

If we encounter stories and descriptions of rape or child sexual abuse or other forms of traumatic incident in our work or volunteer roles, it is very important to create and implement a strategy to reduce the impact of secondary trauma. Below are some ways in which you could implement a **Vicarious Trauma Prevention Plan**.

Preparing to encounter trauma

Clearly define your role and responsibilities and its boundaries.

You are not responsible for the client's experiences or distress or for solving the client's problems or meeting all of his/her needs or concerns. You are responsible for fulfilling your limited role in a caring and professional manner.

Prepare for the day's work.

Arrive a little early, and give yourself some moments beforehand. Try not to rush to an appointment or discussion of traumatic incident, or focus on other demands. Take a few minutes to clear your head.

Take on the protection of your professional role, reminding yourself that this work is important to you and that you will do it with seriousness and concern, but that your own private life is separate from this



Encountering trauma in the moment

When encountering trauma, notice what happens for you, in your thoughts, images, emotions, and body – sensations, movement, impulses. If you feel sick, light-headed, or very emotional: ground yourself by noticing yourself sitting in the chair, the floor under your feet; take some deep breaths, and try to loosen your body – you could be sitting in a tense pose for a couple of hours if you are not aware.

Take regular breaks and try to do something quite different during them, even for a few moments.

Allow time for debriefing between one contact and the next.

After a session, take a few moments to register how you are feeling to let go of and shake out the session. Stretch and loosen your body, which may be holding some tension and trauma. Those working on the telephone need to stretch and release tension in the shoulders and neck consistently through their shift.



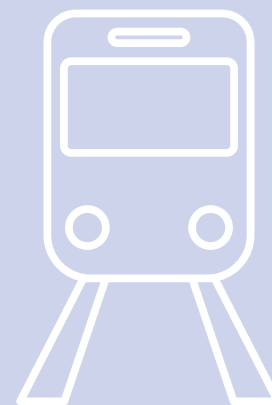
Leaving our workplaces or volunteer locations

At the end of the day, take a little time to finish your day's work, being conscious of putting away files or materials, or locking up as a way of leaving the day behind. As you reach the outer door, consciously offload.

The journey home can be used for unwinding and making a transition between work and personal time.

Be careful when travelling: take a moment at the start of the journey to become conscious of the road and the traffic. A person involved in intense work can be distracted on the journey to work or to home, and may speed, go through traffic lights etc.

When you reach home, it is useful to have a routine to mark the transition from your working life to your home life: showering, changing clothes, consciously leaving work behind, and taking on your personal life. The more conscious you are of offloading through your evening routine the more effective it will be



Preventing vicarious trauma outside of work

Limit your exposure to traumatic material outside of work, eg TV, newspapers, and social media. Consciously seek out the opposite of trauma: well-being, recovery, goodness, and joy.

Provide yourself with as many opportunities as possible to enjoy activities which are fun, and make a conscious decision to link in often with the 'decent people' in your own life. Help yourself to maintain balance by taking part in activities that give you joy and pleasure.

Be careful about rest and nutrition and monitor your alcohol and cigarette intake, which can increase beyond what you would wish when under pressure.

Exercise is a great release and will also allow an outlet for the energy which can build up when we are dealing with issues that cause us to feel anger or powerlessness. It allows us to feel the competence, energy and power in our bodies after a period of absorbing a sense of powerlessness. It allows the fight or flight impulse that we may have experienced during a session to process. It is very important to exercise when working with trauma.



Vicarious trauma and our relationships

It is important to maintain your social networks: stress and exhaustion can lead us to limit our social contact: positive contact will be especially necessary while you are doing this work. You will need to remind yourself about the positive aspects of the world by taking part in activities that give you joy and pleasure.

Stress can cause us to spark off with family members or friends. Monitor on an ongoing basis whether the work is impacting your relationships. If it is, this is a sign of a need for increased supervision and self-care. Bottling it up is a recipe for a later explosion. You need ongoing support and outlets.

Do not be surprised or self-critical if this work impacts your relationship with your children. For example, you may find yourself feeling very over-protective. Seek support if necessary so that the effect does not become adverse.

Don't be surprised if this work affects your feelings about sexuality or your own sexual life. Sometimes people experience flashbacks to images while engaged in sexual activity. Again, if this becomes a concern, seek support.

Be careful not to offload onto your partner, siblings, or friends: they didn't choose to do this work. Or perhaps they also work in this field, and both of you need to be careful not to add to the other's trauma by sharing too much.



*Doing this work may impact on you personally.
There may be times when you need space to consider and process this impact.
Be open to the idea of counselling as a resource for you in your work.*

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre is there for anyone affected by sexual violence, including those supporting others. You can call the National 24-hour Helpline 1800 77 8888 for confidential, non-judgemental information & support.

DRCC also offers specialised training on secondary trauma – contact our Education Department for more at etadmin@rcc.ie or 01-661 4911 or check out www.drcc.ie.

Remember: You can call the 24-hour National Freephone Helpline at 1800 77 8888 at any time to receive free, confidential support.