

Looking after ourselves - how to recognise, address and prevent vicarious trauma

Dr Angela Burnett
Lead doctor
Freedom from Torture

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Workshop summary

- How to recognise, address and prevent vicarious trauma
- Recognising our own stress levels
- Sharing ideas of how to reduce stress levels – both personally and in teams/organisations
- Training day in self care and vicarious trauma
- Questions

Impact of our work on us

'The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet'

Rachel Remen (1996) Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal,

- Anyone working with traumatised people / material is likely to be impacted at some point – normal
- Normal part of empathy / being human
- May be intense feeling dissipating quickly or longer lasting
- Need tools for dealing with it so not destructive / impair functioning

Vicarious trauma

“The cumulative transformative effect on the helper of working with survivors of traumatic life events.”

Bloom (2003) Caring for the Caregiver- avoiding vicarious traumatisation

- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Compassion fatigue
- Burn out

Risk Factors

- The traumatic issues that we work with
- Overworking / too many patients or clients / no breaks
- Ignoring boundaries
- Lack of support in workplace/professional isolation
- Low levels of training and experience
- Unaddressed personal trauma / stress
- Strong desire to help others / unrealistic expectations
- Anyone can be affected – including indirect contact with trauma e.g. administrators, researchers, family

Turn to the person next to you

- Spend 1 minute each answering:
- How do you know when you're stressed?

Common indicators of vicarious trauma

- Feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, burnt out, isolated, anxious
- Lingering feelings of anger, rage, sadness
- Overly involved / difficulty with boundaries / bystander guilt
- Preoccupied with thoughts of patient or client outside of work
- Questioning competence / self-worth
- View world as unsafe
- Distancing – avoid or blame patient or client
- Personal relationships affected



Protective factors

Williams and Sommer (1995) Handbook of post-traumatic therapy

- Good social support
- Supportive connections at work - peer support / trusting relationships / safety
- Ongoing training
- Awareness of possibility of vicarious trauma / burnout
- Openness / willingness to take steps to address it



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Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture

In your same pairs

Spend 2 minutes each identifying something you already do to reduce your stress levels:

- personally (inside or outside work)
- in your team or organisation

Self care

- Work / life balance
- Rest and leisure activities
- Reflection and self awareness
- Make it a professional priority – add to diary



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Self-care and vicarious trauma training

1-day training programme

Participants will learn:

what vicarious trauma is
risk factors

strategies to look after themselves

strategies for their teams and organisations



To find out more or register your interest, please email

training@freedomfromtorture.org

Specific training for lawyers planned in Manchester, Birmingham and London



Any questions?