

The impact of caring

FOR CARERS

To effectively help kids heal from trauma, you also need to look after yourself. You can experience a range of impacts when supporting kids who have experienced trauma.

Two of the most common impacts are burnout and secondary traumatic stress.



	Burnout	Secondary Traumatic Stress
Feelings	Physical / mental exhaustion, overwhelm	Negative world view, lack of compassion
Timing	Builds slowly over time	Can happen quickly
Cause	Too many demands over an extended period	Caring for people who have experienced trauma and feeling their pain
Remedies	A holiday, extended rest, task change or other positive activities	Multiple supports are needed (holiday or rest alone rarely help)

There are numerous risk factors that increase the impacts of caring. Factors that contribute include:

- hearing about the traumatic experiences of your kids
- heightened stress levels
- providing empathetic care
- your personal history of trauma

While supporting kids in out-of-home care, you're likely to have been exposed to one or more of these risks.

Symptoms of secondary traumatic stress include:

- feeling numb
- emotionally withdrawing from others
- being vague or dismissive
- having trouble sleeping
- experiencing nightmares
- troubling thoughts or feelings that interrupt your thinking or actions
- frequent worry that interferes with your concentration
- losing concern for your kids
- having a sense of giving up
- feeling hopeless about your kids' situation
- losing faith in others or the goodness in the world
- feeling moody
- frequently lashing out at others
- feeling physically or mentally exhausted most of the time
- sleeping too much or too little
- falling ill often or frequently suffering headaches or stomach upsets
- using alcohol, food, caffeine or drugs to help you cope or feel better

If you notice these signs in yourself or others, it's important to gain help. You might:

- develop sources of support - talk with others; ask for more support; talk to your GP; reach out to a mental health professional or spiritual leader
- identify and engage in activities that bring you joy
- limit your exposure - listen to your kids, but try to avoid upsetting new stories or real-life drama
- take a break - accept support; engage your support network; take time off; schedule more time alone or with a partner or friend
- work through your own trauma history, if you have one

It's important to identify ways to reduce the impacts of caring. You can do this by developing and implementing a self-care plan. Taking time to look after yourself helps you more effectively support kids who have experienced trauma.