

# Vicarious Trauma: Helping the Helpers



- ✿ Discuss the impact of anxiety and trauma on the individual
- ✿ Differentiate between burnout, compassion fatigue, post-traumatic stress disorder, secondary trauma, and vicarious trauma
- ✿ Discuss protective factors and risk factors for anxiety and grief
- ✿ Identify self-care and coping skills to address anxiety and grief
- ✿ Review crisis resources available to the community

## Objectives

# The New Mental Health Landscape



- COVID-19 resulted in an increase in anxiety and depression. Those with pre-existing mental health issues experience more severe symptoms.
- In Hawaii, 43% of adults get <7 hrs of sleep per night
- Hawaii has the highest percentage of adults who get <7 hrs of sleep per night
- 3.7% of HI residents live with a serious mental health conditions
- 68.2% did not receive treatment
- Every other day someone in Hawai'i dies by suicide

# Following a Natural Disaster:

- You may experience stress, insomnia, high-risk coping behavior, mental disorders, sadness, irritability, low energy, changes in eating, social isolation, or body pains
- Practice self-compassion by setting time aside for self-care
- Limit exposure to emotionally upsetting material
- Eat, hydrate, exercise, take breaks
- Engage in relaxation- breathing exercises, meditation, mindfulness, soothing music
- Continue doing fun activities such as hobbies to accumulate positive emotion
- Stay connected to your social support system
- Identify healthcare resources for yourself and others
- Remember, "it's okay to not be okay" and "every day looks different"
- Seek professional support if you continue to feel distressed and it impacts work, daily life, or relationships



<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/climate-change-and-mental-health-connections/affects-on-mentalhealth#:~:text=The%20mental%20health%20consequences%20of,anxiety%20and%20post%2Dtraumatic%20stress.>

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/coping-after-disaster-trauma>



### *Psychological Symptoms:*

- Excessive Worry
- Agitation
- Restlessness
- Attention/Concentration Issues
- Sleep Problems
- Avoidance

### *Physiological Symptoms:*

- Rapid Heart Beat
- Shortness of Breath
- Chest Pains
- Muscle Tension
- Dizziness
- Stomach Pains (GI Issues)

Activation of nervous system is common with high levels of stress. Negative impact on digestion and immune system function (vaccination/cold care)

# Likert Scale of Responding

## 0-40

May feel little to no symptoms of anxiety

Diet, exercise, self-care

## 40-60

Can feel symptoms of anxiety

Use coping skills

## 60-100

High levels of anxiety

Use distress tolerance skills

## WORK

- Clients more aggressive or have more crises
- Focusing on others, neglecting self
- On-call, long hours
- Change in leadership, staff cutbacks, challenging leadership
- Negative feedback, don't feel appreciated
- limited time, increased pressure, difficult to finish projects
- Professional isolation
- Boundaries are too permeable





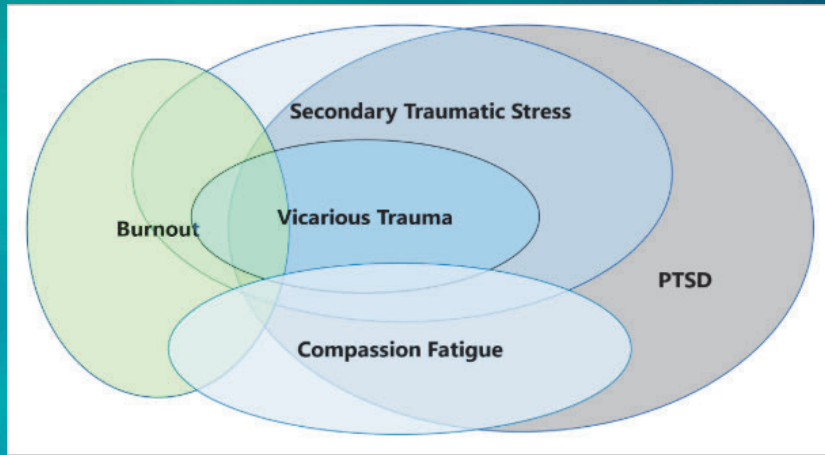
**How do you know when your cup is empty? How do you refill it?**

