

Understanding Vicarious Trauma

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

(Perlman & Caringi, 2009)



- The clearest predictor is exposure to trauma
- Vicarious trauma results from the cumulative exposure to traumatic material
- Empathy is critical to working with individuals exposed to trauma but also increases the likelihood of experiencing vicarious trauma

Vicarious trauma is the cost of high emotion load work

Early Warning Signs

- Difficulty managing emotions
- Difficulty accepting or feeling okay about yourself
- Difficulty in decision making
- Difficulty managing boundaries e.g. taking on too much responsibility
- Problems in relationships possibly linked to distressing content
- Physiological problems e.g. illness, aches and pains, accidents
- Nightmares, intrusive thoughts
- Reminders trigger negative thoughts
- Avoidance behaviours
- Relying on substances to cope
- Feelings of disconnectedness to the world around you
- Feelings of hopelessness and lack of meaning in life

Impact of Vicarious Trauma

- Effects of vicarious trauma can parallel symptoms experienced by the primary victim of the traumatic event
- Some individuals may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder
 - Intrusive reactions
 - Avoidant reactions
 - Hyper-arousal reactions
 - Hypo-arousal reactions
- Vicarious trauma can result in a change in belief in oneself and the world

Controls and protective factors

Vicarious trauma risk and protective factors

Personal

- Own experiences of trauma
- Support network
- Personal coping mechanisms
- Work style
- Current life circumstances
- Personal resilience

Work

- Person/job fit
- Workplace support
- Manager early intervention and support
- Organisational culture
- Team culture and support
- Work satisfaction

Cultural Context

- Sense of control over outcome of issues
- Community perception over issues

Understanding the variables that determine risk levels

Cumulative hazards

Psychosocial hazards can interact or combine to create new, changed or higher risks.

Controls

Control measures are mechanisms put in place to achieve the best fit between working environment, the systems of work and the needs and capabilities of workers.

Protective factors

There are cultural factors within an organisation that can protect against and reduce the risk of hazards when they can't be eliminated

Vicarious Trauma

With cumulative hazards such as:

- High case load (particularly of a traumatic nature)
- Low supports (Peer, ...)

Vicarious Trauma

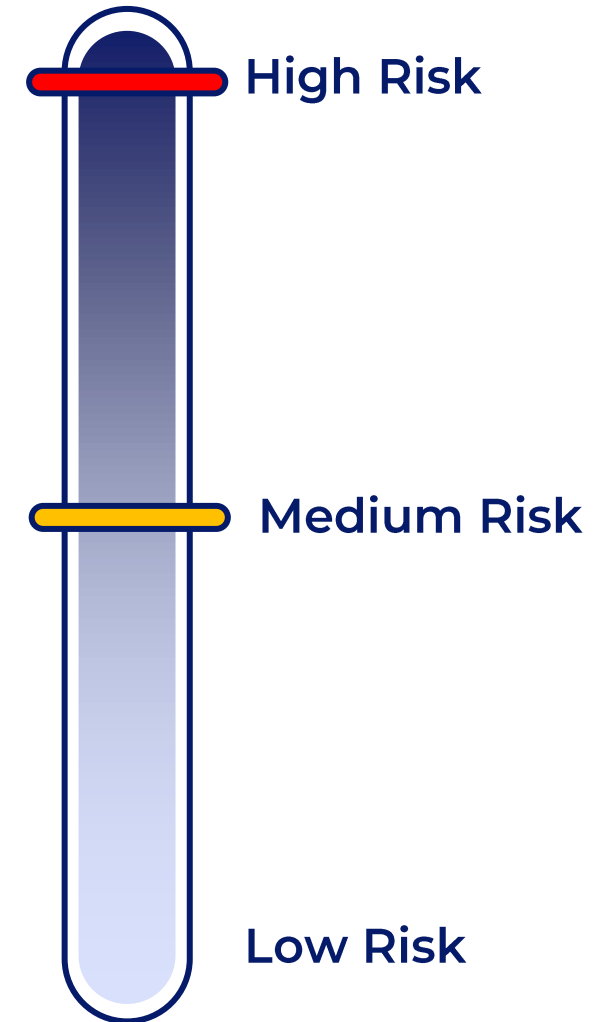
With controls in place:

- Monitoring and flagging system established
- Policy and process for work ...

