

# Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma - Signs and Symptoms

## Physical Signs and Symptoms

- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Somatization and hypochondria

## Behavioural Signs and Symptoms

- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Absenteeism
- Anger and Irritability
- Avoidance of clients
- Impaired ability to make decisions
- Problems in personal relationships
- Attrition
- Compromised care for clients
- The Silencing Response
- Depleted parenting

## Psychological signs and symptoms

- Emotional exhaustion
- Distancing
- Negative self image
- Depression
- Sadness, Loss of hope
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism
- Resentment
- Dread of working with certain clients
- Feeling professional helplessness
- Diminished sense of enjoyment/career
- Depersonalization/numbness
- Disruption of world view/ Heightened anxiety or irrational fears
- Inability to tolerate strong feelings
- Problems with Intimacy
- Intrusive imagery – preoccupation with trauma
- Hypersensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli
- Insensitivity to emotional material
- Difficulty separating personal and professional lives
- Failure to nurture and develop non work related aspects of life

Sources: Saakvitne (1995), Figley (1995), Gentry, Baranowsky & Dunning (1997), Yassen (1995).

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**My signs and symptoms**

Writing exercise:

1. What signs and symptoms stand out most for me?
2. What signs and symptoms do I bring home with me most often?
3. What signs and symptoms do I experience at work?
4. What do I have to lose if I don't deal with the effects of this occupational hazard?
5. What do I stand to gain if I move toward improved self-care?
6. Who will be the biggest supporters of my self-care?