

Vicarious Trauma, Burnout & Self-Care

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Victim Assistance Training Manager*

The work we do changes our lives forever

- Canadian Shelter counselor who now works in prevention

Typical Personalities of Helpers

- Rescue personality
- Risk taker
- Driven by internal motivations
- High personal standards
- Difficulty accepting failure
- Perfectionism/High Attention to detail
- High level of control
- Stimulating activities
- Difficulty delaying gratification
- Easily bored
- Strong need to be needed and help

Watch out for:

- Save
- Fix
- Heal
- Solve



Lets remember that:

- In this work, you will be directly connected to the very worst and best of this world.**



“The Body Keeps the Score”



“I have come to believe
that caring for myself is
not self indulgent.
Caring for myself is an
act of survival.” – Audre Lorde

We may be exposed to:

- Chronic Stress
- Direct Trauma
- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Trauma
- Burnout



What is Secondary Trauma?

Is a term used to describe the negative psychological consequences people in the helping profession such as victim advocacy, may experience as a result of being exposed to a survivor's accounts of trauma and witnessing the survivor's pain and suffering.



Physical Reactions:

- Fatigue/lack of energy
- Changes in sleep hygiene
- Muscle tension or aches
- Gastrointestinal Issues
- Headaches
- Changes in intimacy



Behavioral Reactions:

- Decreased motivation
- Nightmares
- Feelings of detachment
- Hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty balancing work and & personal life



Grief ≠ Death

It = loss

Not linear, not a cookie-cutter experience

Healing means recognizing emotions, patterns, triggers, and grief.



Compassion Fatigue

- Also known as second-hand shock and secondary stress reaction, describes a type of stress that results from helping or wanting to help those who are traumatized or under significant emotional duress.



UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION FATIGUE

- Compassion fatigue is sometimes called burnout but it's a slightly different concept.
- Unlike burnout, compassion fatigue is highly treatable and may be less predictable
- The onset of compassion fatigue can be sudden, whereas burnout usually emerges over time
- Severe cases of burnout sometimes requires the person experiencing it to change jobs or occupations
- Measures can be taken to prevent or treat compassion fatigue before a change in work environment is required

BURNOUT

- Develops gradually as a response to constant and chronic sources of emotional and interpersonal stress
- May feel frustrated as well as physically and emotionally exhausted.



