



Moral Injury

What is Moral Injury?

Moral injury occurs when you experience, witness, or are impacted by something that violates your deeply held moral, ethical, or spiritual beliefs.

It's not a mental illness. It's a wound to your conscience, and it can profoundly affect how you see yourself, others, and the world.

"Moral injury is not about what's wrong with you. It's about what's happened around you that was wrong."

Examples of Moral Injuries

You may be carrying moral injury if you've experienced things like:

- Being forced to follow policies or practices you knew were wrong, especially in disability, training, or care settings.
- Watching animals or clients be harmed or neglected, and feeling powerless to intervene.
- Participating in systems (NDIS, vet clinics, training activities) that failed clients, despite your best efforts.
- Being punished or isolated for speaking up about injustice, abuse, or cruelty.
- Continuing to work in morally grey areas due to financial necessity or fear of repercussions.
- Losing animals or clients in distressing circumstances, especially if preventable.

If you've ever asked, "Did I do the right thing?" or "How do I live with what happened?", you may be experiencing moral injury.



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How it Feels

You might notice:

- Deep shame, guilt, or self-blame
- Mistrust of systems, supervisors, or institutions
- Anger or grief that won't go away
- A sense that your integrity or identity has been damaged
- Withdrawing from clients, animals, or team members
- Numbness, burnout, or cynicism
- Trouble feeling hope, purpose, or joy in your work

You are ...

... not weak or broken.

... reacting normally to an abnormal or unjust situation.

... not alone—many trainers, carers, and professionals in the animal and disability sectors carry moral injury.

Protective Practices

- Peer debriefing: Normalises your experience, breaks silence
- Ethical self-checks: Keeps your practice aligned with your values
- Creative outlets: Helps express complex emotions
- Nature or animal time (without agenda): Rebuilds connection, safety, and joy
- Ongoing learning: Reframes your experience and promotes post-traumatic growth

You are Still Needed

If you are a professional with moral injury:

- You are not disqualified from this work.
- You likely bring depth, integrity, empathy, and lived insight that others can't.
- Animals and people need practitioners who can hold space for complexity.
- Moral injury may leave scars—but it can also shape you into a more ethical, compassionate, and grounded presence in the world.

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Strategies for Dealing with Moral Injury

1. Reconnect With Your Core Values

- Write down what drew you to this work in the first place.
- Reflect on what integrity looks like for you now—not what the system demanded of you before.
- Let your decisions reflect who you are today, not what happened to you yesterday.

2. Talk About It (with the Right People)

- Find trusted peers, mentors, or trauma-aware supervisors.
- Seek spaces that validate your story—not silence it.
- Moral injury heals through relational repair, not isolation.

3. Process the Guilt and Grief

- It's okay to mourn what you couldn't prevent, change, or undo.
- Compassion-focused therapy, journaling, or creative practices can help you externalize shame and find meaning.

4. Work in a Way that Aligns with Your Ethics

- Set boundaries that protect both clients and yourself.
- Walk away from unethical situations where you can.
- Advocate quietly or openly—whatever helps you stay whole.

5. Recognise Triggers and Take Space

- If a client's story or system failure feels too close to home, pause.
- Use grounding strategies. Step outside. Debrief.
- It's okay to say: "This is tough today. I need a moment."

6. Don't Aim to "Fix"—Aim to be Present

- You can still do deeply meaningful work even while carrying pain.
- Often, being a compassionate witness is more powerful than any technique.

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Additional Resources

- Blue Knot Foundation – Practitioner support and trauma-informed resources
- Moral Injury Project – Stories and healing tools for those carrying ethical wounds
- Phoenix Australia – Guidance for moral injury in health and service sectors
- Reflective Practice for Animal-Assisted Practitioners – Supports self-awareness and ethical clarity

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