**16 Warning Signs of Trauma Exposure Responses**

Source: *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk

## Feeling Helpless and Hopeless

* 1. “You know in your gut that there is only so much you can do, but you still feel responsible in some way”
  2. “Perceive that the traumatic event itself will be long-lived … no possibility of relief”
  3. “Believe that … likely to repeat … current struggles in another time and place”
  4. Imagine “will experience the same difficulties in all similar situations”

## A Sense That One Can Never Do Enough

* 1. Scarcity and “not enough-ness”
  2. If we can just be more \_\_\_\_\_, then things would be good.

## Hypervigilance

* 1. “Being wholly focused on our job, to the extent that being present for anything else in our lives can seem impossible”
  2. “Attempt to restore safety and prevent any further victimization by anticipating and recognizing everything as a potential threat and acting accordingly”
  3. “Feel like we are always ‘on,’ even during times when there is absolutely nothing that can or should be done. There is no rest for the weary.”
  4. “May be further reinforced by modern technology…the expectation increases that we be reachable on ‘on’.”

## Diminished Creativity

* 1. “The deeper we sink into a culture of trauma, the less flexible and original our thinking becomes.”

## Inability to Embrace Complexity

* 1. “Crave clear signs of good and bad and right and wrong”
  2. “Feel urgent need to choose sides”
  3. “The answer of ‘no” comes out of your mouth constantly”
  4. “May be dogmatic or opinionated”
  5. “May escalate a volatile situation by making assumptions, passing judgment, talking about things they are not sure of, or engaging in any number of shortsighted behaviors.”

## Minimizing

* 1. “Trivialize a current situation by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more dire”
  2. “Downplay anything that doesn’t fall into the most extreme category of hardship”
  3. “The experience of losing compassion and ability to empathize because we are comparing others’ suffering or putting it into a hierarchy.”
  4. “May also begin to minimize when we feel saturated to the point that we can’t possibly let any more information in”

## Chronic Exhaustion/Physical Ailments

* 1. “Difference between feeling tired because you put in a hard day’ work and feeling fatigued in every cell of your being.”
  2. “Sense of fatigue can become an accepted aspect of a seasoned worker’s demeanor”
  3. “‘Physical complaints are very common; the body keeps the score.’”

## Inability to Listen/Deliberate Avoidance

* 1. “Be aware of avoidance, beaus it can indicate that you are heading toward a much larger problem”

## Dissociative Moment

* 1. “A dissociative moment can happen when a person experiences intrusive or overwhelming feelings. It is the experience of being engaged in your work and, for whatever reason, having something suddenly unhinge within you.”
  2. “In dissociative moments, we cut ourselves off from our internal experience in order to guard against sensations and emotions that could be overwhelming to our system.”

## Sense of Persecution

* 1. “Feeling a profound lack of efficacy in one’s life”

## Guilt

* 1. “Guilt can undermine the possibility for authentic connection between people”
  2. “Guilt also interrupts our ability to take in and be present for the life-sustaining energy in our lives.”
  3. Guilt “can block any experience of pleasure, peace, or happiness.”

## Fear

* 1. “Fear can squelch our ability to think creatively and well”
  2. “It is important to identify our fear and make the connections about what is fueling it.”
  3. “When we acknowledge our own fear, we have an opportunity to deepen our compassion, not only for ourselves but also for every being that has ever been afraid.”

## Anger and Cynicism

* 1. “Anger is complicated because the majority of people in our society have not been raised with good information or skills for managing it.”
  2. “...cynicism is a sophisticated coping mechanism for dealing with anger and other intense feelings we may not know how to manage. Its undercurrent is anger, and yet it is often witty, quick, sharp, easy to laugh at, and incredibly alluring.”

## Inability to Empathize/Numbing

* 1. “An inability to empathize with others, or feeling numb, often happens as a result of one’s system being overwhelmed with incoming stimuli”
  2. Awareness of feelings may be blocked by “alcohol, over-the-counter, prescription, and street drugs” as well as “overwork and overscheduling” and “dependence on caffeine and sugar”
  3. “...we can confuse being amped up, attending to crises (some of which we create), and having a sense of being needed with being fully awake, living life, and being effective. It is interesting to hear what happens to people when they begin to slow down, pay attention to themselves,and take care of longer-term, root issues in their lives.”

## Addictions

* 1. In addition to classic addictions, “... we can also be addicted to the rush of adrenaline — it’s so tempting to stay wired when the alternative is to slow down enough to feel what is going on within and around us….An intriguing example of this is overwork, which for many of us becomes an addiction.”

## Grandiosity: An Inflated Sense of Importance Related to One’s Work

* 1. Possibly thinking “Who else will do it if I’m not here?” or “I can’t possibly leave, they’re relying on me.”
  2. “... can lose an accurate sense of our individual capacities and limits as well as our actual interdependence with others working in the field.”
  3. “It can be very hard to reduce our identification with work, let alone break the addiction to overwork that often results.”