

# TechBeat

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by JTIC

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## About TechBeat



TechBeat is the monthly newsmagazine of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center System. Our goal is to keep you up to date on technologies for the public safety community and research efforts in government and private industry.

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The Justice Technology Information Center (JTIC), a component of the National Institute of Justice's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) System, serves as an information resource for technology and equipment related to law enforcement, corrections and courts and as a primary point of contact for administration of a voluntary equipment standards and testing program for public safety equipment.



JTIC is part of the NLECTC System, which includes the Justice Innovation Center for Small, Rural, Tribal, and Border Criminal Justice Agencies, which focuses on the unique law enforcement challenges faced by those types of agencies; the National Criminal Justice Technology Research, Test and Evaluation Center, which provides technology-related research and testing and operational evaluations of technologies; and the Forensic Technology Center of Excellence, which supports technology research, development, testing and evaluation efforts in forensic science. In addition, a Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative exists to assess and prioritize technology needs across the criminal justice community.



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# Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Helps Agencies Establish Priorities, Develop Response

## Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Helps Agencies Establish Priorities, Develop Response

A police officer assigned to a special unit on sexual assault. A corrections officer who's seen too many incidents between inmates. A courts officer subjected to a parade of victims, day after day. These public safety professionals have at least one thing in common: They're experiencing vicarious trauma, and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime offers an online toolkit that can help their agencies help them cope.

Located at <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>, the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit offers tools and resources tailored for agencies in the fields of victim services, emergency medical services, fire services and law enforcement. The toolkit also offers an assessment tool, available on the home page. The Vicarious Trauma-Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG) tool helps agencies assess their current capacity as a vicarious trauma-informed organization, prioritize areas where there are gaps and identify resources in those focus areas.

Both the assessment and the Compendium of



Resources are organized into sections relevant to each of the four intended disciplines and how agencies working in those fields deal with exposure to the traumatic experiences of other people, also known as vicarious trauma.



Compounding the challenge that agencies face in designing their responses is the fact that individuals' response to vicarious trauma is just that: individualized. Some people become hardened, some become fearful, some become more grateful for their own well-being and some respond in a mixture of ways. However, organizations can take action to mitigate the negative impact vicarious trauma can have on individuals and organizations.

“When we started the process of developing the toolkit, we discovered nothing existed that would help agencies figure out how well they were dealing with vicarious trauma, and so we came up with the VT-ORG,” says Dr. Beth Molnar, principal investigator for the project. “During the development phase, we worked with more than 20 organizations to demonstrate its reliability and validity, and we showed them how to take our survey tool and put it into software tools like Survey Monkey or Qualtrics so they could easily send it out to their people and get back data that they could analyze.”

“VT-ORG helps an organization figure out where it is now and provides it with direction on how to get to where it wants to be,” Product Coordinator Karen Kalergis adds.

The development team offered technical assistance earlier in the project, but now organizations can get similar technical assistance from OVC's Training and Technical Assistance Center (<https://www.ovcttac.gov/>). Using the agency-level survey and toolkit marks a change in approach from the traditional one of asking individuals to take care of themselves on their own time through their own health care regimen, says Project Director Janet Fine: “Traditionally they were expected to shoulder self-care on their own, but now there is recognition that agencies whose staff is chronically exposed to the trauma of others have a responsibility to help. And although the toolkit is designed to work at the organization level, those organizations shouldn't dismiss the importance of the individual's response. Everyone reacts differently.”

After completing the survey and obtaining the results, many agencies express relief to find

out that although they might not have termed them vicarious trauma responses, they have a number of policies and procedures in place that can help staff deal with the issues, Fine says. And once agencies have used the VT-ORG to help them determine what areas they need to address, the toolkit has more than 500 helpful items waiting in the Compendium of Resources, which includes policies, procedures, practices and programs; research literature in abstract and full-text format on issues such as prevalence, impact, risk factors and intervention studies; new tools for the field; and websites, podcasts and videos.

“One of the keys in designing the toolkit was making sure that the products on the website were really appropriate for the four disciplines,” Kalergis says. “We undertook a huge effort to go out in the field and find out what resources agencies were already using, and because we’re providing access to items already being used in the field, it gives the toolkit more credibility.”

While the compendium includes research literature that can be highly technical in nature, the New Tools (<https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/compendium?resource=new-tools-for-the-field>) quickly summarize available literature and resources on a specific topic in a colorful and easy-to-digest format, and videos on the home page provide an introduction to addressing the issue.

