
Conscious Care Giving Understanding, Reducing & Preventing Compassion Fatigue

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taking care of those giving care...

Understanding Compassion Fatigue

- Definition
- Difference from burnout
- Similarity to Post Traumatic Stress
- Risk factors



What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion fatigue is the emotional residue of exposure to working with the suffering.



Compassion Fatigue

A state of tension and preoccupation with an individual or cumulative trauma of clients as manifested in one or more ways:

- Re-experiencing the traumatic events
- Avoidance/numbing of reminders of the traumatic event
- Persistent arousal



Compassion Fatigue is not Burnout

- Burnout is a physical mental and emotional response to constant high levels of your own high stress
- Burnout is not simply excessive stress but a complex human reaction to stress
- Burnout relates to feeling that your inner resources are inadequate for managing the tasks and situations presented to you

Difference between Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

- Burnout is the direct effect of stress on you.
- Compassion fatigue is the effect of your emotional and personal feelings for the suffering on you.



Compassion Fatigue's Relationship to Stress...

- Compassion fatigue is similar to critical incident stress but..
- With compassion fatigue you are absorbing the trauma through the eyes and ears of your clients
- Compassion fatigue can be thought of as secondary post traumatic stress



Four Reasons Trauma Professionals are Vulnerable to Compassion Fatigue

1. Empathy is a major resource for trauma professionals but may also lead to traumatization of the helper.
2. Previously experienced a traumatic event in their own lives which can be triggered.
3. Unresolved trauma in the helper can be activated by similar trauma in the client.
4. Children's trauma is especially difficult for trauma professionals. (Beaton & Murphy, 1993).

Compassion Fatigue Symptoms

Some of the symptoms of compassion fatigue include:

- Increased negative arousal;
- Intrusive thoughts/images of clients' situations/traumas (or clinicians' own historical traumas);
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life;
- Lowered frustration tolerance/outbursts of anger or rage;
- Dread of working with certain clients (the “groan”);
- Marked or increasing transference/counter-transference issues with certain clients;
- Depression;
- Loss of hope;

- Perceptive/assumptive world disturbances (i.e., seeing the world in terms of victims and perpetrators, decrease in subjective sense of safety);
- Increase in ineffective and/or self-destructive self-soothing behaviours;
- Hyper-vigilance;
- Feelings of therapeutic impotence or de-skilled with certain clients;
- Diminished sense of purpose/enjoyment with career;
- Diminished ego-functioning (time, identity, volition);
- Decreased functioning in non-professional situations.

Are you at risk for Compassion Fatigue?

Take a test



Reducing Compassion Fatigue

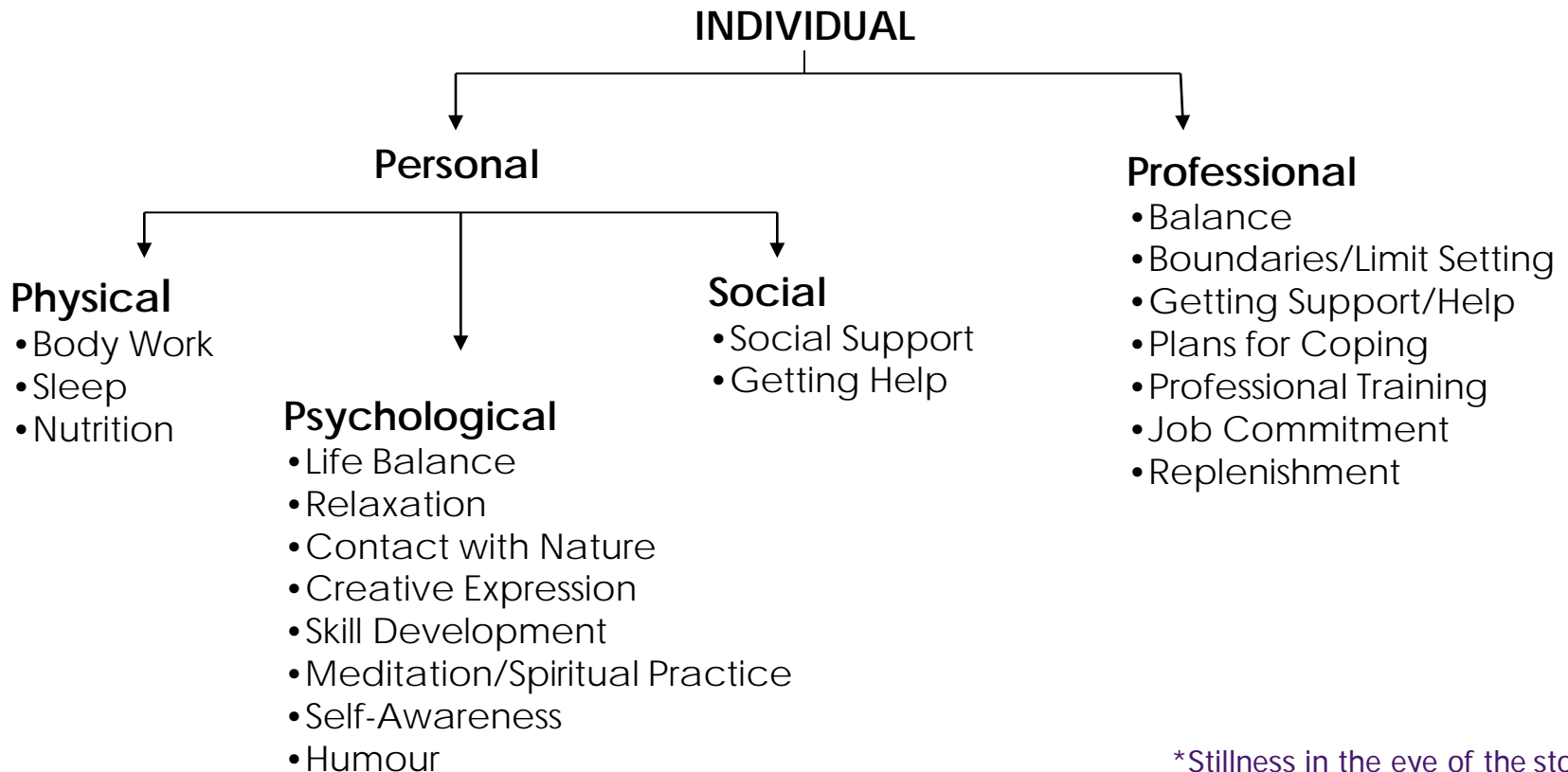
- Life in balance
- Management and Assessment skills
- Self care



