



# Minimising the Effects of Vicarious Trauma Workforce Briefing



Trauma Informed  
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# What is Vicarious Trauma?

Vicarious Trauma (VT) stems from the emotional and psychological impact experienced by those who support and empathise with individuals who have experienced trauma.

We are not referring to the most difficult story you have ever heard; we are talking of the thousands of stories you don't even remember hearing.

## What to look out for in yourself and others

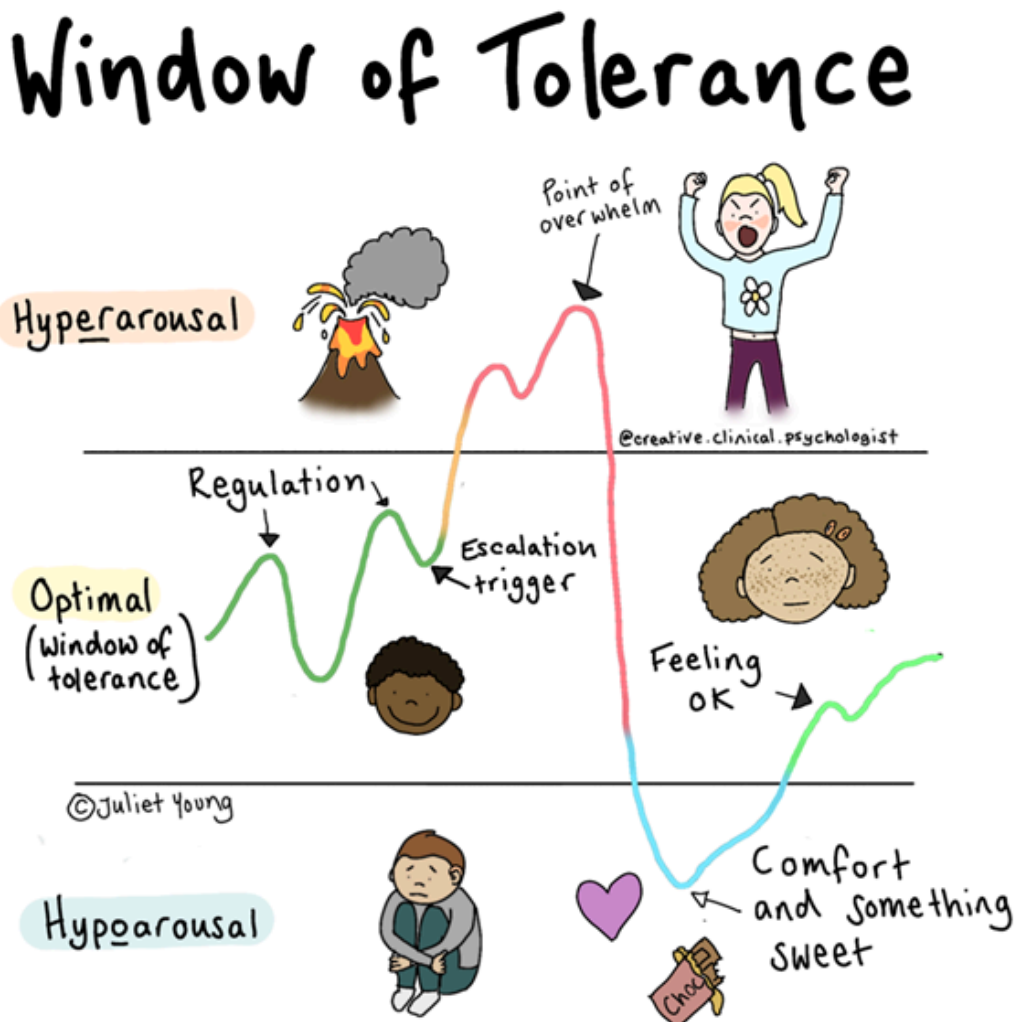
- Often switching jobs
- Absenteeism/Reduced Punctuality
- Easily annoyed
- Not keeping up with work demands as normal
- Fatigue
- Feelings of failure/negative self-talk
- Personal relationship difficulties
- A change in our social preferences e.g. choosing to spend more time in isolation
- Feeling unsatisfied in life generally as well as at work
- Being more rigid/inflexible
- Not feeling able to take responsibility or feeling removed from our actions
- Getting into conflicts/arguments more frequently/being short tempered
- An uneven work-life balance
- Avoiding clients with traumatic experiences
- Detaching ourselves from others in work
- Headaches and Migraine
- Skin complaints
- Digestive/gastrointestinal problems e.g. ulcers
- Palpitations
- Sweating
- Chest pain

## Personal and Professional Trauma

As professionals who work with children every day, we are very fortunate to be able to make an impact, especially when we are trusted during their most vulnerable and challenging times. However, we are humans too! We come with the richness of our personal experiences; this often fuels our compassionate selves and enables us to truly connect with others.

