

Considerations for Psychologists Who Have Experienced Trauma

Psychologists who have experienced trauma themselves face unique challenges in preventing vicarious trauma when working with clients. To mitigate the risk of vicarious trauma, it is essential for these psychologists to prioritise self-care and seek appropriate support. This includes engaging in regular supervision or consultation with experienced peers or supervisors ¹.

Supervision provides a space for psychologists to reflect on their reactions and emotions triggered by clients' trauma narratives and receive guidance on managing their own emotional responses. Supervision is a vital component of maintaining emotional well-being and professional competence. The frequency of supervision sessions may vary depending on individual needs, caseload, and the intensity of client trauma exposure. Generally, supervision should be frequent enough so that the psychologist is provided with an opportunity to frequently reflect on their personal reactions to clients and catch vicarious trauma reactions before they become problematic and necessitate intensive psychological treatment.

Some general recommendations include:

- Supervision should be consistent and ongoing, ideally scheduled at regular intervals throughout the year. The frequency can range from weekly to monthly or as needed. The frequency of supervision may need to increase when caseload complexity is high, or the psychologist recognises the need for further support ².
- Psychologists with a high caseload of trauma-exposed clients may benefit from more frequent supervision. More frequent sessions will be required during periods of increased stress or for challenging cases.
- Psychologists should engage in self-reflection and self-assessment to determine when they might need extra support. If they notice heightened emotional reactions, signs of burnout, or difficulty maintaining professional boundaries, supervision frequency should increase.
- Clinical judgment and self-awareness are important. If uncertain or overwhelmed by a particular case, seek guidance from a supervisor. Standard B.1.3 of the Code of Ethics ³.
- Peer support groups, in addition to one-on-one supervision, can be beneficial. These groups provide psychologists with a forum to discuss challenges, share experiences, and gain insights from colleagues who understand the unique stressors of trauma work ².

- Psychologists should ensure that their supervisor is accessible and responsive when needed.
- Self-awareness and mindfulness practices are crucial ⁴. Psychologists should continually monitor their emotional and physical well-being and employ self-regulation techniques to manage distressing emotions that may arise during sessions ³.
- Seeking personal therapy can be extremely valuable, as it provides psychologists with a safe and confidential space to process their own trauma and develop coping strategies ⁵.

Psychologists who have experienced trauma should prioritise regular and ongoing supervision to prevent vicarious trauma. While each individual's requirements will be variable, the frequency will generally need to increase during times of higher need. A proactive approach, combined with self-awareness, peer support, and a willingness to seek help when needed, can help psychologists maintain their well-being, provide effective care to their clients and ensure that they are meeting their ethical obligations ^{1,3,4,5}.

References:

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