



VICARIOUS TRAUMA



WHY TALK ABOUT VICARIOUS TRAUMA?



- Vicarious trauma also known as secondary trauma is more directly linked to people who work with trauma survivor regularly.
- However, anyone who is exposed to another's trauma or pain can experience vicarious trauma.
- Supporting someone through a difficult or traumatic situation, especially if you have similar experience, can put you at risk.
- This presentation helps you to become aware of the factors that put an individual at risk for vicarious trauma, prevention strategies, and the signs and symptoms that may emerge.




What is Trauma?

Response to an event that a person finds highly stressful, overwhelming

- Abuse
- Assault
- Disaster
- Displacement
- Accidents
- Intergenerational trauma
- Etc.

Types of Trauma

Emotional	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental response to a disturbing event or situation• Acute: Response during and directly after an event• Chronic: Long-term response from prolonged or repeated events• Complex: Response to multiple events that may or may not be related	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serious bodily harm or injury



Signs/Symptoms



EMOTIONAL

- Fear
- Denial
- Anger
- Feelings of helplessness
- Diminished mental wellness
- Changes in behaviour
- Guilt and shame
- Emotional numbness

PHYSICAL

- Psychosomatic illnesses
- Difficulty sleeping
- Nightmares/flashbacks
- Excessive alertness
- Fatigue
- Sexual dysfunction
- Hyper-alertness/jumpiness

Vicarious Trauma



Vicarious traumatization
is a **negative** reaction to trauma exposure.

It includes a range of psychosocial symptoms.

Vicarious trauma is used broadly
to include other related terms
such as secondary trauma,
compassion fatigue,
and critical incident stress.

What Is Vicarious Trauma?



Ongoing and cumulative effects of being exposed to hearing about or witnessing another's painful events.

Feelings . . .



Powerlessness

Irritability

Depression

Anxiety

Guilt

Suspicion

Confusion

Isolation

Discouragement

What Causes Vicarious Trauma?



- Second-hand exposure to disturbing/traumatic events or material
- State of tension and preoccupation with the individual or cumulative trauma of those you have a connection to or identify with
- Re-experiencing traumatic events—being triggered
- Persistent arousal—consistently anxious, concerned, afraid

Impact



- Diminished concentration
- Sleep disturbances
- Physical illnesses
- Loss of compassion
- Missing work
- Reduced productivity
- Avoiding physical intimacy
- Reduced sense of connection with loved ones and colleagues
- Becoming judgmental of others
- Becoming cynical or angry
- Loss of hope or a sense of meaning
- Development of rescue fantasies, becoming over-involved, taking on others' problems.
- Development of overly rigid, strict boundaries
- Avoidance of social/work contact
- Questioning of one's values and beliefs

Common Symptoms



- Feeling frightened
- Sadistic reactions
- Wanting to retaliate
- Feelings of aggression, rage, grief, and horror
- Loss of control
- Extreme vulnerability
- Rescue fantasies—longing to save someone from harm

Common Symptoms



- Feelings impact the way in which the survivor is being listened to and supported
- One's own unresolved conflicts and concerns re-emerging due to ongoing interaction with trauma survivors
- Focus of attention remains on self, rather than on survivor
- May or may not have had similar traumatic experiences
- Inhibits a sense of compassion for other's suffering

Strategies for Preventing Vicarious Trauma



Recognize that being witness to another's pain has an impact and take protective measures such as:

- Setting achievable objectives—you can't save a person, but you can support them. Remember what is in your control.
- Managing the amount of traumatic material, you are exposed to.
- Daily self-affirmations—focusing on successes.
- Take care of your wellness—rest, nutrition, exercise, and connection with people you care about.
- Tap into imagery that makes you feel safe and protected (when you're in work mode) and cared-for (when in non-work mode).
- Meditation, hobbies etc.

Resources



Sexual Harassment in the Workplace—Vicarious Trauma

<https://sharpworkplaces.org/resources/worker/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace-vicarious-trauma/>

Resources on Vicarious Trauma: Self-care and Strategies by Organizations to Support Wellness

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health/vicarious_trauma_and_organization_resource_list.pdf

Vicarious Trauma Toolkit

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/what-is-vicarious-trauma>