## **Warning Signs**

- Mood dysregulation for 2 weeks or longer
  - Anhedonia
  - Social withdrawal, isolation
  - Daily activities & relationships disrupted
  - Expressed suicidality
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- Negative impact on work
- Skipping breaks, enjoying work less
- Emotional exhaustion, irritation, boredom
- Staring off into space, ignoring personal needs

# Definitions:



Henderson, A., Jewell, T., Huang, X., & Simpson, A. (2025). Personal trauma history and secondary traumatic stress in mental health professionals: A systematic review. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 32, 13–30.

[https://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Understanding-Vicarious-Trauma-by-CCIS\\_July-2022.pdf](https://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Understanding-Vicarious-Trauma-by-CCIS_July-2022.pdf)

- **Burnout**- Stress and frustration caused by the workplace.
- **Compassion Fatigue**- Emotional and physical fatigue faced by providers who struggle to renew. Can impact empathy.
- **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder**- Anxiety disorder related to trauma. Key factors avoidance, re-experiencing and numbing.
- **Secondary Traumatic Stress**- Exposure to indirect trauma through stories or pictures that leads to symptoms like fatigue and anxiety.
- **Vicarious Trauma**- Provider has emotional engagement with client's trauma experience. Experiences profound negative changes to worldview.



Cognitive Changes



Emotional Changes



Behavioral Changes

# Signs of Vicarious Trauma

healingfromcomplexptsd.com



- Having difficulty talking about feelings
- Anger/irritation constantly present
- Startles easily
- Sleeping & eating difficulties
- Constant worry about doing enough
- Dreaming about the traumatic experience of loved one or client
- Anhedonia
- Intrusive thoughts
- Low self-image/self-regard
- Loss of trust
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Issues with self-care and relationships



## Statistics

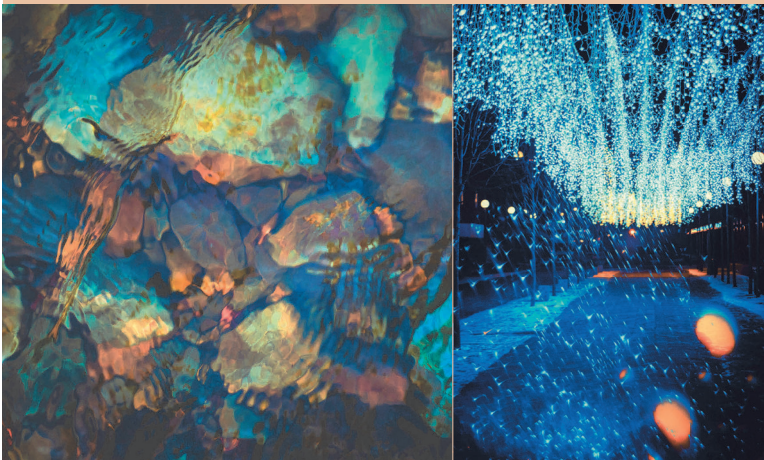
Providers may react physiologically, emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, and spiritually.

Studies have shown:

Between 40-85% of helping professionals have developed vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and/or high rates of traumatic symptoms



## How does hearing about a client's trauma impact you?



## Protective Factors

Biophysical: Healthy attachment, Diet, Exercise

Psychological: Support system, Emotional Regulation, Optimism

Social: Friends, Family, Access to Services

Spiritual: Future Orientation, Set of moral beliefs

<https://www.americanmentalwellness.org/prevention/risk-and-protective-factors/>



# Self-Care Assessment

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization. Norton.

