

Healing Compassion Fatigue and Burnout through Self-care

Description

Many caregivers, both professionals and family members, experience at times, the wear and tear that results from care and compassion given to others. It can be difficult to care for yourself while you're caring for others. In addition, experiencing or even hearing about traumatic events or situations can bring about complicated feelings and emotions. This resource sheet suggests ways to create your own toolbox to prevent burnout.

Compassion and Compassion Fatigue

Compassion is loving kindness towards someone, combined with the desire to take action to relieve suffering. Compassion is an essential quality for professional helpers. When someone feels satisfaction from helping, that is known as *compassion satisfaction*.

Compassion Fatigue is the physical and mental exhaustion caused by a depleted ability to cope with one's everyday environment, caused by a combination of secondary traumatic stress and cumulative burnout when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate. Compassion fatigue can lead to anxiety and depression, compromise the quality of care, and affect relationships with colleagues.

Secondary trauma, also known as vicarious trauma, is the "contagious" trauma that occurs when helpers are repeatedly exposed to others' traumatic experiences.

Compassion fatigue is related to *burnout*, which occurs when job satisfaction is low and workers feel helpless and overwhelmed. Burnout is not trauma-related.

Develop a Professional Protection Plan

- Be self-aware: pay attention to how you are feeling and do not judge
- Speak Up: let someone know what you need to do your job properly
- Know your triggers (what contributes to your stress and fatigue) and your warning signs (physical, emotional signals that you are stressed and fatigued)
- Practice self-care on the individual, professional, and organizational levels
- Develop and maintain strong social supports at home and work
- Connect with compassion satisfaction and joy
- Have a transition from work to home
- Think positively: change your perspective and attitude

Resources

- Care2Caregivers 800-424-2494 and www.care2caregivers.org/self-care
- Self-compassion meditation (Kristin Neff): <http://self-compassion.org/>
- Dealing with trauma: <http://www.giftfromwithin.org/>

References are available on request.

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