

Symptom Domains of Indirect Trauma

INDIRECT TRAUMA is any combination of adverse transformations in the professional’s behavior, emotions and/or cognitive perceptions resulting from empathic engagement and sitting with the stories of those who have experienced trauma. Indirect trauma is an umbrella term that includes, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA is brought about through the accumulation of stress due to continuous empathic engagement that exposes the individual to another’s trauma, bringing about an adverse shift in one’s cognitive schema and belief system.

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS is nearly identical to PTSD, involving the symptom clusters of re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal in reaction to someone else’s traumatic event.

COMPASSION FATIGUE is also generated through the cumulative effects of being exposed to the impact of trauma on others, though it specifically involves the reduced capacity to empathize with others, and is a result of feeling overwhelmed and preoccupied by another’s traumatic or stressful experiences.

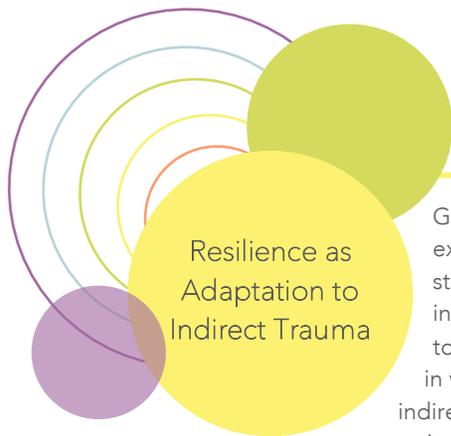
BURNOUT is unique in that the stress symptoms – exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced efficacy – result from any type of constraint in the working environment, and not necessarily out of the relationship between the professional and the client.

Overlap and Distinction between Four Indirect Trauma Symptom Domains				
Symptom	VT	STS	CF	BO
Exhaustion - physical, mental, and emotional			✓	✓
Somatic responses - physical illness and pain	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reduced sense of accomplishment				✓
Depersonalization / Cynicism (mental distancing from people/roles)	✓		✓	✓
Reduced capacity to connect with others or to be empathic	✓		✓	
Countertransference	✓		✓	
Intrusive thoughts related to traumatic exposure	✓	✓		
Avoidance of thoughts related to traumatic exposure	✓	✓		
Hyperarousal due to traumatic exposure	✓	✓		
Distressing emotions - fear, anxiety, depression	✓	✓		✓
Alterations in worldview, beliefs, and schema	✓			
Occurs from empathic engagement with one client or trauma story		✓		
Occurs as an accumulation of empathic engagement	✓		✓	
Occurs as an accumulation of all types of pressure in work environment				✓

VT = vicarious trauma | STS = secondary traumatic stress | CF = compassion fatigue | BO = burnout

This handout is an abbreviation of the following capstone. For additional references related to this work, please contact cynthia.rentrope@case.edu

Rentrope, C.R. (2019). *Building organizational resilience to indirect trauma through staff-driven participatory quality improvement*. (Unpublished master's capstone). Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.



Resilience as Adaptation to Indirect Trauma

Given the complex needs and demanding conditions of working with people who have experienced trauma and adversity, professionals often experience persistent, cumulative stress. If left unrecognized and unmanaged, practitioners are at increased risk for acquiring indirect traumatic stress symptoms such as severe exhaustion, isolation, reduced capacity to connect with others, increased sensitivity to sensory input, and negative transformations in worldview. It is important for those in helping positions to learn to recognize the signs of indirect trauma. To continue providing empathic, high-quality, trauma-informed care, support networks are crucial, as are the development of individual strategies to nurture one's own healing and resilience.

Resilience is not a matter of personal choice or accomplishment, but rather is supported through an environment and inherent biology that facilitates healing and positive development in the face of adversity. Transformations and fortitude that are formed by learning to adapt to stress helps reduce the adverse impacts of trauma such as neuroendocrine functioning and emotional regulation. The following are commonly referenced constructs of resilience.

RESILIENCE is a "self-righting force" that regulates trauma responses. It is the interaction between biology and environment that helps one adapt to threats.

POSITIVE COPING is the process of actively assessing the meaning, context and potential effect of stressful environments, information and interactions, and changing behaviors, thoughts, and emotions to prevent or reduce adverse reactions to those stressors.

VICARIOUS RESILIENCE is the positive shift in worldview that occurs through engaging empathically with others who have experienced trauma(s). Vicarious resilience often enriches the perspectives, relationships, and life trajectory of the person whose schema positively transforms from indirect exposure to trauma and healing.

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH is the change in an individual as they process and find meaning from a traumatic exposure. It involves five aspects of growth: improvements in interpersonal relationships, a greater appreciation for life, new opportunities or pathways in life, a greater sense of personal strength in ability to cope with crises, and spiritual changes or development.

COMPASSION SATISFACTION is the pleasure derived from being able to do one's work helping others well.

What Can I Do Now?

Self-care is a constant state of being. It involves regular self-reflection, developing healthy boundaries with ourselves, with others, and with our work, and building social connections that enhance our minds, our spirits, and our health.

Understand
Build Knowledge about Trauma-Informed Care, Indirect Trauma and Resilience

Assess
Evaluate Your Level of Indirect Trauma and Resilience, and Current Self-Care Strategies

Plan
Develop or Improve Upon Your Simple, Maintainable Self-Care Plan

Act
Attend to Your Well-Being: Physical, Psychological, Emotional, Spiritual, Relational and Environmental

Share!

Thank for connecting with us tonight at Healing Network Night! Your presence is invaluable, and together we hope to build resilience and expand the support network in the community of trauma-informed care. Please share what you've valued here tonight and invite others to join the next Healing Network Night.

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