## Physical Self-Care

- Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- Eat healthily
- Exercise
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when sick
- Get massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
- Take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes I like
- Take vacations
- Other:

## Psychological Self-Care

- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet
- Make time for self-reflection
- Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
- Have my own personal psychotherapy
- Write in a journal
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
- Attend to minimizing stress in my life
- Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre
- Be curious

## Emotional Self-Care

- Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in my life
- Give myself affirmations, praise myself
- Love myself
- Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- Allow myself to cry
- Find things that make me laugh
- Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- Other:

## Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish my optimism and hope
- Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Be open to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- Meditate
- Pray
- Sing
- Have experiences of awe
- Contribute to causes in which I believe
- Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
- Other:

### Relationship Self-Care

- Schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- Schedule regular activities with my children
- Make time to see friends
- Call, check on, or see my relatives
- Spend time with my companion animals
- Stay in contact with faraway friends
- Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
- Allow others to do things for me
- Enlarge my social circle
- Ask for help when I need it
- Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
- Other:

### Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
- Take time to chat with co-workers
- Make quiet time to complete tasks
- Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
- Set limits with clients and colleagues
- Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is "too much"
- Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
- Get regular supervision or consultation
- Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
- Have a peer support group
- (If relevant) Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest

### Overall Balance

- Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
- Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

<https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-ki/self-care-assessment.pdf>



