

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Vicarious trauma is an occupational challenge. It refers to the negative changes experienced by workers who support clients affected by trauma.

This fact sheet provides information on some of the common signs of vicarious trauma. It also has some ideas on how we can manage vicarious trauma.



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Workers can develop vicarious trauma over time through repeated exposure to others' experiences of trauma (e.g. working with clients who have experienced abuse, war, or natural disaster).

It is important to remember that being affected by vicarious trauma is not a result of personal weakness. It is a risk faced by anyone who is exposed to severe or cumulative trauma associated with their work.

Vicarious trauma impacts those who work in many areas that involve supporting others, such as:

- Justice
- Law courts
- Law enforcement
- Victim support
- Prisons
- Out of home care
- Health
- Social work
- Crisis support
- Acute mental health
- Front line response
- Veteran support
- Teachers
- Chaplains
- Counselling

COMMON SIGNS OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA

- Feeling highly alert or easily startled
- Concentration difficulties
- Difficulty managing boundaries between personal and work-life.
- Increased perception of responsibility for clients
- Preoccupied with thoughts about clients and their situations
- Difficulty sleeping and/or nightmares
- Feeling irritable, frustrated or angry
- Feeling anxious or fearful
- Exhaustion
- Feeling trapped or hopeless
- Conflict with others
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling vulnerable
- Relationship difficulties
- Changes in the way that you view yourself (e.g. feeling you have lost your identity or self-esteem)
- Losing pleasure in activities you usually enjoy
- Eating more or less than usual
- Increased drinking or drug use to cope



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- www.blueknot.org.au
- www.thelookout.org.au
- www.phoenixaustralia.org
- www.ovc.ojp.gov
- www.headsup.org.au

Vicarious trauma is a normal response that does not result from personal weakness

FACTORS THAT CAN INFLUENCE VICARIOUS TRAUMA

- Your own experience of trauma in your personal life
- Your personal coping style
- Length of time that you have been in your profession
- How much you are exposed to the trauma work
- The amount of variation in your work tasks
- Your social support
- The work environment
- Orientation and training received
- Support from colleagues and supervisors
- Opportunities to debrief

MANAGING VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Access any support your employer is offering

Engaging with the Employee Assistance Program (confidential counselling, separate to your workplace). Find ways to process your work formally or informally, such as team debriefing, clinical supervision and peer to peer support.

Connecting with others

Spend time with people who you find uplifting and maintain a sense of humour. Strong personal and professional networks and communities help workers to experience their lives and jobs as more fulfilling and connect them with a sense of identity beyond their work.

Practice good boundaries

Boundaries are key for you as a worker and they are key for your clients. Clear boundaries create safety for all. The people you support have often had their personal boundaries violated. Be clear of your professional guidelines /responsibilities. Communicate these clearly also.

Learn ways to separate the work and the personal domains of your life, such as strategies to disengage from worry and rumination. Self-compassion is a good start. You are only human after all!

Access training or workshops

Increasing your skills and knowledge, specifically in Trauma Informed Practice or Vicarious Trauma can help you become more confident and more self-aware.

Increase the basics of stress management

Attend to the basics of self-care such as taking your lunch break, going outside, get some sun, and listen to music. BREATHE deeply and listen to good music. Seek to have more healthy fun and balance in your life.

Practicing spiritual renewal

Spiritual renewal is key for sustaining yourself in a world that can seem full of injustice and trauma. Seek to nurture yourself spiritually and within a supportive community.

Consider Vicarious Resilience

Vicarious resilience is the flip side of working with clients. There are many positive aspects of working with trauma affected clients that are associated with resilience. Google this amazing term and how it can inform and inspire your work!



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