

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Signs of secondary stress can appear in the emotional, spiritual, interpersonal, and physical areas of one's life. Consider whether you are experiencing any of the warning signals below as a result of your work. You might also ask people close to you for their observations. Sometimes others can see us more clearly than we can see ourselves.

- Social withdrawal
- Low energy, fatigue
- Feelings of being easily overwhelmed
- Pessimistic or cynical outlook on life
- Intrusive work-related thoughts or dreams
- Difficulty keeping appropriate relationship boundaries
- Difficulty setting limits, saying "no"
- Depressed mood
- Lack of motivation
- Increased worry and anxiety
- Emotional numbness
- Feelings that no one understands (or would be able to)
- Loss of interest in sexual activity
- Vague physical aches, pain
- Making poor judgments and decisions
- Feelings of loss of control
- Increased sense of danger or not feeling safe
- Finding your mind wandering at work
- Difficulty making decisions
- Sense of disconnection from loved ones
- Increased feelings of suspiciousness
- Feeling "adrift" spiritually
- Accident-proneness
- Involvement in "risky" activities (e.g. drugs, alcohol, sexual behaviors)
- Increased irritability, agitation
- Feeling "on edge" much of the time
- Feelings of despair
- Wanting to escape, "run away from it all"
- Increased "sick days" from work
- Violating ethical standards
- Reduced work productivity, doing the "bare minimum"
- Decrease in respect for others, increase in blaming
- Increase in obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors
- Decreased interest in "self-care"

*Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, and Traumatic Stress Institute Staff,
Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization, 1996.*