The need for creation of the compendium and the toolkit as a whole was influenced by OVC’s Vision 21 Report, which was published in 2013. Molnar, who previously volunteered and now leads the board of directors at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, assembled what she referred to as a “dream team” of national and local organizations that performed numerous advisory roles in the development and dissemination of the toolkit. The OVC grant funding this work ends in September 2018.

“We heard over and over again, you can’t just tell people to do more yoga or do more things to take care of yourself on your own time,” Molnar says. “In the toolkit, we have something that’s easy to use and it’s all free. I think that no matter the size of your organization, there are some resources that will work for you.”

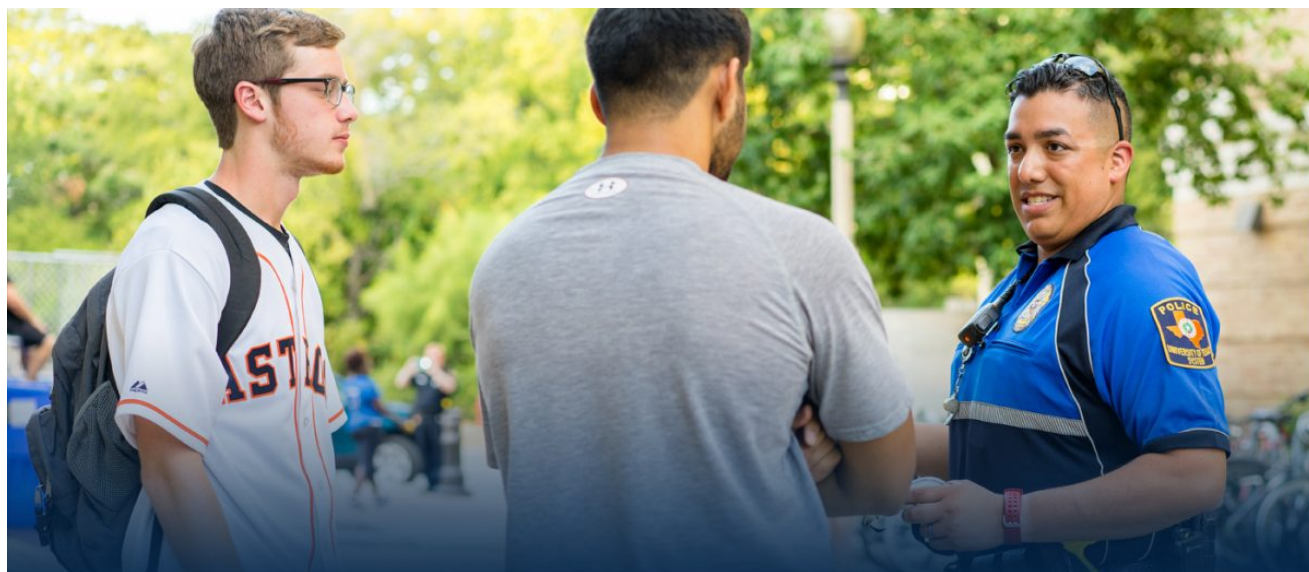
Although organizations may have a response for how high-profile incidents such as a mass shooting affects their staff, Fine says the team had a goal of ensuring that organizations remain aware of the toll from day-to-day chronic exposure when designing their response. She adds: “They also need to be aware it’s not a one-shot deal to do some training, develop a policy and you’re done. It’s an area that requires constant attention.”

Access the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit at <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/> and OVC TTAC at <https://www.ovcttac.gov>.

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*Main photo: iStock.com/400tmax*





# JTIC Releases Desktop Version of School Safe

## JTIC Releases Desktop Version of School Safe

For all the school resource officers (SROs) and school administrators whose thumbs aren't as nimble as those of the average teenager, the Justice Technology Information Center (JTIC) has released a new desktop version of its popular free app, School Safe – JTIC's Security and Safety Assessment App for Schools.

Like the Android and iOS versions, the desktop version makes it easy to perform a safety and security assessment of buildings and grounds by observing conditions and answering a series of simple questions. Desktop School Safe, available as a fillable PDF, also provides enhanced capability to write lengthy blocks of text — using all 10 fingers — and allows for easy file sharing among team members collaborating on an assessment.

For security purposes, each download code issued by JTIC for mobile School Safe can be used on only one device, and although its final output can be exported as a shareable PDF, the



actual survey can be conducted on only one device. With the desktop version, the fillable PDF can be passed from one team member to another to work on different sections. The desktop version also includes enhanced capability for adding photos.



“Earlier this year, in response to requests from the field we had received about our Safeguarding Houses of Worship (SHOW) app, we created a fillable PDF desktop version,” says JTIC Deputy Director Ron Pierce. “The desktop version of SHOW became so popular so quickly that we realized there was a similar unmet need for a PDF version of School Safe.”

