

Trauma and the Practitioner

Practitioners who work with children or young people affected by trauma may themselves be affected by the experiences of those in their care. In communities where practitioners have lived through traumatic experiences, the shared history of trauma can help to build rapport but also mean traumatic experiences resurface¹. In these instances, it may be difficult for the practitioner to work safely with young people without compromising their own health and wellbeing.

Risk Factors



There are risk factors for practitioners working with children and young people who have experienced trauma. Some of these are:

Over-Identification

refers to the act of a person identifying themselves excessively with someone or something else, which can be detrimental to that person's individuality and sense of perception².

Psychological Projection

involves people (often subconsciously) projecting thoughts and feelings they don't like in themselves on to people or things around them⁴.

Emotional Distress

describes emotional suffering caused by experiencing a stressful event. Symptoms of emotional distress can be temporary or endure. They can affect eating and sleep patterns, social life and energy levels³.

Emotional Transference

is when the child or young person may transfer emotions associated with a difficult experience onto the practitioner and vice versa⁵.

The Effects on the Practitioner

Everyone has an individual combination of attributes, with different lived experiences of the world. These attributes, combined with these experiences' perceptions, can affect how the practitioner interacts with others and manages themselves daily.

Primary Trauma

practitioners may experience trauma first-hand when at work in their interactions with other people.

Trauma Triggers

refer to the psychological stimuli that prompt the recall of a traumatic experience. A practitioner may have experienced direct trauma, which their work environment may trigger⁶.

Secondary Trauma (Vicarious Trauma)

is trauma experienced indirectly due to difficult or stressful situations practitioners are exposed to second-hand when engaging empathetically with the person who has experienced trauma⁷.

Compassion Fatigue

describes when a caregiver has a reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or "bearing the suffering of clients"⁸ and is believed to be the result of prolonged exposures to people's traumatic experiences⁹.

Burn Out

refers to a reaction to the demands of a person's work environment. It is "a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations"¹⁰.

Physical Injury

may occur in interactions with people who communicate through behaviours that are violent or aggressive.

The Importance of Self-Care

The World Health Organisation defines self-care as:

“the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider”¹¹



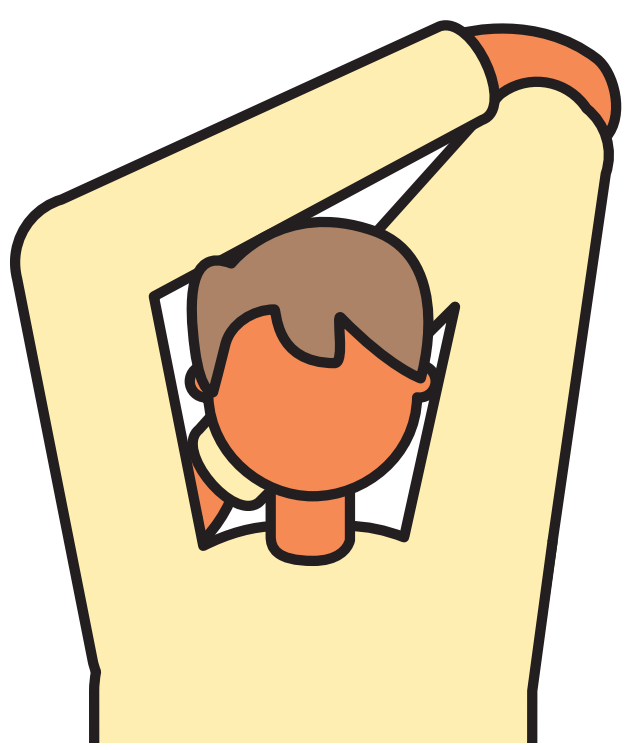
Self-Care

Sets the tone for practitioners to be their ‘best selves’ in their work with children and young people. It is also essential that practitioners can take care of themselves in addition to taking care of others. So that if challenges arise, they are better placed to manage them.



Personal Context

Practitioners may have a variety of ways to look after themselves and promote their wellbeing. They may ensure they have healthy eating and sleeping patterns, exercise, meditate, read, watch TV, cook, have a bath or socialise with loved ones.



Professional Context

Self-care at work can be a challenge due to the ever-changing nature of people’s circumstances. However, practitioners can use ways to support them in their work by speaking to colleagues, finding a quiet place to reflect and take breaks during the day to eat. Organisations and institutions should provide adequate supervision for all practitioners and managers.



Boundaries

Self-care can also help with the management of personal and professional boundaries to contain some of the difficulties that may arise through working with children and young people who have experienced trauma.

Self-Care and the Practitioner



The Practitioner Role

is to facilitate a safe space for the child or young person and provide a consistent and nurturing environment with clear boundaries.

The Practitioner Effect

describes the impact a practitioner can have on a child or young person in their care and their professional duty and responsibility towards themselves and the other person.

The Accountable Practitioner

refers to the operational systems and structures in place, supporting the practitioner to be accountable in their professional role. These frameworks can include reflective practice, personal therapy, clinical and managerial supervision.

Accountability also points to the practitioner's responsibility to uphold a position of openness, self-awareness, curiosity and care that can, for example, identify personal triggers or hotspots ahead of engaging with the child or young person¹².

Text-Only: Page 1

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Reference List

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