![North East London Health & Care Partnership]

Seven minute briefing on: Vicarious Trauma Special thanks to Dudley safeguarding people partnership for allowing adaption of their safer seven information, May 2025.

1. Introduction

Vicarious trauma is defined as "work-related trauma exposure can occur from such experiences as listening to individual clients recount their victimization; looking at videos of exploited children; reviewing case files; hearing about or responding to the aftermath of violence and other traumatic events day after day; and responding to mass violence incidents that have resulted in numerous injuries and deaths".

What is Vicarious Trauma? | The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit | OVC

2. Processing trauma in a work context

Working in pressured systems, constant crisis or reactive situations means it is more likely that focus becomes very narrow, shutting down professional curiosity.

When we recognise how the biology of trauma prompts automatic responses, we are more able to take steps to prevent it or minimise the impact – for example noticing when we are going into a heightened state, being able to take time out or to think through why that response is occurring may help us to calm back down more quickly, moving us back into our window of tolerance.

3. Common signs of vicarious trauma – work related

- Difficulty leaving work at the end of the day, noticing you can never leave on time.
- Taking on too great a sense of responsibility or feeling you need to overstep the boundaries of your role.
- Intrusive thoughts of a client's situation or distress.
- Problems managing personal boundaries.
- Increased need to control events, outcomes and others

4. Common signs of vicarious trauma – personal

- Frustration, fear, anxiety, irritability
- Disturbed sleep, nightmares, racing thoughts
- Loss of connection with self and others, loss of a sense of own identity
- Increased time alone, a sense of needing to withdraw from others
- Loss of pleasure in daily activities.

5. Suggestions for co-workers

- Talking to colleagues individually about the impact of the work
- Encouraging adoption of good clear work boundaries
- Encouraging them to attend to the basics; sleep, healthy eating, hygiene, and exercise
- Supporting connections with family, friends, and co-workers
- Referring them to organisational supports such as a peer support team/ employee assistance programme
- Encouraging them to discuss their experience with their supervisor.

6. Suggestions for Supervisors/Managers

- Discussing vicarious trauma as part of supervision.
- Allowing flexible work schedules, recognising the need for and protecting down time, while staying attuned to the possibility of withdrawal or isolation.
- Creating time and a physical space at work for reflection through reading, writing, prayer, and meditation, among other activities.
- Referring to therapeutic and professional assistance, when appropriate.

7. Suggestions for Organisations

- Ensuring Vicarious Trauma is included in relevant policies
- Consider training for staff all on vicarious trauma and available support
- Hot and cold debriefing offers as appropriate
- Ensuring ad hoc and regular safeguarding supervision is available to staff
- Offer of Employee Assistance Programme