Sleep\* \_\_\_\_\_

Sun \_\_\_\_\_

Nature \_\_\_\_\_

Time to unplug \_\_\_\_\_

Mastered skills \_\_\_\_\_

Aromatherapy \_\_\_\_\_

Cozy blankets \_\_\_\_\_

Relaxating sounds \_\_\_\_\_

Warm beverages \_\_\_\_\_

Take care of something \_\_\_\_\_

Nourishing meals \_\_\_\_\_

Gentle exercise \_\_\_\_\_

Journal \_\_\_\_\_

Visualization exercises \_\_\_\_\_

Share your feelings \_\_\_\_\_

Avoid isolating \_\_\_\_\_

Find spiritual support \_\_\_\_\_

Go for a walk \_\_\_\_\_

Activity buddies (Ex: \_\_\_\_\_

Muddy buddies) \_\_\_\_\_

Learn coping skills \_\_\_\_\_

Meditate \_\_\_\_\_

Practice mindfulness \_\_\_\_\_

Practice radical \_\_\_\_\_

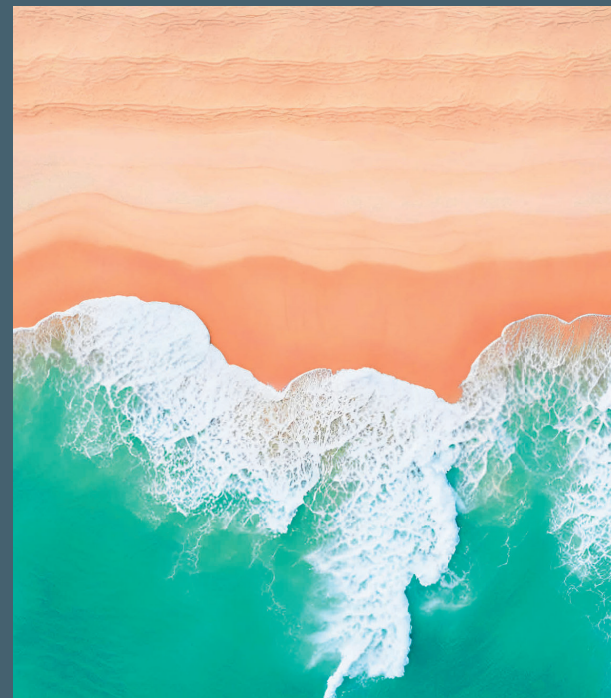
acceptance \_\_\_\_\_


Increase grief literacy for \_\_\_\_\_

yourself and your \_\_\_\_\_

supportive community \_\_\_\_\_

# SELF-CARE

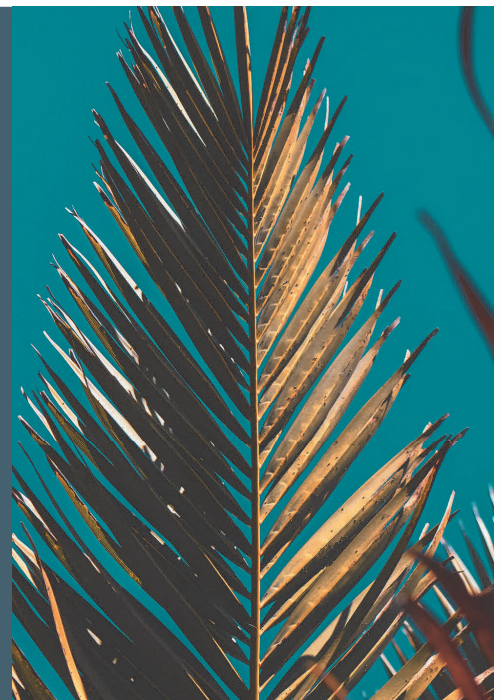




What type of self-care have  
you been using ?

## CREATING A HEALING ENVIRONMENT

- Think cozy, comfy
- Soft blankets and pillows
- Warm drinks (tea station)
- Bring in the greenery
- Indulgence over extravagance
- Soft music, books
- Candle light, lamp light, and fairy light
- Comfortable clothes
- Relaxing scents
- Simplify color schemes



# What do we do to heal?

- Focus on self-care
- Prioritize these stress management strategies
- Learn coping skills
- Seek adequate supervision and support
- Attend trainings on vicarious trauma and stress management
- Seek professional help if needed for self and staff

## Coping Strategies: EQUIP

e

Escape- Take time mentally or physically away from work or the tasks that are causing you distress. Invest that time in taking care of yourself.

q<sub>u</sub>

Quiet- Find time to unwind and relax. Focus on sleep. Relaxation is key.

i

Indulge- "Treat yo' self" Go to your favorite restaurant, watch your favorite movie, have an icecream.

p

Play- Fun activities and hobbies. Think of things that make you laugh and lift your spirit.



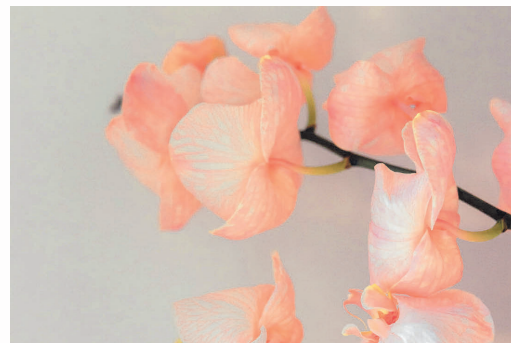
### Professional helpers can experience vicarious trauma

The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is...

 Institute for Public Health /

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## Distress Tolerance Skills



Intense Exercise  
*Diaphragmatic (Paced) Breathing*  
\*Dive Response  
Address Temperature  
Paired Muscle Relaxation

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## Dive Response





## *What is Grief?*

- Loss of something or someone
- Pre-existing history of trauma
- Existing self-care & coping skills
- We all cope differently
- We all grieve differently
- Honor the process

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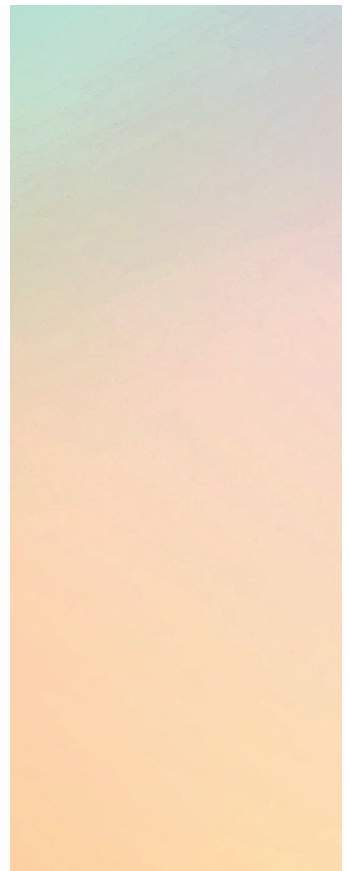
## *Causes of Grief*

