

Fact Sheet: Self care & vicarious trauma

Supporting a person through a disclosure of sexual abuse can be traumatising for you. Your well-being is a priority, for your sake and that of the people around you.



What is vicarious trauma?



The negative transformation in the helper that results (across time) from empathic engagement with trauma survivors and their traumatic material, combined with a commitment or responsibility to help them.

How does it affect me?



Chronic stress activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which activates several different hormone secreting systems that have profound effects across the whole body, resulting in:

- fatigue and depression
- poor memory and learning
- reduced ability to focus
- reduced immune responses, coronary artery disease, and gastro-intestinal disease

What is self care?



Practices that reduce the effects of stress on your body and your mind, and maintain your ability to cope with what life puts in front of you.

Self-care activities help you maintain resilience and avoid short-term relief at the cost of long term well-being, for example, through over-use of alcohol and drugs.

Self Care: What should I do?



Self care encompasses the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, cultural, interpersonal, social and professional dimensions of your life.

Know yourself



Identify what drains you of resilience, eg:

- lack of sleep
- aching back
- noise
- over-commitment
- lack of time to yourself
- effects of alcohol

Be kind to yourself



Identify what brings you peace of mind and builds resilience, eg:

- music
- talking with friends
- exercise and sport
- reading a good book
- meaningful work

Plan and practice!



Some things can both create stress and build resilience, so use your resources wisely:

- your own goals and expectations of yourself
- your beliefs and values
- relationships and allies
- the physical environment at work or home
- mobile phones and computers
- diet and exercise

You can find tools at:

https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19_Self-Care-Planning_Black-Dog-Institute.pdf?sfvrsn=8
<https://www.blueknot.org.au/>

