

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress.

Different names, different patterns, all deserving care.

*People Support
People Change
Communities* ♥

1

Burnout

When the demands keep coming.

You matter here ♥



What it is

A response to chronic, unmanaged workplace stress with emotional exhaustion, cynicism or detachment, and a reduced sense of effectiveness.



Common signs

- Ongoing exhaustion and low energy
- Feeling cynical or detached
- Reduced motivation and productivity
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Decreased sense of accomplishment



What tends to cause it

- High workload and time pressure
- Low control or unclear expectations
- Organisational stress and change
- Imbalance between effort and reward
- Insufficient rest and recovery time



What helps

- Reduce workload and set boundaries
- Increase control and flexibility
- Take regular breaks and time off
- Reconnect with values and purpose
- Strengthen workplace supports

2

Compassion Fatigue

When caring deeply takes a toll.

Caring takes courage ♥



What it is

Emotional and physical exhaustion that can occur from the ongoing demands of caring for others, particularly those who are suffering.



Common signs

- Feeling emotionally drained
- Reduced empathy or feeling numb
- Irritability or impatience
- Difficulty feeling joy or connection
- Physical fatigue and frequent illness



What tends to cause it

- Prolonged exposure to others' suffering or distress
- High emotional labour
- Feeling responsible for others' wellbeing
- Limited time to process and recover
- Lack of support or debriefing



What helps

- Build regular self-care and rest
- Set healthy emotional boundaries
- Access peer support and supervision
- Engage in activities that replenish you
- Remember you can't pour from an empty cup

3

Vicarious Trauma

When others' stories change how you see the world.

These stories matter ♥



What it is

A gradual and profound shift in how you view yourself, others, and the world as a result of repeated exposure to others' traumatic experiences.



Common signs

- Changes in beliefs about safety, trust, or what is "normal"
- Increased sense of cynicism or hopelessness
- Difficulty with trust or relationships
- A deeper, lasting impact on worldview
- Feeling more cautious or vulnerable



What tends to cause it

- Long-term, repeated exposure to others' trauma stories
- Deep listening and witnessing
- Working in helping, care, or crisis roles
- Lack of time to reflect and process
- Cumulative impact over time



What helps

- Create space for reflection and meaning making
- Engage in supervision and consultation
- Connect with supportive colleagues
- Rebuild a sense of safety and hope
- Spend time in restorative activities and with people who ground you

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Secondary Traumatic Stress

When it feels like it's happening to you too.

It's okay to feel this ♥



What it is

Trauma-like symptoms that can develop from close or repeated exposure to others' traumatic experiences. The reactions can feel similar to experiencing the trauma yourself.



Common signs

- Intrusive thoughts or mental images
- Nightmares or disturbed sleep
- Feeling on edge, anxious or easily startled
- Avoidance of trauma-related reminders
- Physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, upset stomach)
- Feeling emotionally overwhelmed



What tends to cause it

- Close or repeated exposure to graphic or highly distressing material
- Hearing detailed accounts of trauma
- Working in high-intensity or crisis roles
- Limited support or processing time
- Sudden or intense exposure



What helps

- Reduce exposure where possible
- Access professional support
- Use grounding and nervous system regulation strategies
- Connect with trusted colleagues
- Allow time to rest, recover and process
- Seek trauma-informed care when needed

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Quick clues

Simple ways to tell them apart (in plain language).



Burnout

Often grows slowly from chronic work stress. It's about the work demands.



Compassion Fatigue

Emotional weariness from caring. It's about the cost of caring for others.



Vicarious Trauma

Changes how you see the world. It's a deeper shift in beliefs, safety and trust.



Secondary Traumatic Stress

Can feel sudden and trauma-like. It may include intrusive thoughts, nightmares and heightened anxiety.



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Important to remember



These experiences can overlap. You can experience more than one at the same time.



They are real, valid responses — not signs of weakness.



Context matters. Your role, environment, and supports all play a part.



Early recognition and support can prevent further impact and support long-term wellbeing.



A healthier you helps create a healthier workplace, stronger teams, and more compassionate communities.

Different paths. The same importance. Care matters. ♥

Kind Brave Capable You Got This ♥

