

SECONDARY TRAUMA: DEALING WITH EVERYDAY TRAUMATIC NEWS

The news these days feels like a never-ending horror movie. Be it the atrocities towards religious minorities or natural disasters, news can be extremely overwhelming and make anyone feel like they're living in a dystopian novel.

Being fed a steady diet of stressful news daily has a long-lasting impact on your mental state and overall well-being. These experiences can become a form of secondary trauma.



Secondary trauma is a result of being exposed to other people's trauma, like through the news, or social media by listening to or witnessing someone's traumatic experience.

Long-term and frequent exposure to these events can take a toll on your mental well-being. Particularly, if you already have a history of trauma, the impact of this exposure can be far greater.

Let us help you understand this concept with an example-

Imagine a friend telling you about a terrifying earthquake that shattered their house. You'd naturally feel awful for them, right? But if they talked about it all the time, in graphic detail, it could begin to disturb you, too.



It's not that you shouldn't care about things happening around you. But, being constantly bombarded can leave you feeling emotionally wiped out, on edge, or even numb.

In response to these events, our brains and bodies often go into defence mode and shut down to protect themselves.

This can be in the form of:

- Being hypervigilant
- Irritability
- Difficulties with concentration
- Nightmares or intrusive images of the trauma
- Feelings of guilt, helplessness and grief
- Physical health problems.



Keeping this in mind, it is important to acknowledge and confront the repercussions of being exposed to graphic and violent media content on our well-being.

And, the first step to prevent or cope with secondary trauma is knowing how you feel about the news and expressing your thoughts and emotions.

Naming your experiences can help bring some sense of control and combat the helplessness you feel in response to viewing traumatic events.

This can help to 'release' and lighten the heavy emotions from your body before you absorb them and they 'stick' to you.

So today, take a moment to think of a specific piece of news that's been bothering you. Write down your thoughts, feelings, sensations or emotions that rise in you due to that news, and jot them in the bubbles below. For example, "I am feeling helpless and angry", and "My heart beats very fast when I think about the injured".



Now that you know how the news impacts you, here are some ways to form healthy boundaries with the news and take steps to self-soothe.

5 Therapist Tips To Prevent Secondary Trauma!



1. Understanding Your Triggers: The first step to managing secondary trauma is recognising your triggers. What types of news stories tend to upset you the most? Is it violence, injustice, or natural disasters? Once you identify your triggers, you can be more mindful of your news consumption and avoid getting bombarded by overwhelming content.

2. Doom-Scrolling Detox: We've all been there – mindlessly scrolling through endless bad news late at night. Set boundaries! Take breaks and designate specific times to check the news and stick to them. You can also try a "news fast" for a day or two.



3. Become a News Curator, Not a Consumer: Imagine the news as a buffet – some dishes are healthy and informative, while others are just greasy negativity bombs. Don't just passively shovel it all in! Choose reliable sources for your updates, limit your daily intake, and focus on stories that offer solutions or positive outcomes.



So, the next time you come across a news article or video that may contain disturbing content, try the following -

1. Pause and scan your own mental and physical state - are you feeling grounded?
2. Take a few seconds to evaluate the benefit of reading or viewing the content.

4. Prioritize Self-Care: You can't pour from an empty cup. Make self-care a priority, not an afterthought. Get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, and exercise regularly. These habits build resilience and help your mind and body cope better with stress.

Engage in activities that make you feel supported. For example, go for a walk in nature, listen to your favourite music, catch up with a friend, or engage in some [grounding exercises](#).



5. Focus On What's In Your Control: Don't confuse taking a break with giving up! Feeling overwhelmed by the news doesn't make you any less compassionate. In fact, it might be a sign you care deeply about the world.

Channel that energy into something positive! Volunteer for a cause you care about, donate your time or skills, even small actions can make a difference.



Secondary trauma due to the news around can make you feel like a firefighter who's constantly surrounded by smoke. Even though you're not directly in the flames, you start to feel a bit choked up and overwhelmed.

So, it's important to take a step back from time to time and prioritize your mental well-being. Because after all, you can't be a lighthouse in the storm if your own flame is flickering!

If you, or someone you know is looking to seek professional help, reach out to us at **The Mood Space** <https://www.themoodspace.com/getstarted> and our Care Team will get back to you within 24 hours.

Not looking for professional help just yet? We understand, keep browsing through our Care Space tools and explore our self-help handouts and worksheets to navigate mental health-related challenges in a better manner.

