

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

How the stories you carry can affect you.

Healthier people. Stronger workplaces. A brighter tomorrow.

What you witness can stay with you.

People Support People Change Communities

1 What is vicarious trauma?

Vicarious trauma is the gradual shift that can happen in your beliefs, safety, trust, or worldview after repeated exposure to other people's trauma.

When we hear, see, or support others through traumatic experiences, their stories can stay with us and influence how we see ourselves, other people, and the world.

*Their stories matter.
Your wellbeing matters too.*



You make a difference

2 How it may show up

Vicarious trauma can look different for everyone. It may include:

- Changes in your sense of safety (e.g., feeling the world is less safe)
- Changes in trust (in others or in systems)
- Blurred personal and professional boundaries
- Intrusive thoughts or images related to the things you've heard
- Strong emotional reactions (sadness, anger, fear, or helplessness)
- Increased cynicism or sense of injustice
- Feeling less hopeful about the future

3 Why it matters

Vicarious trauma can impact many areas of your life, including:

- Identity** — can change how you see yourself and your place in the world
- Relationships** — may affect your connection with family, friends and colleagues
- Work** — can lead to reduced satisfaction, compassion fatigue, or difficulty feeling effective
- Sense of self** — may impact your sense of hope, meaning, and belief in a positive future

*Caring deeply can change you.
That doesn't mean it has to take you.*

4 What helps

There are many ways to reduce the impact of vicarious trauma and support your wellbeing:

- Reflective supervision**
Create space to process what you're carrying with a trusted supervisor.
- Consultation**
Seek input, perspective and support from experienced colleagues.
- Grounding practices**
Use breath, mindfulness, and connection to the present moment.
- Set boundaries**
Be intentional about your exposure to traumatic material.
- Supportive connection**
Lean on colleagues, friends, and people who understand your work.
- Therapy or counselling**
Access your own support to process and heal.
- Intentional recovery**
Make time to rest, joy, creativity and things that replenish you.

5 Protective practices

Small, consistent practices make a big difference:

- Team debriefs**
Create regular opportunities to check in and process together.
- Peer support**
Build trusted connections with colleagues who get it.
- Routines that signal leaving work**
Develop end-of-day rituals to help you mentally transition (e.g., a walk, music, changing clothes).
- Reconnect with life outside of work**
Make space for hobbies, nature, movement, relationships and activities that bring you joy.

You can care deeply and still care for yourself.

6 For organizations

Workplaces play a vital role in preventing and responding to vicarious trauma. Consider:

- Trauma-informed leadership**
Build awareness, compassion and realistic expectations.
- Manageable caseloads**
Monitor workload and ensure adequate resources.
- Regular supervision and consultation**
Provide structured support and space for reflection.
- Cultures that support wellbeing**
Normalize conversations about impact, encourage help-seeking and prioritize psychological safety.

Support sustainable people so meaningful work can continue.

7 Important to remember

Being affected does not mean you are weak. It means you are human and doing meaningful work.

Your responses is a sign of empathy, not failure.

You are not alone. Many helping professionals experience vicarious trauma.

With awareness, support and care, it is possible to stay grounded, keep your compassion, and continue making a difference.

Your wellbeing helps you keep showing up for others. That matters.