

## **Burnout and Vicarious Trauma**

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Both can lead to serious health consequences and interpersonal problems

### **Burnout:**

General psychological stress with physical and psychological effects

Can develop when working in any profession

Develops overtime and leads to dissatisfaction with work

Often a result of our desire to achieve certain standards and our feelings of not living up to those standards

Cynicism and negativity

Cumulative and progressive in nature:

Early symptoms – feelings of being driven, under pressure and never seem to be able to slow down. Always on the run

Later symptoms - Withdrawal, exhaustion, irritability and overreacting to situations, sadness, anxiety, decrease in self esteem, memory, sleep and concentration – similar to depression

Physical - muscle pain and tension – decreased immune system, increased susceptibility to physical illness

### **Vicarious Trauma:**

Short and long term consequences without intervention

Occurs when working with trauma victims/survivors

Feelings of being overwhelmed are due to specific victim experiences

Process of change - cumulative with ongoing stories - hearing of other peoples traumatic experiences

Traumatic events are incorporated into our own sense of the self and the world

Disruption affects all areas of functioning – physical, behavioral, emotional, cognitive and spiritual

Changes meaning of life - effects our basic beliefs about safety, trust, justice and security

Feelings of powerlessness

Decrease of trust in mankind

Nightmares of clients' experiences, intrusive thoughts and memories

Sense of alienation and isolation can develop – does anyone really understand?

Stages of Vicarious Trauma:

1. Numbness and shock
2. Confusion – nothing makes sense
3. Renewed hope and resilience

Factors that influence vulnerability to Vicarious Trauma:

1. Individual
2. Life situations
3. Organizational factors – work place

**Prevention:**

Remain aware of symptoms of stress – some stress helps us thrive, too much stress is counterproductive

Establish and maintain management of stress goals – determine what works best for you

Exercise, meditation, social support, debrief – be there for each other, talk about your experiences, be honest and open with healthy supportive people. Normalize your feelings, seek out good role models and be a good role model, use humor, take planned vacations and unplanned vacations if necessary!

Set boundaries and limits with self and others

Listen to your own advice

Attempt to balance workload – risk of Vicarious Trauma increases as trauma workload cases increase

Don't take work home

Forward focus – two sides to the job – Negative/depressing and positive/fulfilling

Look back and pat yourself and your clients on the back

Take time to reflect on the process - growth, dedication, commitment and strength of survivors as well as your contribution

Consider forming a VOICES Chapter in your community and enjoy the next steps of change

**Questions to think over:**

1. What are some ways you have changed over time because of your work? Both positive and negative
2. What are some of the ways that working with those you care about has affected you?
3. How has your work influenced your sense of self and the world?
4. In what ways do you feel your dedication and commitment to the well-being of trauma victims has helped you and in what ways do you feel it has hurt you both personally and professionally?
5. How has your work influenced what matters most to you?