- Loss of a loved one
- Suicide
- Divorce
- Chronic/Terminal illness
- Loss of a pet
- Loss of a job
- Loss of a cherished item (Ex: Home)
- And others

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## Complications with Grief

- Traumatic Grief
- Collective Grief
- Pre-existing trauma
- Limited support system
- Limited behavioral health resources or other obstacles to care
- Stigma around mental health and help seeking
- In systems that do not have strong mental health or grief literacy
- Moral injury
- Survivor's guilt





- Appreciation for life
- Increased empathy
- Engagement with faith
- Sense of purpose
- Connection with support system
- Clarifies what is important and what is not

**As we heal...**



## **Grief Resources**

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention- Hawai'i Chapter <https://afsp.org/chapter/hawaii>
- Bereavement Recommendations from the Hawaii Psychological Association at <https://hawaiipsychology.org/page-1862168>
- <https://www.griefshare.org/countries/us/states/hi/cities/honolulu>
- <https://www.navianhawaii.org/hospice-care/services/dealing-with-grief/>
- <https://childrengrieve.org/grief-reach/grief-reach-faqs/17-grief-reach-grants>

- Who do you talk to that helps you feel better
- Who can you talk to about your stress
- Providers numbers saved in phone
- Consider a therapist for therapists
- Crisis resources saved in phone
- Self-care items identified- Fast Five
- What gives life meaning

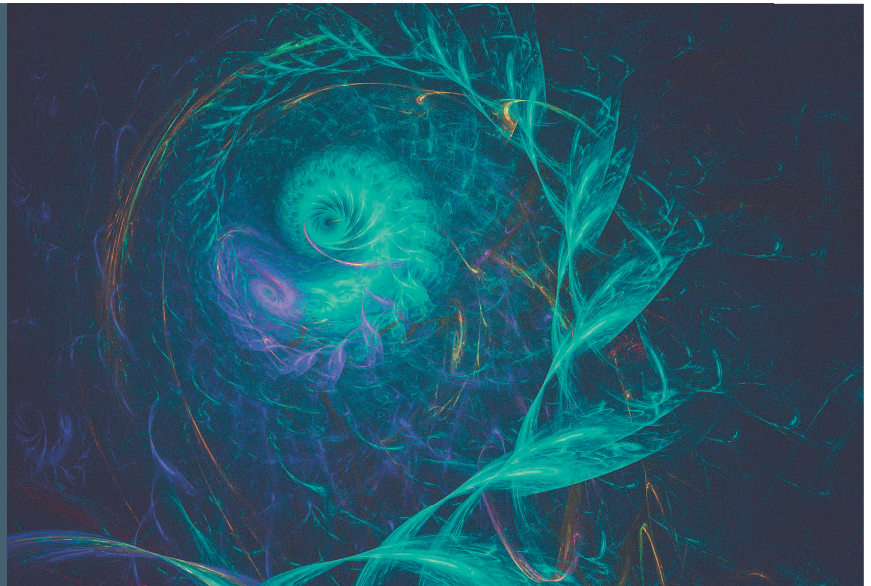
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## SUPPORT PLAN



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## Maintaining Compassion





## 5 Elements of Compassion

- Recognizing suffering
- Understanding the universality of human suffering
- Feeling for the person suffering
- Tolerating uncomfortable feelings
- Motivation to alleviate suffering