Vicarious Trauma

With controls and protective factors in place:

- Supportive leadership
- Psychologically safe culture
- Peer support
- VT training completed

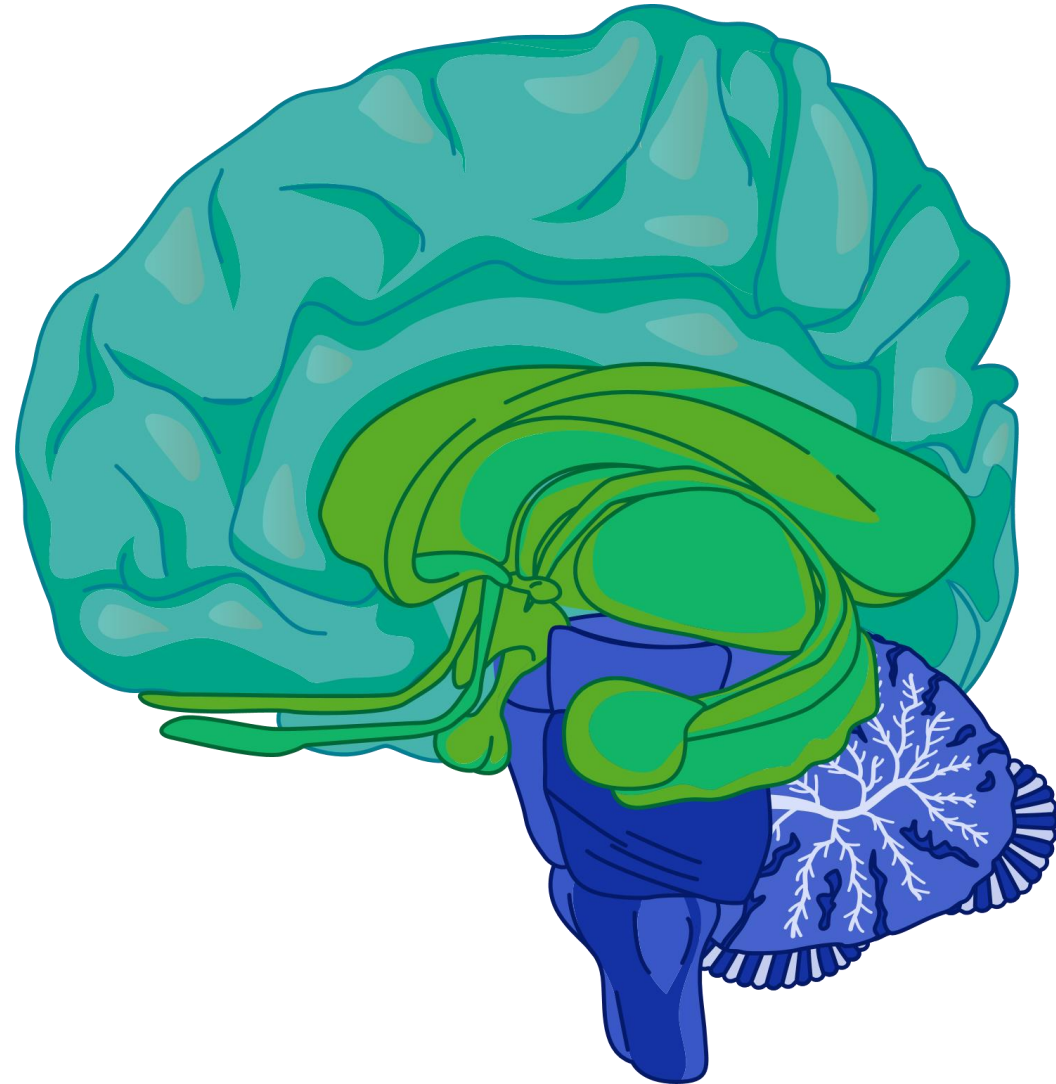


The Amygdala: De-escalating from the stress response

We need to manually switch off our stress response.

To do so activates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps us to relax and reset.

By doing so we are able to effectively re-engage the neocortex and are in a better position to engage in controlled empathy.



MIRROR NEURONS



Wellbeing strategies for minimising the impact of vicarious trauma



**STAYING
CONNECTED**

Team support

- Peer to peer support program
- Be mindful of significant changes in each other
- Check in with each other on a regular basis
- Show interest, attention and care
- Reassure others that what they are experiencing is understandable and expected
- Allow the person to discuss their experience and reactions
- Encourage the person to seek further assistance if required (Manager, HR, EAP)

Thank You

