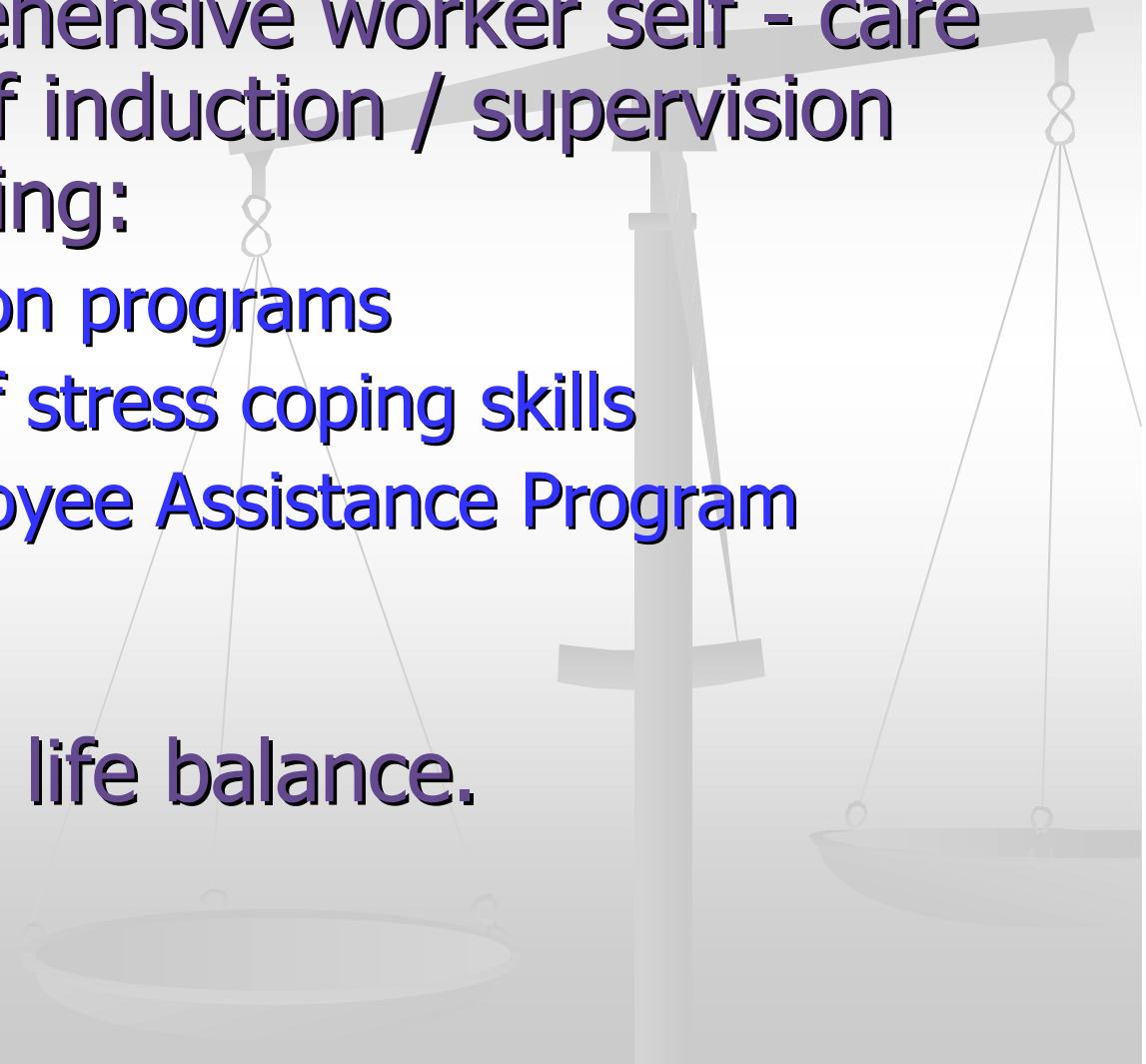
# Preventative Strategies (cont):

- Knowledge of VT and education (re: prevention, community resources)
  - Self – awareness of own vulnerabilities & stress reactions
    - Button pushers
    - Coping threshold
    - Knowing your limits
  - Stress Management education and implementation of techniques
- 

# Preventative Strategies (cont):

- OH&S focus on emotional/ psychological well-being of staff
    - Education / training
    - Policies / procedures
    - Overseeing set-up of structural support
  - Allocation of appropriate workloads
  - Balance and variety of work tasks
- 

# Preventative Strategies (cont):

- Develop comprehensive worker self - care plans (as part of induction / supervision process), including:
    - Special education programs
    - Development of stress coping skills
    - Access to Employee Assistance Program (eg. OCAR)
  - Work / personal life balance.
- 



# Survival Toolkit



**Self -  
expression**  
*(Feelings and  
words)*



**Exercise**

**Life  
Experiences**  
*(Knowledge, skills &  
wisdom)*



**Sources of  
Inspiration**  
*(Stories, articles,  
quotes, affirmation  
cards)*



**Social  
Support**  
*(Friends, family ,  
significant other)*



**Planning  
something  
special to look  
forward to**

**Personal  
resilience &  
problem –  
solving ability**



**Positive Self-  
talk**

**Connections**  
*(Groups)*



**Humour**

**Stress Beaters**



**Strong sense of  
life meaning &  
purpose**

**Contribution**  
*(Volunteering)*



**Self – reflection  
time**

**Mentors**



**Personal  
Projects**

**Nutrition**



**Present focus**

**Role Models**



**Good Physical  
& Mental Health**

**Recreation /  
hobbies**  
*(eg. reading,  
gardening)*



**Spirituality**  
*(Meditation, personal  
growth groups)*

**Self - belief**



**A good nights  
sleep**

**Routine**



**Religion**

**Self – care**



**Professional  
Support**  
*(Counselling)*

# The ABC's of Addressing VT:

1. **Awareness**: Being attuned to one's needs, limits, emotions & resources. Heed all levels of awareness & sources of information - cognitive, intuitive & somatic. Practice mindfulness & acceptance.
2. **Balance**: Maintaining balance among activities, especially work, rest & play. Inner balance helps to maximise physical & mental health, thereby enhancing work productivity & satisfaction – *"More is less, and less is more."*
3. **Connection**: Connections to oneself, to others and to something larger. Communication is part of connection & breaks the silence of unacknowledged pain. These connections offset isolation & increase validation and hope.

*(Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1997)*

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