

Vicarious Trauma

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In 4 Pages



A Self-Check & Grounding Guide

What is vicarious trauma?

Vicarious trauma is the emotional and psychological impact of **repeated exposure to other people's suffering**. It can affect anyone, especially those who are witnessing violence, supporting loved ones, engaging in advocacy, or closely following traumatic events through news and social media.

Feeling affected does **not** mean you are weak. It means you are human.

Self-Check Questions

Take a moment to check in with yourself. There is no right or wrong answers.

- Have I been feeling emotionally overwhelmed, numb, or constantly on edge?
- Do I find it hard to stop thinking about others' suffering?
- Am I feeling more irritable, sad, angry, or hopeless than usual?
- Has my sleep, focus, or energy changed?
- Do I feel guilty when I rest or step away from the news?
- Do I feel less safe, less trusting, or disconnected from meaning?

If several of these resonate, vicarious trauma may be affecting you. This is a sign to care for yourself, not a failure to cope.

Grounding Tools (Use Anytime)

1. Ground Through the Senses

Name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

This helps bring your nervous system back to the present moment.



2. Breath for Regulation

- Inhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 2 counts
- Exhale for 6 counts

Repeat for 1–3 minutes. Longer exhales help signal safety to the body.

3. Reconnect With Your Body

- Place your feet on the ground and notice the support beneath you
- Gently stretch your neck or shoulders
- Hold a solid object and notice its texture and weight

Physical grounding can reduce emotional overload.

4. Set Media Boundaries

Being informed does not require constant exposure.

- Choose specific times to check the news
- Avoid graphic content when possible
- Step away without guilt

Rest is not indifference; it is protection.

5. Return to What Nourishes You

Ask yourself:

“What helps me feel even a little more grounded right now?”

Small acts, music, movement, prayer, writing, nature, or connection, matter.

A Reminder for Volunteers & Advocates

You are not required to absorb everyone's pain.
You are allowed to rest.
Sustainable care protects both you and your community.

When to Seek Additional Support

If distress begins to interfere with daily life, relationships, or your sense of safety, reaching out to a mental health professional or trusted support resource may be helpful.

Final Note

Witnessing suffering changes people. Needing grounding, rest, and support is a human response to prolonged exposure to pain. Caring for yourself allows you to continue caring for others in meaningful, sustainable ways.

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