Pierce notes that the mobile version allows SROs and administrators to walk around and look at facilities while answering the questions, and, “It’s a little hard to do that carrying a laptop. Users might want to print out a blank copy and carry it on a clipboard, making quick notes they can expand on later.”



The ability to easily expand on those brief notes is the most significant advantage that desktop School Safe offers, he says: “This new version is so much easier to use if you have extensive notes or comments regarding what you saw while surveying the facility. The result is a thorough, professional-looking assessment that can be shared electronically or as printed hard copies.”

That final output can also easily be submitted to district or state offices that may require schools to submit a security assessment, a requirement implemented by a number of jurisdictions in the wake of the Feb. 14, 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. (Read about one district’s experience conducting such an assessment using mobile School Safe in a related article, “[School Safe Gives Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Fresh Angle on Security.](#)”)

Access to versions of School Safe is free, but is limited to qualified criminal justice professionals and school administrators. To request a copy of either mobile version or the new desktop version, send the following information to [schoolsafe@justnet.org](mailto:schoolsafe@justnet.org) from your

official agency email account:

- School Safe – JTIC’s Security and Safety Assessment App for Schools in the subject line.
- Your name.
- Your title.
- The name of your school system.
- The name of your law enforcement agency (for SROs).
- Your agency mailing and email address.
- Which version (iOS, Android or desktop and how many of each).

For more information, visit <https://www.justnet.org/SchoolSafe/index.html>.

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## **School Safe Gives Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Fresh Angle on Security**

### **School Safe Gives Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Fresh Angle on Security**

When Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Superintendent Beverly Emory decided to encourage all of the system's 80-plus principals to perform a safety and security assessment of their buildings, the district didn't have to look hard to find a suitable tool.

Thanks to the efforts of Security Director Jonathan Wilson, the North Carolina school district already had used School Safe – JTIC's Security and Safety Assessment App for Schools.

In early 2017, Wilson selected School Safe, which is available free to criminal justice professionals and school administrators, for the system's school resource officers to store on their smartphones and use to assess their buildings' security features. When Emory, in the aftermath of the Feb. 14, 2018 shooting at Marjory



Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, asked the principals to complete and submit assessments, Wilson offered information on how to access School Safe.

Brent Campbell, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, says the superintendent already had a mandate in place for schools to find ways to improve safety without spending more money, and using a free tool like School Safe fit well with that mandate. In addition to recording assessment information for their own use, principals also submitted copies of completed assessments to the administration's security team.

"We encouraged them to use the assessment, because it helped principals see things they might otherwise have missed, and we used the results as a discussion point during leadership meetings," Campbell says. "The principals who had used it shared how it helped them and encouraged those that hadn't yet used it to give it a try."

One of the principals who used School Safe, Colin Tribby of Easton Elementary School, says completing an assessment using the app gave him several new things to think about: "I was pleasantly surprised to find out that it wasn't all about how to deal with an active shooter, and it brought questions to my mind that I hadn't considered. I hadn't thought about our parking lot signage or the location and number of handicapped and visitor spaces. It made us more aware of the bus drop-off and pick-up areas, and the need to have entrances and exits clearly marked. Also, after completing the survey, we realized that outsiders could access a door we were leaving open, so we started locking it. Asking for the key is a minor inconvenience but people just have to get used to it."

Easton, a pre-K through fifth grade school enrolling about 630 students, was built in 1957, and renovations are planned within the next several years. Tribby says that students and community members have worked on a number of beautification projects to try to keep things looking nice, and after completing the assessment, small tweaks will make the school safer as well. Grading for the addition of more parking spots is underway, for example, as are plans to change signage. Tribby cautions future users that a School Safe assessment isn't something that can be done in five minutes; he says plan on taking at least 45 minutes to do a good job.

"I think it's good that we now have data collected in an app," he says. "We can do it over



again next year and make sure we're making improvements, or we could get rights to have another individual do it with fresh eyes. In fact, I know two other principals who walked each other's campus, and each of them saw safety tweaks that the other missed."

In addition to the two principals that Tribby mentioned, Wilson says several other pairs of schools also used the "buddy system" to flip-flop campus surveys. That approach goes along with the idea driving the use of School Safe for the assessments: the district wanted principals to find a new way of looking at their campuses.

"Principals walk through their schools 100 times a day and they miss things because they see them all the time. We wanted to find a tool that would force them to look at things a little differently," Wilson says. "We had paper documents before and this is much more in line with the times. They can use School Safe to make notes, and they can save it and come back to finish later if they run out of time."

