



VICARIOUS TRAUMA

01.

What is it

Exposure to others' trauma can change how we think, feel, and relate. Shaping our worldview, safety beliefs, and sense of trust.

Why It's Important

Unchecked vicarious trauma erodes empathy, clinical judgement, and personal wellbeing. Managing it is both an ethical obligation and a workplace responsibility.



Early Signs

- Intrusive images or replaying client stories
- Heightened startle response, vigilance, or numbness
- Cynicism, reduced hope, or loss of meaning
- Sleep disturbance, headaches, irritability

02.



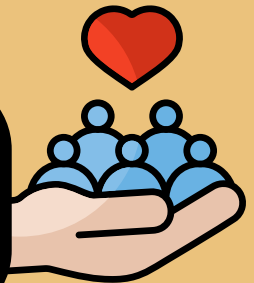
Repeated exposure to clients' trauma can impact your own mental health and professional effectiveness.

Practical Takeaway: Schedule regular supervision to process emotional load and identify early signs of vicarious trauma.

03.

Workplace responsibility

Organisations should provide psychologically safe cultures, structured debriefs, clinical supervision, workload adjustments after critical incidents, and access to EAP.



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05.

Vicarious Trauma Self-Check

Tick any that apply to you recently:

- ✓ Intrusive Thoughts
Replaying client stories or traumatic details outside of work.
- ✓ Emotional Numbness or Overwhelm
Feeling detached or overly reactive to distressing material.
- ✓ Changes in Worldview
Increased cynicism, loss of trust, or heightened sense of danger.
- ✓ Physical Symptoms
Headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, or muscle tension.
- ✓ Hypervigilance or Avoidance
Feeling constantly on edge or avoiding certain cases/topics.
- ✓ Difficulty Maintaining Empathy
Irritability, reduced patience, or feeling disconnected from clients.
- ✓ Impact on Personal Life
Withdrawal from relationships, loss of interest in hobbies, or mood changes.

06.

If you notice several of these signs:

- ✓ Pause and ground yourself
- ✓ Seek supervision or peer debriefing
- ✓ Access organisational supports (EAP, counselling)

Practical strategies (workday friendly)

- Micro resets: 2–3 minute grounding (breath, sensory scan) between sessions
- Boundaries: Clear finish times; limit trauma content after hours
- Peer connection: Brief check-ins and planned debriefs
- Recovery rituals: Walk, stretch, step outside for fresh air
- Reflect & release: Write three lines—what happened, what I felt, one action I'll take

Supervision prompts

- What signs of vicarious trauma have I noticed lately?
- Which cases are “sticking with me,” and what meaning am I making?
- What organisational supports or adjustments would help right now?

Empathetica offers supervision when you need it! Same day availability

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