VICARIOUS TRAUMA
SELF-CARE TO MANAGE THE IMPACT
OF OTHER PEOPLE’S TRAUMA

Have you ever felt ‘burnt out’? ‘Emotionally exhausted’? Or ‘heavy’? Your work puts you in front of trauma most days and this can have a toll. It’s important then to take care of yourself and look out for signs when you might need some extra you time.

What is vicarious trauma?
Vicarious trauma is a normal response to the ongoing exposure to other people’s trauma. Working to support people who have experienced trauma, and hearing, seeing and learning about their experiences, can have a cumulative effect on you and many aspects of your personal life.

The children and young people we work with have usually experienced significantly challenging, traumatic and distressing experiences in their lives. These are not considered ‘normal’ experiences, and when you hear about or experience these repeatedly it can impact your personal life, health and functioning. This is vicarious trauma.

Symptoms of vicarious trauma
The symptoms of vicarious trauma are our brains way of coping. These symptoms might include:

> **Intrusive reactions**: Dreams/nightmares, flashbacks, obsessive thoughts, physiological reactions, and re-experiencing. For example, feeling more irritable with clients and colleagues, dreaming about work, feeling hopeless or doubting your abilities.

> **Avoidant reactions**: General numbing in responsiveness and avoidance. For example, avoiding clients, increased sick days, blaming others, comfort eating, increased alcohol use.

> **Hyper-arousal reactions**: Hyper-vigilance and difficulty concentrating. For example, difficulty falling or staying asleep, losing sleep over work, distractibility, difficulty retaining information, fatigue.

Vicarious trauma shares similarities with stress, trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout and secondary traumatic stress – but there is a key difference. Vicarious trauma can actually change or impact your core beliefs and inner experiences.

How to care for yourself
Use the ideas from the Mental Health Self Care Wheel to think about ways you can care for yourself.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you’d like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:


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