

Notes from Discussion

22 participants

Topic for discussion - Vicarious Trauma and Self Care

Vicarious Trauma



What is it and What isn't it?

- Burnout
- Compassion Fatigue

blue knot Foundation: <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Workers-Practitioners/For-Health-Professionals/Resources-for-Health-Professionals/Vicarious-Trauma>

Vicarious trauma is a process that unfolds over time. It is not just your responses to one person, one story, or one situation. **It is the cumulative effect of contact with survivors of violence** or disaster or people who are struggling. It is what happens to you over time as you witness cruelty and loss and hear distressing stories, day after day, and year after year. **This process of change is ongoing.** Your experiences of vicarious trauma are continuously being **influenced by your life experiences (both those you choose and those that simply happen to you** in the course of your professional and personal lives).

Headington Institute - <https://headington-institute.org/?tabid=2258>



Literature states that there is a difference between Vicarious Trauma (VT) and Burnout or Compassion Fatigue.

Small group discussion about the difference of definitions.

- Informal debriefing with peers is very important
- Sense of humour is also important
- External factors (personal life) will impact on our individual capacity to deal with VT - being mindful of the impact of these factors.
- Burnout and Compassion fatigue can be a compounding factor to vicarious trauma.
- Hyper vigilance in our external lives.
- Sometimes we need to choose who we spend time with outside of our work - some people “get it” and some do not - the energy used to deal with people who don’t ‘know’ about DFV.

Discussion around limits to working in the sector:

- Passion and political motivation (social justice) are ways to keep us ‘in the work’.
- Strong mentors can make a huge difference in supporting us.

- When we see the signs that the work is taking a toll, workers spoke about concern in it affecting the quality of their work and ability to continue working.
- Reflective practice and self-awareness are critical
- Many practitioners have left the sector and re-engaged in the sector.
- Sometimes being on the 'front line' in crisis continually can be overwhelming and so a side-step can be a way to invest in longevity.
- Sometimes work mandated self-care days are not appropriate for all. Some practitioners have very robust self-care practices.
- Participants mentioned that VT can creep up on you.
- Being vulnerable and transparent in a confidential space with colleagues is critical. This allows self-awareness and understanding limitations.
- Creating boundaries can be challenging as awareness of DFV and child protection transfers into our personal life - "once you know, you can't unknow".
- Supervision is critical - Having a great manager goes a long way to preventing and identifying VT.

Discussion around self-care and supervision - how do we manage VT?

- Self-care days in an organisation can be challenging as it might not be everyone's cup of tea. Management need to be aware of this and also be flexible.
- Staff having a safety and self-care plan - everyone is Accountable for each other.

Drowning in Empathy TED talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsaorjlo1Yc>

Self-entitlement - Justification as negative maladaptive behaviours because of the positive things you do.

Question posed about our potential maladaptive beliefs and behaviours eg: I can handle it.

Further thoughts for discussion: Is VT an occupational hazard?

Practice Principles for DV informed approach

How does Vicarious Trauma effect these three areas?

