

Looking After Yourself After A Traumatic Event

Low levels of stress are manageable and considered necessary to keep us motivated and excited about what we do. Distress results when our bodies over-react to events and how we perceive and interpret events dictates how our bodies react. Some of us work in environments where we are continually exposed to stressful and traumatic events. And while we manage on a day to day basis, the overall impact of these events can and do take their toll.

Whether you work in an environment where you are regularly exposed to events or material considered to be traumatic, or you are dealing with the aftermath of trauma, you may become exposed to Vicarious Trauma or as it is commonly known, Compassion fatigue.

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious Trauma can be thought of as the negative changes that occur in us when we see/hear/read about other people's pain and suffering. It is the process of change that occurs because we care for people that are suffering and feel a sense of obligation to help.

These changes include disruptions in the way we see ourselves and our professional identity, our world view, and our beliefs. There are several signs of vicarious trauma to be aware of:

- Intrusive thoughts and images
- Memories: flashbacks or nightmares of traumatic material
- Bodily symptoms such as susceptibility to illness aches and pains, fatigue, etc.
- Heightened feelings and emotions related to the trauma
- Increased substance use and abuse, self-injury, suicidal thoughts, aggression against others.
- Interpersonal workplace conflicts
- Changes in the ability to rely on others to meet one's needs
- Changes in our feeling connected to others in a meaningful way.
- Ability to tolerate, manage and integrate strong feelings.
- Ability to maintain positive self-worth and to feel deserving of life and love.
- Ability to make self-protective judgments.
- Ability to establish interpersonal boundaries.
- Ability to take perspective and foresee consequences.

Self Care Techniques

- Develop a realistic schedule of daily activities that includes time for work, sleep, relationships, and recreation. Use a daily "thing to do" list.
- Use your time and energy efficiently. Recognize that you can only do so much in a given period
- Physical activity has always provided relief from stress. We need to develop a regular exercise program to reduce the effects of stress before it becomes distress.
- Be sure to get sufficient rest at night.
- Balance your family, social, and work demands with special private times. Hobbies are good antidotes for daily pressures. Unwind by taking a quiet stroll, soaking in a hot bath, watching a sunset, or listening to calming music.
- A balanced diet will provide the necessary energy you need. Avoid nonprescription drugs & excess alcohol.
- Daily doses of conversation, social engagements, and occasional sharing of deep feelings and thoughts can reduce stress

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