



## STAFF SELF-CARE

If you are a school administrator, teacher, or behavioral health professional, the stress of the job can be overwhelming. There is a growing body of academic research that talks about the high need for self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-care for service-oriented professionals. Therefore, it is incredibly important that youth-serving professionals are self-aware, so they understand 1) How their own social-location affects their pedagogical and professional practices and 2) How certain health symptoms may be signs of burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue.

District- and school-leaders must focus on creating positive adult climates where adult relationships are trusting and collaborative. As part of a comprehensive school behavioral health system, healthy staff relationships are vital to the success of providing effective social, emotional, and behavioral health supports to students.

**Self-care** is “the collection of strategies we use to prevent or alleviate the symptoms of vicarious trauma” (The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success, 2009, p. 38).<sup>1</sup>

**Compassion fatigue** is the fatigue, emotional distress, or apathy that results from constant care giving.

**Burnout** is the “physical and emotional exhaustion that may include the development of a negative self-concept, negative job attitudes, and loss of concern and feeling for students, their parents and colleagues. High levels of compassion fatigue over time may lead to burnout” (p. 38).

**Vicarious trauma** “is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed or responsible to help them. Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being” (Headington Institute).<sup>2</sup>

### Signs of Vicarious Trauma

According to the Headington Institute, common signs of vicarious trauma may include:

- Difficulty managing your emotions;
- Difficulty accepting or feeling okay about yourself;
- Difficulty making good decisions;
- Problems managing the boundaries between yourself and others (e.g., taking on too much responsibility, having difficulty leaving work at the end of the day, trying to step in and control other’s lives);
- Problems in relationships;
- Physical problems such as aches & pains, illnesses, accidents;
- Difficulty feeling connected to what’s going on around and within you; and
- Loss of meaning and hope.

1 State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Washington University. (2009). The heart of learning and teaching: compassion, resiliency, and academic success. Retrieved from <http://www.k12.wa.us/compassionateschools/heartoflearning.aspx>

2 Headington Institute. What is vicarious trauma? Retrieved from <http://headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2646>

Most likely, professionals will not exhibit all of the above areas. These signs may be different based on the individual. Learn more at [www.headington-institute.org](http://www.headington-institute.org).

## SELF-CARE TIPS

Staff self-care is especially important for educators working with students who frequently experience trauma. Visit [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/CTTE\\_SelfCare.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/CTTE_SelfCare.pdf) for an informational one-pager about self-care for educators who work with students experiencing trauma.

In *The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success*, there are tips for maintaining one's self-care. These tips include:

- Partake in physical fitness;
- Focus on nutrition and hydration;
- Get plenty of sleep and rest;
- Practice building assertiveness skills that promote boundary setting;
- Take time for centering and solitude;
- Engage in creative activities;
- Find time for fun and enjoyment;
- Provide support to others; it helps you feel happy and alive;
- Seek support;
- Set and monitored goals; and
- Do something other (of your own design).

To obtain a free, downloadable copy of *The Heart of Learning and Teaching*, visit <http://www.k12.wa.us/compassionateschools/heartoflearning.aspx>.

To maintain self-care, visit the following link for a goal setting worksheet: <http://www.icadvinc.org.php53-6.dfw1-1.websitetestlink.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Conf2012-SELF-CARE-PLAN.pdf>.