

The Cost of Caring

“Studies confirm that **caregivers** play host to a **high level** of **compassion fatigue**.”

Vicarious trauma, similar to compassion fatigue is ...

“emotional residue of exposure that counselors have from working with people as they are hearing their trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured.”



Compassion fatigue consists of the manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in the therapist who experiences the traumatic event second hand (listening or witnessing). Unlike vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue can occur from a single client.

Symptoms

- Overwhelmed
- Anxious
- Unable to experience pleasure
- Emotional numbness
- Despair
- Resentment
- Emotional exhaustion
- Personal reminders of their own trauma
- Unworthy of love or feel currently unloved
- Self-loathing
- Question their right to be alive and happy
- Cynical about people and the world
- Feel unsafe
- Withdraw socially from those they love
- Intense rage, crying, intolerance
- Nightmares
- Avoid looking at traumatic event itself

The Road to Recovery

- ✓ Exercise, massage, yoga, meditation
- ✓ Eating healthy foods
- ✓ Drinking plenty of water
- ✓ Practicing the art of self-management. *Just say no*
- ✓ Developing a healthy support system: people who contribute to your self esteem, listen well and care for you
- ✓ Organizing your life so you become proactive, not reactive
- ✓ Living a balanced life: Practice what you preach



BOTTOM LINE:

“While there is no way of knowing just how prevalent vicarious trauma is, **all mental health practitioners are at risk**.”

Books as Additional Resources

- Help for the helper: the psychophysiology of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma by Babette Rothschild, Marjorie L. Rand
- Secondary traumatic stress: self-care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators by B. Hudnall Stamm

Resources: <http://www.counseling.org/>, <http://www.lianalowenstein.com/>, <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>