### Some helpful tips

**Reflection:** Reflect on what sparks joy, calms you or soothes you depending on what you need that day. We aren't saying that it is as simple as running a hot bath. However, the simple things that we can do each day do add up and can extend our window of tolerance (this concept derives from Dr Dan Siegel's work).



**Boundaries:** Clearly defining and creating boundaries around the various aspects of our lives. One way of looking at this is by time blocking tasks associated with your work and your life outside of work. This can support you in reducing what you psychologically 'take home.' Between these blocks of time, try to build in 'buffer time' to help you transition between work and personal or indeed between your different roles. This might something as simple as driving the long way home or talking a short walk at lunchtime.

**Sharing with others:** Although being honest about your own experiences may be difficult and exposing, being as open and honest as you can with your supervisor or support system can be really beneficial if it feels safe for you. This can really help to personalise the support offering in your workplace to meet your needs better and/or to create a greater sense of mutual understanding, connections and belonging.

**Remembering our Physical Health:** Don't forget that our physical health does directly impact on our psychological wellbeing. Neglecting our sleep, hygiene and nutrition needs will negatively impact on our ability to try to stay in the present and be our authentic self. More guidance available from the Sleep Foundation.



# Self-Assessment Tool

This tool has been created to support you in identifying your exposure by considering how we rank against some of the main indicators of VT. It is not a diagnostic tool but a self-awareness tool which might conversations you have for informal or formal support.

Indicate using the scale below where you would place yourself.

1. What I hear in work is always on my mind. I can't switch off.

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

2. Work exhausts me

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. I feel irritable and snappy when in the company of others

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

4. I feel overwhelmed by my work which influences my self-talk

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

5. My sleep is impacted by my work (e.g. getting less sleep, waking up, not being able to switch off...)

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

6. I am aware I have less contact with my family and friends

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

7. I know that I am soothing myself in ways I don't consider to be healthy

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



8. My physical health is impacted

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

9. I no longer experience enjoyment from my work in ways that I used to

Never (0)	Rarely (1)	It Depends (2)	Frequently (3)	Almost Constantly (4)	Score Awarded
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Score	
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### Interpreting Your Score

**0-10:** Showing few signs of Vicarious Trauma. Keep going with your self-care and remembering that you matter too.

**11-20:** Showing some signs of Vicarious Trauma. Draw on some of the strategies you have thought of from reading this guide.

**21-30:** Time to seek some support. This might help you to mitigate against further impacts on yourself. It could be from those in your personal support network.

**31-40:** Vicarious Trauma is significantly impacting on you. Many people in this category will need to seek professional support. Remember that there are lots of mediums for how this can be accessed e.g. face-to-face, online, telephone/text support and more.

# What Next?

Now you have your score, use this to understand that prioritising your own needs is not self-centred but is integral to your daily functioning. Taking a proactive approach enables you to be as compassionate with yourself as you are to others. If you have any concerns or are looking for some support speak to a trusted colleague, line manager or supervisor. Refer to your organisation's policies and consider raising any concerns during your Personal Development Review (PDR). Your organisation/service may have access to paid for counselling/supervision you can access.

## Some quick win strategies for you

Take what you like from the list when you need a mindful moment...

### 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding...

- 5 things I can see
- 4 things I can hear
- 3 things I can smell
- 2 things I can touch
- 1 thing I can taste...

### Body scan

- Close your eyes/look at the floor.
- Work from your head to your toes. What sensations do you feel?
- Take note of these sensations whilst focusing on your breathing.

### Adding to your own support network

- Samaritans call 116 123 [jo@samaritans.org.uk](mailto:jo@samaritans.org.uk)
- SHOUT: text 85258
- NHS Every Mind Matters <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>
- Hub of Hope <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>
- Your GP has access to a range of services too...



Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire have produced these resources with support from the Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA) and Trauma Informed Consultancy Services (TICS). Thank you to all partners who have supported the development of Trauma Informed Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.



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