



CHILDHOOD TRAUMA REACTIONS:
TIP SHEET SERIES

TEACHER SELF-CARE

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THE UNIVERSITY
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“Be on the lookout for signs of teacher distress or compassion fatigue. The earlier you notice them, the earlier you can get help.”

LOOKING AFTER YOUR OWN HEALTH

In all likelihood, teachers of children impacted by natural disasters such as floods, bushfires and storms may also have been affected by the disaster, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, caring for others who have experienced the trauma may not only be a stressful experience, but may compound the teacher's own reactions.

The impact on the teacher or person caring for the young person can involve feeling physically and emotionally worn out, feeling overwhelmed by the young person's trauma and reactions and experiencing traumatic stress of their own. This is also often referred to as '**compassionate fatigue**' or '**secondary traumatic stress**'. Such reactions are not a sign of weakness. Rather, they are the cost of caring for and helping others.

There is some overlap between the reactions demonstrated by young people following trauma and those of teachers who are experiencing 'secondary traumatic stress' or 'compassionate fatigue'.

Signs that may indicate teacher distress/secondary traumatic stress include:

- Decreased concentration and attention
- Increased irritability or agitation with students
- Problems planning classroom activities, lessons and maintaining routines
- Feeling numb or detached
- Intense feelings, intrusive thoughts or dreams about a student's trauma (that don't reduce over time)
- Symptoms that don't improve after a couple of weeks

Teachers who look after themselves and manage their own stress levels are more equipped and able to manage student behaviours and difficulties.

Tips for teacher self-care:

- Find your support system. Just like students, teachers need to protect themselves from becoming isolated.
- Monitor your own reactions, emotions and needs.
- Seek help for your own trauma-related distress. If your signs persist for longer than two to three weeks, it might be a good idea to seek further assessment or assistance from a health professional.
- Use positive coping strategies to manage emotions and distress:
 - Try out calm breathing techniques, muscle relaxation, and imagery (relaxation)
 - Challenge unhelpful thoughts that cause you distress
 - Look for resources to help you feel more in control
- Maintain a structured classroom environment. This is a good thing for both children and teachers.
- Plan ahead where possible, and have back-up strategies for difficult situations so you don't have to do it on your own.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle (i.e. eat regular healthy meals, exercise, good sleep routine, participate in enjoyable activities).
- Make time for yourself, family and friends.

Where can teachers find more information and help?

When teachers are concerned with their own emotional well-being, or feel as though they might benefit from further assistance, there are numerous ways in which you can seek help. Teachers may choose to visit a General Practitioner, Psychologist, Counsellor or mental health service (where available) and in some occasions may have access to such services as part of their employment.

However, there are now also many excellent online self-help resources that can be useful for adults who would like some help in managing their emotions, maintaining a healthy lifestyle or generally adjusting following traumatic or difficult situations.

Some of these are provided below:

Anxiety Online – Offered by the National eTherapy Centre:

Anxiety Online is a comprehensive online mental health service offering information, assessment, online diagnosis and treatment programs (“eTherapy”) for anxiety.
www.anxietyonline.org.au

e-couch – Offered by Australian National University:

e-couch is a self-help interactive program with modules for depression, generalised anxiety & worry, social anxiety, relationship breakdown, and loss & grief.
www.ecouch.anu.edu.au

MoodGYM – Offered by Australian National University:

MoodGYM is an interactive web program designed to prevent and decrease depressive symptoms. Although it was designed for young people, it is helpful for people of all ages.
www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Black Dog Institute

The Black Dog Institute is a not-for-profit, educational, research, clinical and community-oriented facility offering specialist expertise in depression and bipolar disorder. www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

beyondblue – the national depression initiative

beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia. www.beyondblue.org.au

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Evidence Based Information Resource – Offered by CONROD, University of Queensland:

The PTSD evidence based information resource provides evidence based information to the general public and health care professionals about PTSD and its management.
www2.som.uq.edu.au/som/Research/PTSD/Pages/default.aspx

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