*Strauss C., Taylor B. L., Gu J., Kuyken W., Baer R., Jones F., et al. (2016). What is compassion and how can we measure it? A review of definitions and measures. Clin. Psychol. Rev. 47 15–27. 10.1016/j.cpr.2016.05.004*

"self-care is seen as central to the capacity to maintain care for others"

*Baguley, S. I., Dev, V., Fernando, A. T., & Consedine, N. S. (2020). How Do Health Professionals Maintain Compassion Over Time? Insights From a Study of Compassion in Health. Frontiers in psychology, 11, 564554. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.564554>*

### COVID CoACH

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
PISD

The COVID Coach app was created to support self-care and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is available on iTunes and Google Play.

MIHA

Make yourself comfortable, so that your thoughts are on the image and nothing else.

NEW TOOLS

MANAGE STRESS

LEARN

MOOD CHECK

FIND RESOURCES

### CBT-i

The CBT-i Coach app is designed to help people experiencing symptoms of insomnia, who would like to improve their sleep.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY  
PISD

It is available on iTunes and Google Play.

MIHA

MY SLEEP

TOOLS

LEARN

REMINDERS

#### Sleep Summary

Date	Time in Bed (Avg. = 7.0h)	Time Awake (Avg. = 6.2h)
Sep 24, 2017	7h 55m	7h 30m

NoShameGetHelp.org

NO SHAME GET HELP

Home

In a Crisis

Help For Myself

Help for Someone Else

Take a Screening

Contact

## IT ALL STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION

### WHERE CAN I GET HELP DURING AN EMERGENCY?

The following resources can help you or a loved one in time of a mental health crisis.

All are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

Call 911 immediately. Tell the operator there is a mental health crisis, explain the current situation, and share the person's mental health history.

CALL 911

#### The National Suicide Prevention Hotline

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential support for people in distress, as well as prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call 1-800-273-8255

Visit Website

#### Hawaii Cares (Local Crisis Line)

Hawaii Cares is a free local mental health and substance use call center that is open 24 hours a day. They provide support for adults and adolescents through crisis, treatment, and recovery.

Oahu: (808) 832-3100

Neighbor Islands: 1-800-753-6879

#### The National Crisis Text Line

The Crisis Text Line provides support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through text messaging for those in crisis. Text "ALOHA" to **741741** from anywhere in the United States to text with a trained Crisis Counselor.

(Message and data rates may apply)

Visit Website

**For Mental Health Emergencies:**

You are not alone. If you or someone you know is suicidal, don't wait!

**988**  
SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE

**National Suicide & Crisis Line**  
National 24/7 crisis line  
988

**Hawai'i CARES**  
Hawai'i's 24/7 crisis line  
O'ahu: 832-3100  
Neighbor Islands Toll Free:  
1-800-753-6879





**CRISIS TEXT LINE |**

**Crisis Text Line**  
Free, 24/7  
Text ALOHA to 741-741  
www.crisistextline.org


**Trevor Helpline**

National 24/7 hotline for  
LGBTQ Youth  
1-866-4U-TREVOR (488-7386)  
www.thetrevorproject.org

**Online Screening**  
Free mental health  
screenings  
<https://bit.ly/3yGjIdN>

**COVID Coach**  
Created to support self-care  
and mental health during the  
COVID-19 pandemic.



Download on the  
App Store | Get it on  
Google Play

# Crisis Resources

**POISON  
Help**  
1-800-222-1222  
PoisonHelp.org




**FACEBOOK**  
@MHAHawaii



**INSTAGRAM**  
@livenaau  
@mhahawaii



**TIKTOK**  
@mhahawaii



**X**  
@MHAofHawaii



**YOUTUBE**  
@mhaofhawaii



1136 Union Mall #208  
Honolulu, HI 96813

[mentalhealthhawaii.org](http://mentalhealthhawaii.org)

808-521-1846 (Oahu)

808-242-6461 (Maui)

Screenings:

<https://bit.ly/3yGjJdN>

