

Looking after your own wellbeing

This practice guide is part of our child sexual abuse response pathway, designed to ensure that professional responses to concerns about child sexual abuse meet the needs of children and their families. It aims to bring clarity to key decision points, helping you keep the child's needs and perspectives central in your response.

Working with children and families affected by child sexual abuse can be very rewarding. However, it can also place high demands on you, which may affect your physical and emotional wellbeing. It can also trigger responses if you have your own experiences of trauma.

It's important to find ways to manage the ongoing impact of your work, and to recognise when you need additional support or time out. This short guide covers:

- [basic things you can do to look after your wellbeing](#)
- [warning signs that you may be experiencing work-induced stress or trauma](#)
- [managing the impact of your work when you are finding it difficult](#)
- [links to other useful resources](#).

Basic ways to take care of your wellbeing

Activities that can help you take care of your wellbeing include:

- **taking frequent brief breaks** – for example, having a cup of tea and a chat with a colleague – to clear your head and think about something different
- **talking about your emotions**, and debriefing difficult situations and cases with your supervisor or a trusted colleague
- **maintaining a good diet** – eating healthy foods and keeping hydrated
- **taking exercise** – sometimes a short walk or 30-minute exercise session can be very helpful in maintaining a clear head and a positive outlook
- **staying connected to friends and family** – chatting on the phone or sharing a meal can provide distraction or allow you to talk about how you are feeling
- **trying to limit your working time** to no more than your contracted hours
- **doing some meditation**, yoga, or other mindfulness activity which helps you focus on your inner self
- **having fun** – doing something you enjoy
- **seeking counselling or therapy** if you need to process your experiences and their impact on you – you may be able to access therapy or counselling through [MIND](#), or locate a counsellor/therapist through [The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy](#)
- **seeking support through your employer** – they should be able to provide some support, perhaps through supervision or support from peers, and they may have an employee welfare scheme providing access to counselling.

Taking stock and recognising warning signs

Acknowledging that your work can affect your health and wellbeing is the most important first step in managing its potential impact. Use this checklist to help monitor your wellbeing and spot possible signs of work-induced stress or trauma.

Have your relationships with close friends, family, children or partners changed? Maybe you've become overprotective of children in your life, or you avoid physical contact with children. Or you feel you've lost your sense of humour or are more irritable with people around you. You may also be less interested in sex or be distracted during sex.

Has your behaviour at work changed? You may feel less productive than you were, or think you are making mistakes more often. You may also doubt your own competence, have difficulty making decisions, or find it difficult to concentrate for long periods.

Have your feelings about your work changed? You may find you're thinking about service users so much that it affects your life outside work. Or you may feel guilty that you can't do more to help a child or family, or have persistent feelings of anger, rage and sadness about their situation.

Have your relationships with service users changed? You may find you're avoiding service users or anxious about engaging with them. You may also be avoiding listening to service users talk about their traumatic experiences. You may be distancing yourself, cutting service users off or trying to stay busy.

Has your general mood changed? You may be feeling flat, sad, lacking in energy, overtired for no reason, or 'spacing out' from things around you. You may be experiencing mood swings, or feel that your moods are sometimes out of your control. Do you feel unsafe or overly anxious about your safety?

Has your physical health changed? You may be feeling run down, catching more colds or infections than usual, experiencing frequent headaches, or trying to relieve stress with food, alcohol, substance use or smoking.

Are you having trouble sleeping? You may be having frequent nightmares, interrupted sleep or intrusive thoughts, or see images that are upsetting.

Has your outlook on life changed? You may feel that you've lost hope, or that there is little 'goodness' in humanity. You may feel that you are powerless to do anything about your situation, or that there is no point. Or you may be feeling more cynical or suspicious of other people.

Your work may be more likely to affect your wellbeing negatively if you are:

- being exposed over a long period of time to the traumatic experiences of children/families
- finding that you identify strongly with a child or family with whom you're working
- carrying a heavy and complex caseload
- not receiving sufficient training or supervision
- experiencing other stress triggers in your life, such as illness or debt.

The signs of work-induced stress and trauma vary from person to person. Some people experience a wide range of signs; others find a particular area of their life is affected, such as their physical health or their relationships.

It's important to not ignore *any* signs of stress, and to speak to your manager or a health professional if the stress is affecting your work or personal life.

If you are personally affected as a victim/survivor of child sexual abuse/sexual violence, you can:

- find help, support and advice in your area through [The Survivors Trust's directory of services](#)
- call the [Rape Crisis](#) helpline (0808 802 9999), which can also tell you where your nearest services are located if you want face-to-face support or counselling
- call the [National Association for People Abused in Childhood](#) on 0808 801 0331.
- find online help for male survivors of sexual abuse and rape from [Survivors UK](#).

Managing the impact of your work

It may also be useful for you to recognise the deeper psychological and emotional impacts of working with children and families affected by child sexual abuse, and consider how you can stay healthy and effective in your role. Actions that may help include:

- **maintaining good communication** with your colleagues, and being ready to seek support and guidance from them

- **talking to your manager**, and asking them to help you cope with the impact of your work
- **admitting when you are struggling** or are having problems dealing with your work – it's important to recognise the difference between finding your work challenging and being unsafe to practice, and you need to take action if you feel you may not be able to work safely
- recognising that, although you may not be able to change the things that are causing you stress, you can change how you deal with them in terms of your own expectations and attitude – for example, by **keeping your expectations of your performance realistic** and **setting boundaries between your work and other aspects of your life**
- **reminding yourself of the reason you do your work** – working with children and families affected by sexual abuse is challenging, and it is easy to forget sometimes why you do it. Maybe you are motivated to, for example:
 - help people move on from emotional hurt and pain
 - keep children safe
 - stop people from abusing children
 - help families who need more support
 - help offenders move on and lead positive lives
 - understand more about human behaviour
 - help people understand how to have healthy sexual relationships
 - advocate for and help give a voice to those who are less heard.

Remember that it is your employer's responsibility to notice when employees feel under too much pressure, and to give you support if you need it. In the first instance, talk to your line manager about your work's impact on you.

Other resources to support your wellbeing

You can find more information for professionals working with abuse in the [Looking after yourself](#) section of the Upstream Project's website.

The [Education Support Partnership](#) runs a free, confidential 24-hour helpline, and provides resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of people working in education.

[NHS Practitioner Health](#) is a confidential, mental health assessment and treatment service, open to NHS and care professionals in England and Scotland.

The [Vicarious Trauma & Self-care Toolkit](#) produced by the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy provides information about preventing and managing vicarious trauma.

The Australian website [1800Respect](#) has helpful information on recognising and preventing work-induced trauma and stress.

Where next?

[Return to the response pathway.](#)