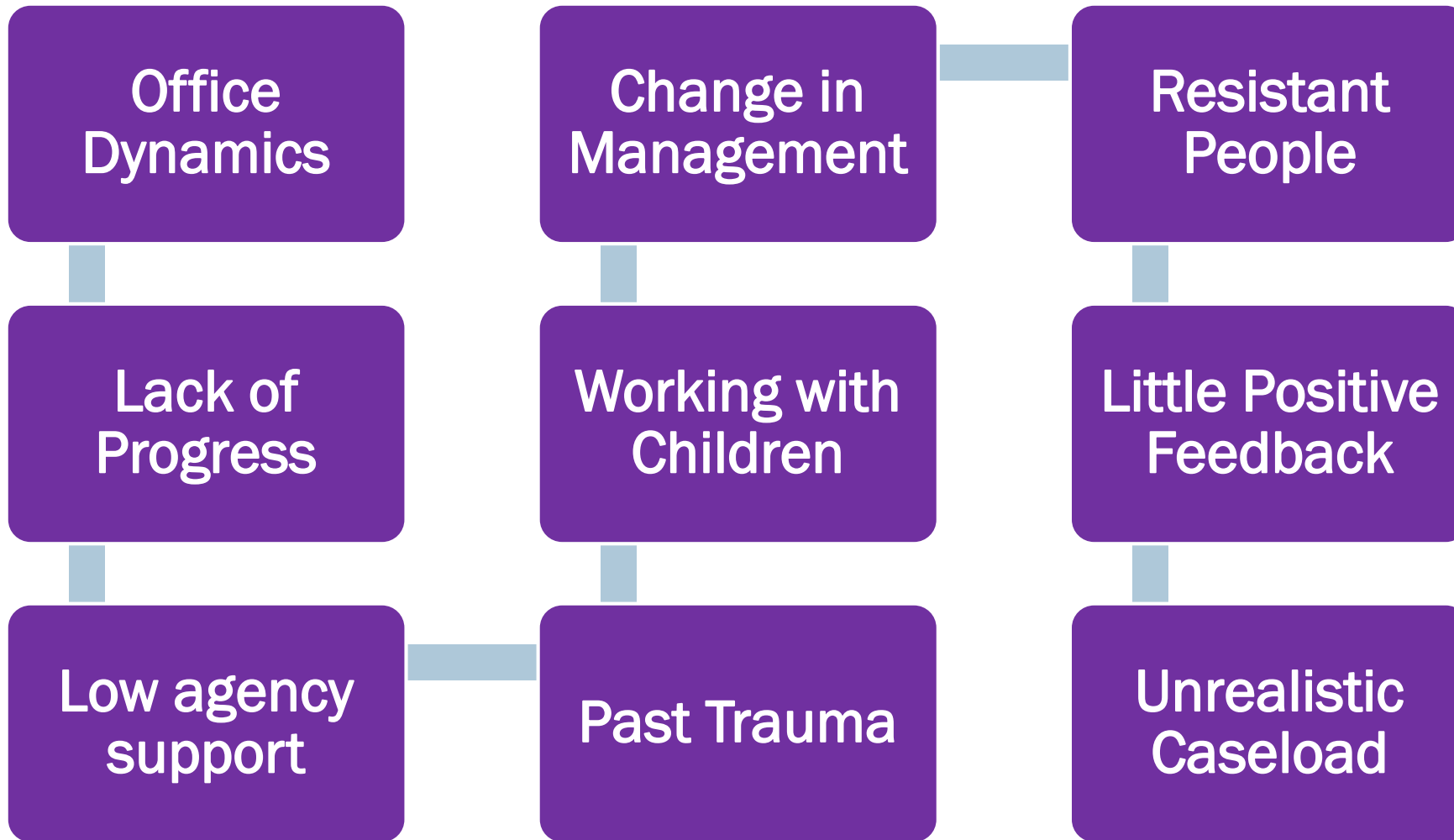
BURNOUT INDICATORS

- Exhaustion
- Emotional
- Detachment
- Feeling Indispensable
- Minimization and denial of feelings
- “Saving” personality characteristics

Someone Experiencing Burnout:

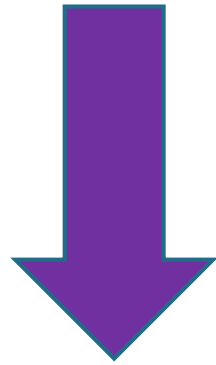
- Be relieved when clients miss appointments
- Continuously call in sick
- Low level work performance
- Have little ability to positively interact
- Always seem to be just “getting by”

Risk Factors



The Challenge

Dedication and Commitment



Not getting attached in a way that is detrimental

Vicarious Trauma



- The cumulative toll of being exposed to the suffering of other humans
- May feel sad, afraid, overwhelmed or scared based on continuously feeling empathy for the traumatized individuals they work with
- Often take on the crisis and actual trauma of another

Vicarious Trauma

**Impacts our World View and Disrupts
Beliefs about:**

- **People**
- **Faith, A higher power**
- **The ability to control Ourselves - performance and destiny**
- **Ability to keep oneself and others safe**

Someone Experiencing Vicarious Trauma Might :

- Sacrifice health and private life to devote more time to work.
- Be passionately involved to do anything and everything
Work late, skips lunch

Early Signs of Vicarious Trauma

Symptoms for negative reactions:

- Hyper vigilance
- Somatic Complaints
- Relationship Disturbances
- Guilt, Fear, Cynicism
- Addictive Behaviors
- Numbing, Disconnection
- No time or energy
- Avoidance of traumatic material
- Despair, hopelessness
- Changes in identity, world view, spirituality



How Vicarious Trauma May Impact You?

- Length, intensity and type of exposure
- Personal history
- Self Care
- Organizational Strategies
- Beliefs



If You Catch Yourself Saying

I can never
“turn off”

I have no
patience
outside of work

I am constantly
“on guard”

I feel
desensitized

I have to do
more

I can't sleep

“When the body experiences trauma, both mind and body mobilize vast amounts of energy in preparation to deal with that threat. Without an opportunity to discharge that stored energy, the body holds onto that high energy, ramped up state.”

Peter Levine, Ph.D., Healing Trauma

Now Let's Talk About You

Think back to the last few times you were having a very difficult day/week/month.

What would you say you were feeling?

What did you tell yourself to in order to cope?

Self-Care



The proactive strategies that professionals use to offset the negative aspects of working with trauma victims and promote their own wellbeing.

Resilience

- Connection
- Nourishment
- Pleasure
- Movement
- Relaxation
- Community
- Reflection
- Learning
- Rest



There is no Cookie Cutter Approach:

- Self-care needs to be on-going & dynamic
- How do we support each other and encourage self-care?



How do you care for yourself?

What will you do for yourself emotionally?

Social Supports – healthy relationships

Enjoying life, appreciate beauty, passion

What inspires you?

Who can tell you it's getting to you?

What will you do for yourself intellectually?

Challenge and develop your skills

Increase your competence and abilities

Training opportunities

SELF – CARE PROTOCOL



Develop strategies to prevent/mitigate vicarious trauma and burnout in each category :

- Physical
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Spiritual
- Workplace

RESTORE THE BALANCE



- **Set Limits**
- **Schedule time for pleasant activities**
- **Spend time with balanced people**
- **Schedule “off limits” periods of time**
- **Find balance between your work and your personal life**

“All my energy goes into just getting through my days. I don’t meditate anymore or write; that’s what I used to do at night. I don’t do anything anymore but work and go home and watch TV.” – Community Organizer

Self-Care vs Self-Comfort (Self-Soothing)



Unhealthy Self Care

- Keeping everything to yourself
- Excessive drinking / drug use
- Overeating / Not Eating
- Over sleeping / Sleep deprivation
- Isolation
- ???

Your Self-Care Plan

Consider: What happens when you start to get stressed?

- Physical stress response
- Work more
- Drink more caffeine
- Drink more alcohol
- Eat more
- Shop more
- Short tempered
- Self-blaming
- More sensitive
- Start arguments
- Avoidance
- Clean/Organize
- Less sleep/more sleep
- Dissatisfaction
- Exercise more/less
- More/Less focus

Organizational Prevention of Vicarious Trauma

- Recognize and normalize the impact of trauma on an individual worker
 - ❖ Supervision
 - ❖ Time Off, 40 hours
 - ❖ Openly discuss Self - Care
 - ❖ Opportunities to Get Involved

“There are seemingly endless amounts of beauty and hardship. We need to be present for both.”

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

