

THE BEHAVIOUR INSTITUTE

Diploma in Trauma-Informed Psychotherapy

UNIT 6 • CORE READING 5 OF 6

05

Post-Traumatic Growth for Practitioners

This work can cost something real. It can also give something real back.

What This Document Covers

This document turns to something genuinely important, and often underemphasised in trauma training: vicarious post-traumatic growth. Sustained exposure to clients' trauma carries real risk, covered honestly across this entire unit — but a growing body of research also documents genuine, positive growth arising from this same work, not simply cost.

What Post-Traumatic Growth Actually Refers To

Post-traumatic growth, as a concept, describes positive psychological change that can occur following direct exposure to significant adversity — not simply returning to a previous baseline, but genuine growth beyond it, in areas like a deepened appreciation for life, more meaningful relationships, a greater sense of personal strength, or a genuinely shifted, often more grounded, set of life priorities.

Vicarious post-traumatic growth refers to a parallel phenomenon observed specifically in practitioners who work closely with trauma survivors — genuine positive change arising not from directly experiencing trauma themselves, but from witnessing, closely and repeatedly, both the reality of human suffering and, just as significantly, the reality of human resilience and recovery.

Where This Growth Tends to Come From

Witnessing Genuine Resilience

Trauma practitioners occupy a genuinely unusual vantage point: they witness, repeatedly and directly, people surviving and eventually recovering from experiences that once seemed unsurvivable. This repeated, direct evidence of human resilience appears to shape practitioners' own beliefs about human capacity in a genuinely positive direction, working somewhat in the opposite direction from the worldview shifts covered in Document 1.

A Deepened Sense of Meaning

Many practitioners report that sustained trauma work produces a genuine deepening of their own sense of purpose and meaning, connected directly to witnessing the real, tangible impact of their work on another person's life — a form of meaning that can be harder to access in less directly consequential work.

Increased Personal Insight

The reflective practices this course has asked of you throughout — the Pause and Consider prompts appearing across every document, the deliberate self-examination central to Unit 5's material on countertransference — build a habit of genuine self-reflection that tends to extend well beyond clinical work itself, into a practitioner's broader personal life and relationships.

Pause and Consider

If you have already spent time around people who have survived significant adversity, has witnessing their

resilience changed anything about your own beliefs or outlook, even in a small way? If you haven't yet had that experience, what do you imagine it might offer, based on what this document has covered?

Growth and Risk Are Not Opposites

It is genuinely important not to misread this document as contradicting everything covered earlier in this unit. Vicarious trauma and vicarious post-traumatic growth are not opposite outcomes, where a practitioner experiences one or the other. Research suggests they frequently coexist within the same practitioner, sometimes even connected to the very same clinical experiences — a difficult case can carry genuine risk and genuine potential for growth simultaneously, rather than one ruling out the other.

What appears to matter most in shaping which predominates, based on the material covered across this whole unit, is precisely the sustainable practice covered in Document 4: adequate support, supervision, personal processing, and a genuine, ongoing habit of self-awareness. Practitioners who actively engage with that support system appear considerably more likely to experience meaningful growth alongside, rather than instead of, the genuine risks this unit has been honest about throughout.

Why This Document Belongs Near the End of This Course

This course opened, back in Unit 1, with a reframe: asking what happened to someone, rather than what is wrong with them. It feels fitting to close with a parallel idea, applied to yourself as a practitioner: this work is genuinely difficult, and it can genuinely cost you something if approached without adequate care and support, as this whole unit has taken seriously. But approached with that care — supervision, peer support, personal therapy, genuine sustainable practice — it can also give you something real in return. Both things are true. Neither cancels out the other.

What's Next

This unit, and this course, closes with a document addressing common myths about vicarious trauma and self-care, before a closing note on completing this diploma.

A Few Things to Take With You

- Vicarious post-traumatic growth describes genuine positive change arising from sustained, engaged trauma work, not only vicarious trauma or cost
- This growth appears to arise particularly from witnessing genuine human resilience, a deepened sense of meaning, and increased personal insight
- Vicarious trauma and vicarious post-traumatic growth frequently coexist within the same practitioner, rather than being mutually exclusive outcomes
- Sustainable practice, covered in Document 4, appears to shape which predominates — genuine support makes growth alongside risk considerably more likely

Before You Move On

- Does understanding vicarious post-traumatic growth change how you think about the risks covered earlier in this unit?
- Why do you think witnessing resilience specifically, rather than simply witnessing suffering, appears to drive much of this growth?
- What would meaningful, sustained engagement with the support systems covered in Document 4 look like for you, specifically, going forward?