

Self-Care for Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious Trauma, or Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), occurs when an individual is exposed to the firsthand trauma experiences of another.

Individuals affected by Secondary Traumatic Stress, or Vicarious Trauma may find themselves re-experiencing personal trauma or notice an increase in arousal and avoidance reactions related to the indirect trauma exposure. They may also experience changes in memory and perception; alterations in their sense of self-efficacy; a depletion of personal resources; and disruption in their perceptions of safety, trust, and independence. A partial list of symptoms and conditions associated with secondary traumatic stress includes:

- Feeling helpless/hopeless (feel like you're not doing enough)
- Morale (eroding morale)
- Hyper-vigilance
- Exhaustion
- Avoidance
- Cynical humor, or cynicism
- Anger
- Externalising, "blaming"
- Minimizing
- Blind spots
- Dogma
- Addiction

Definitions

Burnout: a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.

Compassion Fatigue: the emotional distress one may experience when having had close contact with a trauma survivor.

Vicarious Trauma: the transformation in the self that results from empathic engagement with traumatized clients.

Strategies to evaluate secondary stress

Cognitive behavioral interventions
Mindfulness training

Reflective supervision

Caseload adjustment

Informal gatherings following crisis events (to allow for voluntary, spontaneous discussions) (aka Debriefs)

Change in job assignment or workgroup

Referrals to Employee Assistance Programs or outside agencies

Self Care to Prevent Vicarious or Secondary Trauma

Managing personal and professional stress is vital:

- Avoid “self care” avoidance
- Build and maintain connections
- Know your “triggers”
- Finding Inspiration: what motivates you?
- Exercise and eat healthy
- Engage in a pleasant hobby or activity
- Creating a health consistent structure and pattern in your personal life
- Knowing your limits
- Improving your understanding of trauma and secondary trauma
- Taking a time out
- Seeking support from co-workers, family, friends
- Professional counseling
- Vacations
- Music
- Breathing, mindfulness
- Attend to spiritual relationships
- Visualization
- Humor
- Develop/increase personal wellness plan
- Transition to home **-leave it at the office**