

## Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

### Make a Plan: Identifying Your Resources

Choose 1-2 signs or symptoms of vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue that you'd like to address.

Focus on 2-3 strategies to address those symptoms of vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue. (see next page)

Get specific: Identify the when, how, where, what you will do, and who may be involved in your plan.

## 10 Strategies to Address Vicarious Trauma

1. Know and address your risk factors
2. Integrate activities to “bring the lid down” throughout the day
3. Notice “those moments that add up”
4. Assess yourself for signs and symptoms on a regular basis
5. Ask a trusted friend or colleague to help you by asking you assessment questions
6. Develop habits that build up a reserve of calm
7. Accept without judgement
8. Identify self-care that directly address your symptoms
9. Reflect on what the work means to you
10. Take time off

## Breathing Exercises

Practicing controlled breathing is one of the most common skills that can be used to help regulate the nervous system and support the emotional and rational brain in working together. The following breathing exercises, with regular practice, can help to create new patterns within the nervous system by activating its parasympathetic, or calming and healing, responses.

### **Breathing Exercise #1: Coherent Breathing**

Coherent Breathing involves taking long and slow breaths to support the synchronization of your respiratory system and your heart rate for physical and emotional benefits. Studies show that the optimal rate for most adults is anywhere between 3.5 – 6 breaths per minute. A typical rate for Coherent Breathing is often considered to be 6 breaths per minute (5 counts for inhalation and 5 counts for exhalation), but feel free to alter the counts based on your comfort level. It may take some practice to get the breathing slow and steady.

Coherent Breathing swings between slight activation during the inhalation where your heart rate speeds up and slight relaxation during the exhalation when your heart rate slows. The goal of the exercise is to create a relaxed state of alertness, so you are ready to go about life's tasks when done.

#### **Steps:**

1. Sit upright or lie down with your eyes open, closed, or at a soft downward gaze.
2. Slowly inhale with gentle, full inhalations lasting 5 seconds.
3. Slowly exhale with gentle full, exhalations lasting 5 seconds.
4. Repeat for 6 rounds, or however long is comfortable for you.

### **Breathing Exercise #2: Breath Moving**

Breath Moving is often done in combination with Coherent Breathing. In this exercise, you use your imagination to “move” your breath and awareness to different parts of the body. Breath Moving has been shown to improve both circulation of energy through the nervous system and blood flow.

#### **Steps:**

1. Sit upright or lie down with your eyes open, closed, or at a soft downward gaze.
2. Do a few rounds of Coherent Breathing: Slowly inhale with gentle, full inhalations lasting 5 seconds, and slowly exhale with gentle full, exhalations lasting 5 seconds.
3. As you continue Coherent Breathing, imagine your breath moves into the top of your head on inhalation and then down the spine and out through its base on exhalation.
4. Repeat for 6 rounds, or whatever is comfortable for you.

**Tip:** If you'd like to practice these breathing activities with a 5-count chime sound, try:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2qCSu75cOk>