Principals won't be able to address every issue they see after performing the assessment, but it might make them think about changing their car dropoff to a different point, or installing something like bollards or big flowerpots to block an open sidewalk that might allow an intruder to drive right up to the door.

"Sometimes it isn't a physical change that a school needs, but rather a change in the way they do business, such as locking additional doors," Wilson says. "The district issues them all smartphones, and using the app just gave them a simple way to walk around the school and look at things. They could make notes, put the phones in their pockets and walk on to the next spot."

For more information on Winston-Salem/Forsyth County's use of School Safe, contact Brent Campbell at [bcampbell@wsfcs.k12.nc.us](mailto:bcampbell@wsfcs.k12.nc.us). For information on how to obtain access to School Safe, visit <https://justnet.org/SchoolSafe/index.html>. The app is available in both iOS and Android versions, along with a new desktop-friendly version (see related article, "[JTIC Releases Desktop Version of School Safe](#)").

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# Forensic Evidence and Criminal Justice Outcomes in Sexual Assault Cases

*National Institute of Justice*

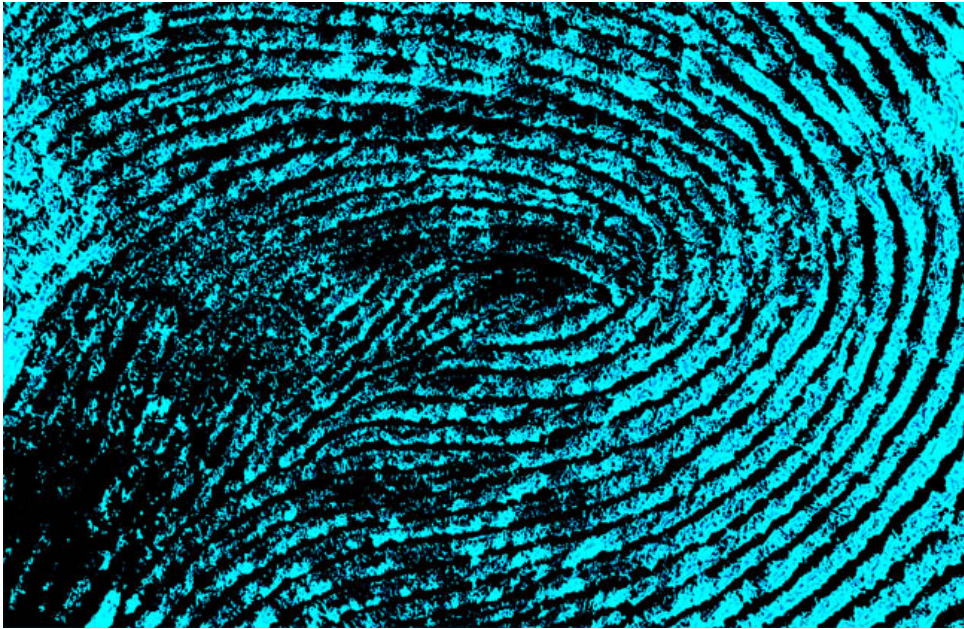
Victims undergo difficult forensic medical examinations with the hope of contributing evidence that can help bring assailants to justice. A study funded by the National Institute of Justice explored injury and forensic evidence in sexual assault cases using data from different types of medical examiners (including sexual assault nurse examiners), laboratories and the police.

Researchers examined how the collected biological evidence and the type and frequency of injuries related to arrest. The timing of evidence collection and arrest also was taken into consideration. The results were then compared based on who collected the evidence and the age of the victims

To read about the study, click [here](#).

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# Defining the Difficulty of Fingerprint Comparisons

*National Institute of Justice*

Fingerprint comparisons are often portrayed as straightforward in television crime shows, but the forensic fingerprint community knows that latent print comparisons can be a complex process with significant variations in the degree of difficulty involved in specific comparisons.

In a project funded by the National Institute of Justice, researchers set out to develop an accurate and quantitative metric for measuring the difficulty of latent fingerprints for any given comparison. Is there an objective way, the researchers asked, to determine how difficult it would be to measure a particular set of fingerprints?

Access the article about the project [here](#).

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# Law Enforcement and Victims of Crime

## *Office for Victims of Crime*

The Office for Victims of Crime has released a new video, OVC Partnerships With Law Enforcement.

Law enforcement personnel are often the first contact that victims of crime have. It is therefore critical that law enforcement understand the needs of crime victims, have the skills to provide a trauma-informed response and have resources to help address work-related exposure to trauma.

This 6-minute video discusses OVC-sponsored programs and resources to enhance the delivery of services to victims of crime by law enforcement agencies. To view the video, go [here](#).

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