

Self-care for Interpreters in challenging situations

Introduction

Metro South Health (MSH) is committed to working with interpreters. This Fact Sheet has been developed to provide some strategies to assist you with self-care, particularly after interpreting in challenging situations. Interpreting in the healthcare environment can be a very rewarding profession. However, there can be certain environments where interpreting can be demanding and leave you feeling emotionally and physically exhausted.

Some examples (but are not limited to) include:

Services	Situations
Oncology	Crisis situations
Mental health	Domestic and family violence
Maternity	Death and dying
Intensive Care	Psychological trauma

Why is it important to take care of myself?

Self-care is necessary for everyone to maintain their wellbeing. Wellbeing is known as a state of feeling good about ourselves and our lives. It includes our physical, mental, and spiritual health and ensures we have positive relationships with other people.

As with everyone, there are times in our lives where we are stressed, busy, caring for other people or experiencing difficult times.

If you are working in challenging situations, it is even more important to prioritise your self-care, otherwise there may be negative impact on your emotional wellbeing.

What is vicarious trauma?

“Vicarious Trauma is what happens to your neurological (or cognitive), physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual health when you listen to traumatic stories day after day or respond to traumatic situations while having to control your reaction.” (Vicarious Trauma Institute)

While there are many definitions of vicarious trauma, it can be best understood as absorbing another person’s or people’s trauma to an extent which significantly impacts on your health and wellbeing.

Like other professionals working in highly stressful situations or with victims of trauma, interpreters may experience feelings of anger, sadness, compassion fatigue, experience guilt and shame on behalf of the patient and have a strong desire to help the person. This reaction is normal.

WHAT CAN I DO TO LOOK AFTER MYSELF DAILY? >>

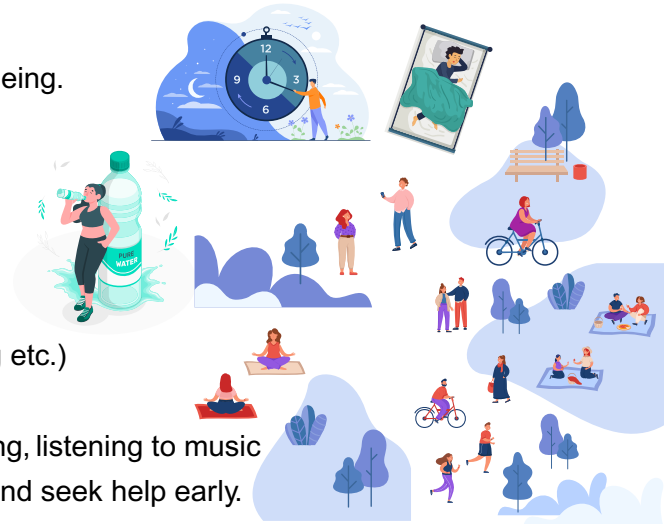
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What can I do to look after myself daily?

We have put together some ideas to help you maintain your wellbeing.

- Get plenty of sleep
- Eat well and drink lots of water
- Do not accept too many emotionally difficult jobs
- Meditate or practice mindfulness exercises
- Allow time to practice your spirituality or faith
- Do some physical activity (going to the gym, yoga, walking etc.)
- Take time to connect with family and friends
- Do activities that you enjoy e.g. gardening, dancing, painting, listening to music
- Recognise the signs that you are stressed or not coping and seek help early.



What can I do before the job to help look after myself?

You can:

- Ask for relevant information before the job to help you prepare better, both linguistically and emotionally
- Let healthcare staff know on arrival if you need to leave by a certain time for another appointment
- Be aware of potential stressors or situations which may be re-traumatising for you. You have the right to refuse a job if it triggers adverse memories for you. For example, certain jobs may trigger trauma, grief or emotionally add significant stress to your life
- Recognise taboo subjects (for you) and areas where you believe your impartiality and/or your peace of mind may be compromised or impaired.

What can I do after the job to help look after myself?

You can:

- If you have the opportunity, talk to someone (e.g. a friend, a colleague, the Interpreter Services Coordinator). Always ensure you do not share patient's confidential information.
- Access counselling or other mental health support e.g., through your local doctor (Mental Health Plan), Employee Assistance Program
- Access the following websites that have ideas to help you look after yourself.

Additional Resources

<https://mentalwellbeing.initiatives.qld.gov.au/>

<https://mentalwellbeing.initiatives.qld.gov.au/support>

https://ausit.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Code_Of_Ethics_Full.pdf

<https://www.cit-asl.org/new/teaching-interpreters-about-self-care-7-1/>

<https://streetleverage.com/2017/06/self-care-sign-language-interpreters-8-ways-to-ease-trauma/>

<https://certifiedlanguages.com/blog/interpreter-self-care-tips/>

(This Resource Fact Sheet has been developed in partnership with Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre and Addiction & Mental Health Services, Metro South Health).