

INFORMATION FOR AGED CARE WORKERS

Caring for older people: How can trauma affect me?

**Phoenix**
A U S T R A L I A

Working in aged care and looking after older people can be very rewarding. But sometimes it can be difficult or stressful. The people you provide care for may have experienced trauma, loss and grief in their lives and this can have an effect on you.

How can carers be affected by trauma at work?

- Caring for people who have suffered a lot in their lives can be draining and upsetting:
 - They may tell you stories of bad things that have happened to them that are hard to listen to.
 - They may become very sad, anxious or irritable and it's hard to help them calm down.
 - Some people you are providing care for may become abusive when they are upset or confused.
- You may be with a person when they die or you may have lost several people you have been caring for over a short period of time.
- You may see people not receiving the care they need or being abused, and feel like you can't help them.

These kinds of experiences at work can build up over time until you feel you've reached your limit. If work is busy, stressful and you don't feel supported, this can make it even harder.

"When things were really bad with COVID-19, everyone was scared, and we were all so busy and stressed. It was really hard, and I felt like I was on my own..."

Warning signs that you may need help

Look out for warning signs that you need to take care of yourself and get some support. You might notice changes in your body and changes in the way you feel. For example:

- tired all the time, not sleeping well
- constant headaches or upset stomach
- loss of appetite
- taking sick days to avoid going to work
- feeling anxious when going to work
- avoiding certain residents or becoming upset or irritable with them
- feeling that you can't do enough to help the people you are looking after
- not enjoying your work anymore
- finding it hard to concentrate or remember things
- feeling negative most of the time.

If you have any of these problems, get some help so you can take care of yourself.

'One of the elderly ladies I cared for passed away from cancer. She was a beautiful lady – always kind and polite. I was there with her towards the end – she had to fight for every breath.

I can still remember the sound. Some nights I wake suddenly. I see her face and it takes me ages to go back to sleep again...'

Getting help and support

Sometimes, it can take a while before you realise that you are not coping so well.

You don't need to feel embarrassed or ashamed. Anyone can be affected by the things they see or hear when caring for people who are grieving and have experienced trauma.

Get help:

- Talk to your manager about how you are feeling and how this is affecting you and your work.
- Talk to your doctor. They may arrange for you to see a counsellor who can help you work out what is happening and how to manage it.
- Talk to family and friends if you feel comfortable to. They can also be an important part of helping you feeling better.



Useful resources and services

Nurse & Midwife Helpline
1800 667 877

**Australian Centre for
Grief and Bereavement**
1800 22 22 00