



Vicarious
Traumatization
and Self-Care

Definition of Terms



Vicarious Trauma

Continuous exposure to trauma and violence poses a significant challenge for professionals in victim services, law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire services, and related fields due to their ongoing interaction with victims and exposure to distressing content. (Office for Victims of Crime, 2020)



Self-Care

Self-care is the practice of taking care of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of your life to promote health and wellness (Bottaro, 2023) .



Compassion Fatigue

Emotional and physical exhaustion that can affect people who have been exposed to other people's traumas or stressors. It is characterized by a decreased ability to empathize, feelings of helplessness, and burnout due to the demands of supporting those who are suffering (Cherry, 2023) .

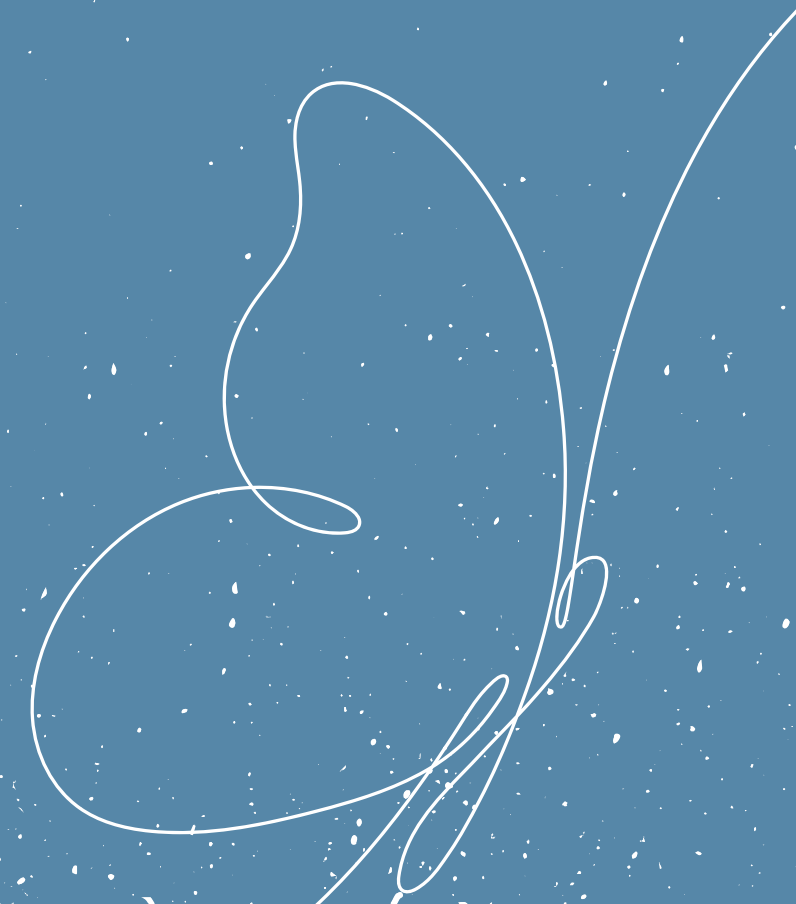
Risk Factors for Vicarious Trauma

- Personal history of trauma (Swaim, 2022)
- Heightened empathy (Swaim, 2022)
- Trouble recognizing your own emotions (Swaim, 2022)
- Lack of support at work, especially training and debriefing (Swaim, 2022)



Common Negative Reactions to Vicarious Trauma

- difficulty managing emotions;
- feeling emotionally numb or shut down;
- fatigue, sleepiness, or difficulty falling asleep;
- physical problems or complaints, such as aches, pains, and decreased resistance to illness;
- being easily distracted, which can increase one's risk of accidents;
- loss of a sense of meaning in life and/or feeling hopeless about the future;
- relationship problems (e.g., withdrawing from friends and family, increased interpersonal conflicts, avoiding intimacy) ;
- feeling vulnerable or worrying excessively about potential dangers in the world and loved ones' safety;
- increased irritability; aggressive, explosive, or violent outbursts and behavior;
- destructive coping or addictive behaviors (e.g., over/under eating, substance abuse, gambling, taking undue risks in sports or driving) ;
- lack of or decreased participation in activities that used to be enjoyable;
- avoiding work and interactions with clients or constituents; and
- a combination of symptoms that comprise a diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) .(Office for Victims of Crime, 2020)



What Happens If Vicarious Trauma is Unaddressed?

- It can turn into PTSD (Swaim, 2022)
- It can turn into depression (Swaim, 2022)
- It can compromise a persons ability to provide care or professional services (Ravi et al., 2021)
- It can affect their own personal health and relationships (Ravi et al., 2021)



Self Awareness

Self Care When Experiencing Vicarious Trauma

Peer Support

Get Enough
Sleep

Be Active

Set
Boundries

Counseling



(SAMHSA, 2021)

Application of Self-Care to Prevent Vicarious Trauma

- Adequate sleep, healthy eating, regular physical activity, and active relaxation
- Positive relationships with other crisis counselors
- Schedule time for relaxation, meditation, and rest.
- Stay in regular contact with friends and loved ones.
- Stay informed on resources and events for crisis counselors.



Further Resources

Vicarious Trauma Reasing
Course and Workbook

<https://www.headington-institute.org/blog/resource/understanding-vt-reading-course/>

Vicarious Trauma Toolkit

<https://istss.org/clinical-resources/treating-trauma/vicarious-trauma-toolkit>

Name of agency: Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Address: 500 Deaderick Street, Nashville, TN 37243

Phone number: (800) 560-5767

Email (if applicable) : OCA.TDMHSAS@tn.gov

Contact person/department (if applicable) : Marie Williams, Commissioner

Website: [Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#)

My Self Care Plan



Self Awareness

I will keep in tune with myself and being able to recognize when something is really affecting me.



Setting Boundries

I will set boundaries to ensure my self-care remains a priority, allowing me to effectively support others while maintaining my own well-being.



Prioritizing Health

I will practice getting enough sleep, healthy eating, regular physical activity, and active relaxation.

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Office for Victims of Crime. (2020) . The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit | What Is Vicarious Trauma? Office for Victims of Crime. <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/what-is-vicarious-trauma>



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Swaim, E. (2022, March 3). Dealing with trauma day-to-day increases your risk of vicarious trauma — here are the signs and what to do. *Business Insider*.
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