**Signs of Vicarious Trauma**

(from joyfulheartfoundation.org)

**Exhaustion and physical ailments**

* Constant tiredness, even after resting
* Physical body tension
* Headaches, back pain, and wrist pain
* Difficulty falling asleep or excessive sleeping
* Falling sick when you have time to rest, such as on a vacation

**Emotional shifts**

* Hypersensitive to emotionally-charged material
* Feeling disconnected from your emotions and/or your body
* Guilt for having more resources or opportunities than those you serve
* Feeling like no matter how much you give, it will never be enough
* Feeling helpless or hopeless about the future
* Increased levels of anger, irritability, resentment, or cynicism

**Thought patterns**

* Difficulty in seeing multiple perspectives or new solutions
* Jumping to conclusions, rigid thinking, or difficulty being thoughtful and deliberate
* Minimizing the suffering of others in comparison to the most severe incidents or situations
* Intrusive thoughts and imagery related to the traumatic material you have seen or heard

**Behavioral shifts**

* Absenteeism and attrition
* Avoidance of work, relationships, and/or responsibilities
* Dread of activities that used to be positive or neutral
* Using behaviors to escape, such as eating, taking alcohol/drugs, watching TV, or shopping

**Relationship changes**

* No separation of personal and professional time
* Viewing other people who don’t work within your field as less important
* Difficulty relating to others’ day-to-day experiences without comparing them to those you serve or yourself
* Lacking a personal life outside of work
* Hypervigilant and concerned about the safety of those you care about
* Isolate yourself completely from others or only interacting with people who are in your same field or can relate to your experiences

**Self-care for before, during and after vicarious trauma**

1. **Set boundaries** with supervisors, colleagues, clients and even housemates. Ex: if you are supposed to be at your placement for 40 hours a week do not serve for more than that unless you get to “flex” the extra time. This will help prevent burnout and increase your productivity.
2. **Exercise.** Whether it’s running, a yoga class at the local YMCA, or pushups in the living room, exercise helps to regulate moods, reduce anxiety, manage depression and give you endorphins! These are only a few of the benefits. Even if it’s only for 20 minutes a day, move vigorously.
3. **Seek out supervision and peer support.** You are not expected to be an expert at your placement and you may not have the training that more experienced co-workers at your site will have. Take this year as a learning opportunity. Ask a lot of questions, seek out advice when you don’t know how to proceed, and find supportive colleagues who can mentor and encourage you.
4. **Take time off.** Use all of your vacation time. Go to retreats even if you are tired. Call in sick if you are sick. Your placement and clients existed before you arrived and will keep on surviving after you leave. You will still have to care for your mental health if you neglect yourself, though, so take time for yourself now.
5. **Create space between your placement and home.** It can be helpful to have a ritual that allows your mind, body and spirit to transition from the rush of service into the rush of community. This can look like doing a mindfulness meditation on your bus ride home, changing clothes or literally shaking off the energy you collected throughout the day.
6. **Ask for help.** Don’t try to be a superhero. Embrace the limitations of your humanity. Delegate tasks both at your placement and in community. Be honest about when you are struggling. If asking for help is difficult for you, have a conversation with your community members early in the year about what it looks like when you are not well and how they can support you at those times. That way, when you do need help your community members can step in to take care of you.
7. **Say no often** so that you can say yes to what matters the most. It can be hard to say no to something, especially if it involves your service, clients or community obligations. However, keep in mind that whenever you say yes to something you are also saying no to other things. So taking on that extra project at your placement might be helpful to someone but it also means that you are giving up time for rest, play and rejuvenation. Before you say yes, ask yourself if the nos you are also committing to are things you can live without.
8. **Get training**. Knowledge is power and will fine-tune both your understanding of the service being asked of you and your personal needs. Learn as much as you can about the work of your placement, how to do it well and about what vicarious trauma there looks like. Ask if there are professional development opportunities you can participate in to build skills. Keep developing wellness routines that you can turn to when times get tough.

**Compassion Fatigue Resources**

Books:

* Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide for Caring for Others while Caring for Yourself by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burke
* The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van der Kolk
* What about You?: a Workbook for Those who work with Others by [Katherine Volk](http://homelesshub.ca/contributions/9400), [Megan Grandin](http://homelesshub.ca/contributions/9401), & Rose Clervil
* Help for the Helper: The Psychophysiology of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma by Babette Rothschild
* To Weep for a Stranger: Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving by Patricia Smith

Online Resources

<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/index.html>

* A great page to start on the site is: <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/pages/Top12SelfCareTips.pdf>

<http://www.headington-institute.org/>

* A great page to start with on the site is: <http://www.headington-institute.org/files/vicarious-trauma-handout_85433.pdf>

<http://www.proqol.org/Links.html>

* A great page to start with on the site is: <http://www.proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL_5_English.pdf> (Professional quality of life survey)

<http://www.firstaidarts.org/>

* A great page to start with on the site is: <http://www.firstaidarts.org/trainings-and-workshops/> (intro workshops are free! And they could potentially do a training at your placement)

Barnett, J. and Norcross, J. (2008). Self-Care as Ethical Imperative. National Register of Health Services Psychologists. Accessed online at <http://www.nationalregister.org/trr_spring08_norcross.html>

Child Traumatic Stress Network; Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit. (2008). Accessed online at: <http://www.nctsn.org/products/child-welfare-traumatraining-toolkit-2008#q3>