

Trauma Awareness

because recovery from trauma is possible

Vicarious Trauma

Taking care of one's self is critical to being able to continue the work where there is trauma exposure

There is an increase in exposure to trauma and violence in our world - and in many of the professions, we are often directly exposed to the trauma of others - this can have a significant impact on our own well-being, and impact the relationships we have as well as our ability to continue our work.

Just a few things you might notice if you are being impacted by secondary stress ...

EMOTIONAL

Trauma exposure can impact emotions - you might notice:

- anxiety
- guilt
- numbness
- sadness
- hypersensitivity
- overwhelmed

RELATIONSHIPS

Both personal and professional relationships can be profoundly impacted - you may notice:

- isolation
- mistrust
- projection
- intolerance
- poor communication

PHYSICAL

Stress and secondary stress can have a profound impact on our physical health - a few things you may notice:

- somatic symptoms
- impaired immune system
- aches/pains
- difficulty sleeping

Engaging in self-care

Connect with others

As with survivors of trauma, it is important for helpers to connect in meaningful ways with others. This provides resilience and creates support.

Connect with environment

In addition to connecting with other people in meaningful ways, connecting with the environment is very important - take a break outside and away from the screen.

More About Vicarious Trauma

Whether you work in the medical field, policing, or another area of human services - as long as you are exposed to trauma of others, you are also at risk of secondary trauma exposure for yourself.

For many years this has gone unnoticed or ignored, we have often referred to this as 'burnout'. The truth is, burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma are closely related, but there are some significant differences.

Burnout can be described as physical and emotional exhaustion. This can be attributed to low job satisfaction, feelings of powerlessness and being overwhelmed. Compassion fatigue is often thought of the profound emotional and physical exhaustion that can result over the course of a career - it is also associated with being unable to listen to or witness the stories or experiences of others. Vicarious trauma is more of a profound shift in world view after working or witnessing the trauma of others.

Did you Know ...

Exposure to secondary trauma can create symptoms that mimic symptoms of PTSD?

Here are a couple of my favourite resources:

We are becoming more aware of this - for a great resource, check out the work of Laura van Dernoot Lipsky: traumastewardship.com Laura is a wonderful presenter and humanitarian - throughout her book, she is able to authentically express herself and connect with the reader. I absolutely recommend this book for anyone who works with human services, law enforcement or the medical field.

Another great resource is joyfulheartfoundation.org - some great information and opportunity to look at healing programs. This not-for-profit organization offers great web resources and commits to raising awareness and supporting others

ABOUT ME

Throughout my work I have developed a strong passion around the area of trauma and vicarious trauma. I have worked in the field of Addiction and Mental Health in a variety of roles since 2001, teaching a sessional class on Trauma and Healing at the University of Lethbridge for several years, along with being in private practice since 2011. I have also had the wonderful opportunity to instruct numerous workshops to a variety of professionals from one hour to two days. I continue to care for myself and my passion in this area through learning and indulging in my curiosity.

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