



BALANCED YOU



Compassion Fatigue Discussion Guide *(Based on Information from the American Institute of Stress)*

How To Use This Guide:

- Share this sheet with your team to review before the meeting
- In your team gathering use the following questions to guide discussion:
 - What did you learn about compassion fatigue that you didn't know before?
 - What signs of compassion fatigue are you seeing in yourself?
 - What signs of burnout?
 - What contributes to your compassion fatigue?
 - What helps you manage it?
 - Are there other things you would like to try do to manage it?
- Use the action plan grid to create a compassion fatigue action plan.

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion fatigue has been described as the “cost of caring” for others in emotional pain (Figley, 1982).

The helping field has gradually begun to recognize that workers are profoundly affected by the work they do. Whether it is by direct exposure to traumatic events (for example, working as a paramedic, police officer, emergency hospital worker); secondary exposure (hearing clients talk about trauma they have experienced, helping people who have just been victimized, working as child protection workers); or the full gamut in between (such as working with clients who are chronically in despair, witnessing people's inability to improve their very difficult life circumstances or feeling helpless in the face of poverty and emotional anguish).

The work of helping requires professionals to open their hearts and minds to their clients and patients – unfortunately, this very process of empathy is what makes helpers vulnerable to being profoundly affected and even possibly damaged by their work.

Is it Burnout or Compassion Fatigue?

The Stages of Burnout have been identified as:

- enthusiasm
- stagnation
- frustration
- apathy

Commonalities of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment or meaning in work
- Mental exhaustion
- Decreased interactions with others (isolation)
- Depersonalization (symptoms disconnected from real causes)
- Physical exhaustion

Clear difference: Compassion fatigue has a more rapid onset while burnout emerges over time. Compassion Fatigue has a faster recovery (less severe, if recognized and managed early).

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- Affects many dimensions of your well-being
- Nervous system arousal (Sleep disturbance)
- Emotional intensity increases
- Cognitive ability decreases
- Behavior and judgment impaired
- Isolation and loss of morale
- Can lead to Depression and PTSD
- Loss of self-worth and emotional modulation
- Identity, worldview, and spirituality impacted
- Beliefs and psychological needs-safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control
- Loss of hope and meaning=existential despair
- Anger toward perpetrators or causal events

Tips for Managing Compassion Fatigue

Do:

- Find someone to talk to.
- Understand that the pain you feel is normal.
- Exercise and eat properly.
- Get enough sleep.
- Take some time off.

- Develop interests outside of medicine.
- Identify what's important to you.

Don't:

- Blame others.
- Look for a new job, buy a new car, get a divorce or have an affair.
- Fall into the habit of complaining with your colleagues.
- Work harder and longer.
- Self-medicate.
- Neglect your own needs and interests.

Awareness: What types of cases contribute to your stress level increasing your vulnerability to compassion fatigue?

Think of events or situation that causes one to experience an unusually strong reaction and often overpowers one's usual coping mechanisms.

Are you aware of any of these issues or contributing factors in your workday? If so, you could be at risk of compassion fatigue.

- Ability to function is interfered with or altered.
- Situation or incident does not seem "typical or ordinary", it feels traumatic.
- "Compassion stress" impinges upon or breaks through normal boundaries
- Regularly waking up tired in the morning and struggling to get to work?
- Feeling as if you are working harder but accomplishing less?
- Becoming frustrated/irritated easily?
- Losing compassion for some people while becoming over involved in others?
- Routinely feeling bored or disgusted?
- Experiencing illness, aches and pains?

Keep Balance in Your Life

- Practice excellent self-care
- Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion
- Allow yourself to take mini-escapes- these relieve the intensity of your work
- Transform the negative impact of your work (find meaning, challenge negativity, find gratitude)
- Get medical treatment if needed to relieve symptoms that interfere with daily functioning- don't use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate
- Get professional help when needed to get back on track- we all need coaches and consultants at times

Find Your Passion

- We all have hidden sources of energy and healing power.
- When you identify the things that fuel you, the things that you have true passion for, your fatigue will disappear.
- Balancing your life involves putting the things that we value and have passion for in our schedule.

Balance For Your Soul

- Have quiet alone time in a calm, beautiful place- a safe retreat where you feel renewed
- Have an awareness of what restores and replenishes you.
- Find ways to acknowledge loss and grief
- Stay clear with commitment to career goals or your personal mission
- Know how to focus on what you can control
- Look at situations as entertaining challenges and opportunities, not problems or stresses

Connections

- Talk out your stress- process your thoughts and reactions with someone else (coworker, therapist, clergy, friend, family, supervisor)
- Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about compassion fatigue that you didn't know before?
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Compassion Fatigue Action Plan

Things that lead to compassion fatigue	What helps and how we can support each other	Compassion fatigue check ins
<i>Write down what contributes to compassion fatigue</i>	<i>Write the skills that help with compassion fatigue and what help each person needs to be able to practice those skills.</i> Balancing Exercise	<i>Check back on a regular basis to see how the skills development is going for team members. Consider supplementing learning with myStrength mental health app.</i>

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>List one mini-escape or diversion that worked well to restore and renew you</i>• <i>List one thing that brings you joy</i>• <i>Name 3 things you feel grateful for today</i>• <i>Think of something that has brought you a sense of joy (Make your top ten list)</i>• <i>Who do you love that you can reach out to today? (Call them!)</i>• <i>What made you laugh today? (Share it!)</i> | |
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