

# VICARIOUS TRAUMA

All stakeholders create a culture of learning so that students come first.

Compassion Fatigue includes provider burnout and vicarious trauma.

**Burnout:** is defined as the state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in demanding situations. Associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work related responsibilities.

**Vicarious trauma (VT):** is defined as work-related, secondary exposure to extreme or traumatic events. VT can be the result of exposure of helpers to the traumatic experiences of others (i.e. students, co-workers). The helper experiences a transformation of their own being as a result of responding to and empathy of other's difficult experiences.

It is important that you are aware of the signs and symptoms of VT and compassion fatigue (CF) so you can recognize them in yourself and others. VT and CF manifest themselves differently in each of us. The following includes some signs and symptoms of VT and CF and is not an exhaustive list; exhaustion, insomnia, headaches, increased susceptibility to illness, increased alcohol consumption, absenteeism, anger/irritable, feeling helpless/hopeless, intrusive imagery, numbing, social withdrawal, disconnected from loved ones.

**Resilience:** defined as the positive capacity to cope, adjust to, or recover from stress and negative life events, personal traits, skills and responses that enable thriving in the face of adversity. Consider talents, energies, strengths and constructive interests; external influences such as family, community expectations and access to hobbies, sports, activities in the community that can support your resiliency.

*Excerpts taken from www.ahwg.net Trauma & Resilience, An Adolescent Provider Toolkit. Adolescent Health Working Group.*

**Saakvitne and Pearlman quoted in *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook* refer to the basics of self-care as:**

- Sleep, rest, proper diet, exercise, vacations
- Renewal, engaging in activities that replenish you
- Nourishing activities everyday
- Access to regular debriefing process
- How often do you access an Elder in your community?

**“Ask yourself the following questions, and how high would you score each category? Do you get enough sleep on a regular basis or do you keep yourself going with caffeine? Do you eat healthy most of the time? Do you exercise for 30 minutes at least three times a week? Do you take regular vacations? Do you have access to debriefing whenever you need it”**

Mathieu, M. T(2012) *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*. Routledge. New York, NY.

## Strategy to Avoid Retraumatization

Retelling stories and sharing details of other's traumatic events can contribute to VT. It is important to consider how much detail is **needed/required** (if any at all) versus how much detail is **too much**. This includes both when providing and when receiving information.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU SHARE GRAPHIC DETAILS:

Is this conversation a:

- Debriefing?
- Case Consultation?
- Consultation with OPP?
- Consultation with assigned social worker/mental health professional?
- Staffroom chat?
- Parking lot catch-up?
- Child's Hockey Practice?
- Christmas Party?
- Partner Talk?

The nature of the conversation and details will clearly change.

Is the listener:

- Aware that you are about to share graphic details?
- Able to control the flow of what you are about to share with them?
- Does the listener need to be aware of the information / details. If so, for what purpose?
- Demonstrating signs and symptoms of VT/CF? If so, don't share.

As the listener:

- Know when to say, "I don't need to hear the details".
- Protect yourself!

## Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL)

Use the attached document or click on the hyperlink [Professional Quality of Life Scale](#) to complete the scale. This scale is a series of thirty questions related to positive and negative experiences related to being a “helper”. Once complete place your scores on the scoring sheet divided into three sections *Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress*.

Should you fall into the Burnout and/or Secondary Traumatic Stress range please reach out to a supervisor, colleague, or mental health professional as soon as possible.

It is normal to feel some level of burn out from time to time, however it is important to consider the frequency, intensity and duration in which it occurs. It isn't normal to remain in a period of burnout for an extended period of time. Acknowledging warning signs of entering into burnout, and identifying what signs and symptoms you might exhibit during burnout is extremely important. With acknowledgement and identification of signs and symptoms you will be better able to create a self care plan for yourself, know when to say no and know when to reach out for support.

## COMPASSION SATISFACTION

Compassion satisfaction includes pleasure from being able to do one's own work well, helping others through work, positive feelings about colleagues and contributing to the work setting/work environment for the greater good.

What can you and/or your school team do for greater COMPASSION SATISFACTION?

Grounding strategies can help reduce anxiety, anger and other difficult emotions. Try this simple technique below to feel more grounded, to reduce symptoms of VT/CF and to be better able to respond to whatever life throws at you....

### Grounding Exercise

**Name 3 things you...**



**see**



**smell**



**hear**



**feel**

**Breathe in & out slowly 3x**

[www.Social.Work.Career](http://www.Social.Work.Career)

## Posttraumatic Growth

Not all who experience trauma become traumatized and not all bad things come from trauma.

30-90% of people affected by a serious event describe some type of posttraumatic growth.

Posttraumatic growth includes changes in perception of self, the improvement and deepening of relationships with others, an increased ability for expressing emotions and an ability to find meaning in the trauma experience.

*Taken from [www.ahwg.net](http://www.ahwg.net) Trauma & Resilience, An Adolescent Provider Toolkit. Adolescent Health Working Group.*

Support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

[Crisis Response Services](#)

1-866-888-8988

[Kids Help Line](#)

1-800-668-6868

[Talk4Healing](#)

1-855-554-HEAL

[First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line](#)

1-855-242-3310

[Center for Suicide Prevention](#)

Web Based Resources