

# Managing Vicarious Trauma: Self-Care Tips

Vicarious trauma is a cumulative effect of working with trauma, which can affect many aspects of a person's life. It may consist of short-term reactions, or longer-term effects that continue long after the work has finished\*



Working with people who have experienced trauma can take a toll on your own wellbeing. Vicarious trauma happens when you're exposed to someone else's pain, and over time, it can affect your emotions, behaviour, and even your physical health. While you might not have gone through the trauma yourself, your brain still responds as if you have. This is because of "mirror neurons," which help us feel empathy, but also leave us vulnerable to carrying the emotional weight of others' experiences.

## Signs of Vicarious Trauma:

**Emotionally:** You might feel unsafe or overly sensitive, struggle to manage emotions, or experience mood swings, irritability, or exhaustion. You could feel disconnected, hopeless, or more sensitive to violence or abuse.

**Behaviourally:** Trouble sleeping, increased heart rate, withdrawal, overeating or undereating, and even turning to substances to cope can be signs. You may also find yourself being overly critical or withdrawing from others.

**Cognitively:** It's common to have ruminating thoughts, trouble concentrating, nightmares, or a sense of dread about work.

## How to Look After Yourself:

**Practice self-care:** Regular exercise, creative outlets, meditation, and relaxation techniques can all help

**Take breaks:** Step away from work when needed and engage in activities that aren't work-related.

**Get support:** Use opportunities for debriefing, supervision, or counselling

**Stay connected:** Maintain relationships with people outside of work

**Reflect on your successes:** Take time to appreciate the positive impact you're making

**Engage in spiritual or humorous activities:** These can provide comfort and perspective

If you're feeling overwhelmed, consider seeking professional help to support your mental health and wellbeing.

\*Australian Institute of Family Studies - Mouldern & Firestone, 2007, p. 68

To book an appointment with one of our counsellors, call or scan the QR Code



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