



VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND SELF-CARE

Samir Khalil

What is Vicarious Trauma?

- According to the Vicarious Trauma Institute, the definition of vicarious trauma is, “a *transformation in the helper’s inner sense of identity and existence that results from utilizing controlled empathy when listening to clients’ trauma-content narratives*”¹
- Essentially, when a person is in a field that interacts with people who have suffered from trauma and is exposed to that trauma, they are more likely to suffer from second-hand trauma.

¹Vicarious Trauma Institute. (2021). *What is vicarious trauma?* Vicarious Trauma Institute.
<https://vicarioustrauma.com/whatis.html>

Current Research

- **Symptoms:**
 - Difficulty managing emotions¹
 - Becoming overly involved emotionally with the patient²
 - Fatigue, sleepiness, or difficulty falling asleep¹
 - Loss of hope, pessimism, cynicism²
 - Being easily distracted, which can increase one's risk of accidents¹
 - Experiencing bystander guilt, shame, feelings of self-doubt²
 - Depressive symptoms¹

¹OVC. (2020). *What is vicarious trauma?* US Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime. <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/what-is-vicarious-trauma>

²Mehlmann-Wicks, J. (2020, September 7). *Vicarious trauma: signs and strategies for coping*. The British Medical Association. <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/your-wellbeing/vicarious-trauma/vicarious-trauma-signs-and-strategies-for-coping>

How to Treat Vicarious Trauma Individually

- According to several resources such as the Social Work License Map and the British Medical Association, there are several things that you can do as an individual to help address vicarious trauma in oneself:
 - Increase your self-observation
 - Look after your physical and mental wellbeing
 - Exercise, rest, spend time in nature
 - Maintain a healthy work/life balance
 - Learn to say “no” and set limits.
 - Take regular breaks
 - Use your creative expression
 - Paint, cook, journal, other creative expressions

How to Treat Vicarious Trauma in an Organization

- The Social Work License Map has several suggestions that organization can follow to help reduce vicarious trauma in the workplace:
 - Promote self-care and prioritize staff care
 - Divide responsibilities and ensure diverse workloads
 - Offer professional training and encourage staff development
 - Ensure a safe work environment and provide equipment for workers to be safe
 - Provide counseling resources

Resources for Vicarious Trauma

- The US Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime has created "[The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#)" which has several hundred resources to help address vicarious trauma.
- Another resource is the Social Work License Map which has compiled several different [evidence-based resources](#) to address vicarious trauma.

What is Self Care?

- Self care is “doing things to take care of our minds, bodies, and souls by engaging in activities that promote well-being and reduce stress” (Active Minds, 2020).
- Anything that helps to rejuvenate a person can be considered self care. Here are several examples:
 - Exercise, hiking, running, walking, swimming, being in nature
 - Painting, drawing, coloring, journaling, puzzles
 - Music, TV, resting, comedy, friends/family

How is Self Care and Vicarious Trauma Related?

- Self care is one of the evidence-based strategies that can help fight against vicarious trauma and help to reduce negative symptoms (Salazar, 2016).
- After being able to recognize symptoms of vicarious trauma, a self care routine is able to help rejuvenate an individual so that the secondhand trauma does not affect the person as strongly as it could (Salazar, 2016).

My Self Care Routine

- **Each Week:**
 - Approximately four hours of blacksmithing
 - At least four hours of talking with friends
 - At least two hours of playing video games with friends
 - At least one hour/day with my significant other
 - A full Sabbath of rest

References

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