

Experiencing and Coping with Trauma, Secondary Trauma, and Compassion Fatigue

Trauma: Experiencing or witnessing a deeply distressing or disturbing incident. Responses can vary based on personal history and experience.

Secondary Trauma: Indirect exposure to trauma – how we interact with others who are suffering, in pain, and experiencing crisis and how it impacts us.

Compassion Fatigue: Emotional and physical fatigue that results when we feel compassion, but do not take enough time away from caring for others to refuel and care for ourselves.



Experiencing trauma, secondary trauma, and repeated stress can make us vulnerable to a wide range of symptoms.

Emotional

- Anxiety
- Numbness
- Fear
- Irritability/anger
- Cynicism
- Guilt

Behavior

- Avoidance
- Hypervigilance
- Grandiosity
- Absenteeism
- Crying
- Increase in alcohol/substance use
- Altered eating habits
- Decline in job performance
- Difficulty separating work and personal life

Physiological

- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Ulcers
- Heartburn
- Chronic fatigue
- Easily startled
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Tremors or muscle twitches

Cognitive

- Diminished creativity
- Negative mindset
- Difficulty remembering
- Difficulty processing/thoughts of trauma
- Loss of objectivity
- Difficulty concentrating
- Inability to embrace complexity

Spiritual

- Loss of hope
- Feeling disconnected
- Feeling unworthy

Managing Trauma

Be aware of yourself and others. Is something triggering you or others? Are you noticing behavior patterns?

Ask yourself:

- What is challenging about my work?
- What do I take home?
- Why do I do this job?
- Am I okay?
- How is my overall health?
- What am I doing to reward myself?
- Given the cumulative impact, can I continue to be effective in my work?



What You Can Do to Cope

- Seek therapy or medical care.
 - Participate in recreational, community, or religious activities.
 - Identify and mitigate triggers.
 - Take care of yourself by finding methods that work for you, not someone else.
 - Do things that make you feel like you again.
- Stay connected to family, friends, and nature.
 - Recognize over-identifying or feeling overwhelmed.
 - Understand the differences between professional relationships and friendships.
 - Examine personal prejudices and cultural stereotypes.
- Recognize when your own trauma experience may be interfering with your effectiveness.
 - Be aware of personal vulnerabilities and emotional reactions.
 - Establish boundaries by practicing work-life balance.

What We Can Do at Green Hill School (GHS)

Help reduce the effects of trauma through supporting your teammates.

- Lead by example.
 - Reach out and check in with others.
 - Communicate openly and connect with team members by investing in them.
 - Start and guide conversations on trauma impact.
 - Be a positive force by showing enthusiasm and encouraging others.
- Be respectful of ideas, opinions, and experiences.
 - Be coachable and accountable.
 - Be reliable by ensuring your team can count on you.
 - Always push to expand your knowledge of the systems that you employ.
 - Acknowledge when something affects you differently and recognize when something may have affected a team member.
- Help each other by listening, offer to rotate assignments, take a short walk, and take time to debrief situations.
 - It can be challenging, but it is important to be open to accepting help from others.
 - Remember that our responses are normal reactions to abnormal events.

Resources

Crisis Members: A list of GHS crisis members is posted in locker rooms and on the shared drive under “Crisis Team.” These staff are always available to offer support if you’re experiencing trauma, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, or crisis.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): All Washington State employees and their adult family members may use EAP to help resolve personal and work-related issues. For more information visit www.des.wa.gov/services/hr-finance/washington-state-employee-assistance-program-eap.

Consultation Teams: These teams are valuable resources for working through issues. Consultation teams are supportive and confidential. Contact shanna.schultz@dcyf.wa.gov for information on meeting times and availability.

Additional Resources:

- Find local therapists: betterhelp.com
- Crisis Clinic: 1-800-273-8255

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 | 360-902-8060, ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov).