

# Responding to vicarious trauma at <insert name of organisation>

<Organisation name> acknowledges that vicarious trauma can be experienced by people in archives and memory institutions and that resources and support are needed. Recognition of vicarious trauma is an action the archival profession can take to make archives safer for all, and is one component of enacting trauma-informed archival practice.

<p><b>What is vicarious trauma?</b></p> <p>Vicarious trauma, also known as secondary trauma, is trauma you experience as a result of reading or viewing traumatic or distressing material; or through witnessing the trauma reactions of others. It can have the same effect of the trauma experienced through a direct event that happens to you.</p> <p>It is an expected response to dealing with difficult materials and situations, particularly on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Everyone will experience vicarious trauma differently, and some won't experience it at all.</p>	<p><b>Who can experience it?</b></p> <p>Anyone – staff, clients and researchers, members of the public, visitors, volunteers, donors, students, and anyone else associated with archives.</p> <p>People who are constantly exposed to difficult materials and situations are at higher risk. Vicarious trauma is cumulative, so the more you are exposed, the more likely you are to experience symptoms.</p> <p>Specific record types are known to cause distress, but anyone can find anything traumatic.</p>
<p><b>What are the effects of vicarious trauma?</b></p> <p>Vicarious trauma can affect all areas of your life, from personal relationships, to life outlook, and ability to undertake work.</p> <p>Everyone is affected differently and may experience some or multiple symptoms which may include physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural or spiritual changes.</p> <p>Sometimes, others around you will notice that you are affected before you do.</p>	<p><b>What can be done to minimise vicarious trauma in archives?</b></p> <p>Raising awareness of these issues is an important first step, as is normalising discussions of vicarious trauma, mental health and self-care. Build time for this into regular meetings and staff induction.</p> <p>Undertake training in vicarious trauma, trauma-informed practice and mental health. Individuals will find different support helpful, so flexible responses are imperative, and it is important to establish a self-care plan in advance.</p>
<p><b>What can you do if you are affected in the moment?</b></p> <p>Some strategies that you might find effective are listed here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Techniques to bring you back into the moment, for example:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Using the 5 senses to ground yourself, e.g. listing 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, and so on</li> <li>○ Taking long and slow breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Leave the environment and go for a walk</li> <li>• Complete a mindfulness exercise</li> <li>• Take a break from the work</li> <li>• Ask peers if you can debrief with them</li> <li>• Inform your organisation</li> <li>• Enact other activities on your self-care plan</li> <li>• Reflect on what happened and reset by thinking about forward actions</li> </ul> <p>If you are reading this and have not been affected, you are encouraged to look up techniques that you think will be helpful for you.</p>	<p><b>Support and resources available at this &lt;organisation&gt;</b></p> <p>&lt;to be completed by each organisation&gt;</p>

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