

Vicarious Trauma: Surviving, Thriving & Reviving



Self Awareness

How aware are you regarding your emotional and psychological state? How aware are you regarding your level of compassion satisfaction and fatigue? One of the most critical protective factors to vicarious trauma is self-awareness. We all like to believe that we don't have a 'breaking point'. However, we/you do. It is not a matter of if the work you do will have an impact on you, it is a matter of when. If we take a moment to notice, we can learn a lot about ourselves and our own experiences.

The key to self-awareness is the ability to know what you're feeling so that you can begin to gain more insight into your inner workings and external tendencies. Self-awareness can include being aware of our own trauma/attachment history and how it can impact on you and the work you do, taking notice of when you are spending less time on the things that give you joy, knowing the signs of compassion fatigue and if you are experiencing any of them, and using formal measures etc. Never forget that *"time spent in self-reflection is never wasted – it is an intimate date with yourself"* (Paul TP Wong).

Self-Care

"You can't pour from an empty cup" (unknown). Self-care is not something you figure out once and get a certificate. You can't say, "I completed a course and now I'm a certified expert in my own self-care". It takes time and effort.

Self-care does not mean the same thing for everyone. Different people will adopt different self-care practices. When appropriate and adaptive self-care is regularly practiced, the benefits are broad and have even been linked to positive health outcomes such as reduced stress, improved immune system, increased productivity, higher self-esteem, and better outcomes of those young people you work with. When you are regularly taking care of yourselves, you are better able to respond to the things that go on in your life.

One of the most important points to take away is that small, incremental, sustainable self-care practices integrated into your daily routine is the best way to protect both your wellbeing and your professional longevity. However, self-care does need to be balanced with individual life responsibilities and what works today may not work for you next week. Self-care practices need to be re-evaluated and modified/tweaked over time.

Team Practices

Increasing wellbeing is not just what can you do for yourselves, but also what occurs in the workplace – what staff and leadership do/don't do. No matter how superior your self-care is, if staff and managers do not collaborate continually to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of all in the team/organisation, personal wellbeing can and does decline. What genuine supportive team practices are occurring? Is there a supportive culture genuinely encouraged across all levels of the team/organisation? What support is leadership being provided?

A positive, and hardworking workplace culture is not created overnight, but it can be changed. Workplace cultures are embodied and reinforced by leadership; however, workplace culture is the responsibility of everyone - we all have a part to play. David Morrison (2016 Australian of the Year) once stated, *"the standard you walk past is the standard you accept"*. Positive team and organisational practices is closely linked to productivity, reduced staff turn, increased wellbeing and better outcomes of those we work with.

Connecting / Help Seeking

We find supporting and helping others much easier than asking for help. For many, asking for help is awkward or uncomfortable. It requires you to acknowledge something is not quite right and to be vulnerable.

Sometimes you need to reach out and ask for help. To be where you want to be emotionally and psychologically, at times you do need to talk/connect with someone you trust. You can't do everything yourself. *"Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It's evidence of self-awareness, courage and strength"* (unknown). *"Taking care of myself doesn't mean 'me first', it means 'me too'"* L.R. Knost).

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