Reducing Compassion Fatigue

Is your “Life in Balance”?

The following chart demonstrates a person’s life that is in balance. This balance may shift as an individual experiences stress. Under stress, the tendency is to overcompensate in one area (i.e. our profession) and neglect or get out of balance in other areas (i.e. physical or psychological needs).




*Stillness in the eye of the storm

Life Balancing Questions

- What areas in your life are most out of balance calling for your immediate attention to make some changes?
- In which areas of your life are you most “over-extended”?
- In which areas of your life are you most “under-developed”?
- What activities, roles or qualities of your “Self” are the sources of your greatest joy, satisfaction or sense of accomplishment?
- Which aspects of your life are you most grateful for?
- Which areas have you been ignoring that call for your attention?



Compassion Fatigue Management Skills

- **Action-oriented skills:** In which we seek to confront the problem causing the stress, often **changing the environment** of the situation.
 - **Emotionally-oriented skills:** In which we do not have the power to change the situation, but we can manage stress by **changing our interpretation of the situation** and the way we feel about it.
 - **Acceptance-oriented skills:** Where something has happened over which we have no power and no emotional control, where our **focus must be on accepting. It is what it is...**
- 

Compassion Fatigue Assessment Tool

Assess the situation – Don't hook in

	Can be Controlled	Can't be Controlled
Take Action	Situation Mastery	Ceaseless Striving
Don't Act	Giving Up	Letting Go

Position yourself accordingly



Self Care

- Go for a walk
- Take care of yourself as well as you do everyone else

(It is that easy and that important)



Preventing Compassion Fatigue

- Clear boundaries
- Energy Awareness
- A different way to ask questions



Boundaries can:

- Be set to create separateness between self and others, or self and environment;
- Create feelings of safety or privacy;
- Be easy to set in some situations and with some people, and yet difficult to set in other situations (i.e. You may be able to set limits with your co-workers, yet feel walked on by family members who do not respect your boundaries and privacy);
- When your set boundaries are violated, you may feel uncomfortable, disrespected and angry.

Set Clear Boundaries

- Everyone has physical and emotional boundaries that are constantly adjusting depending on the circumstances. We use boundaries including our gender, past experience, emotional state, body language, etc.
- Setting clear boundaries can prevent Compassion Fatigue



Setting your Boundaries

Are you a Rescuer or a Helper?

Rescuer	Helper
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has difficulty saying no• Confuses sympathy with empathy• Expects to be able to fix things• Assumes person can't help themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets clear limits and boundaries, can say no• Can separate self from the pain of another and still care• Recognizes can't do everything and everything can't be fixed• Has respect for other person's ability to grow, change and help themselves with healthy and appropriate support

Setting your Boundaries

Are you a Rescuer or a Helper?

Rescuer	Helper
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hears “I couldn’t do it without you”, which means dependency has been encouraged• Doesn’t wait to be asked, assumes help is needed• Mostly ignores own needs for needs of others• Constantly seeking external approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hears “You were a great support to me”• Gives people permission to ask for help• Validates own needs and meets them as well as needs of others• Does best of what can be done on any given day and is satisfied

Energy Awareness

- Energy, not time is a fundamental currency of high performance
- Managing our energy allows us to work towards becoming a fully engaged self
- Liken what we do to interval training
- Think corporate athlete
- Managing energy can prevent Compassion Fatigue

Consider a Paradigm Shift

Old Way	New Way
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage time• Avoid stress• Life is a marathon• Downtime is wasted time• Self discipline rules• The power of positive thinking• Evaluation good versus bad	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage energy• Seek stress on your terms• Life is a series of sprints• Downtime is productive time• Rituals rule• The power of full engagement• Assessment pre/post for change



Preventing Compassion Fatigue

- Compassion Fatigue Prevention
- A different way to Ask Questions



Compassion Fatigue Generating Situation

Questions that result in answers that cause a floodgate of difficult information and moral distress.



Compassion Fatigue Generating Question

- How are you doing?

(opens the floodgates on to you)

Compassion Fatigue Prevention Question

- How are you doing **today?**

(containment)



Compassion Fatigue Generating Question

- Having any difficulties... with pain? With eating?

(opens the floodgates on to you)

Compassion Fatigue Prevention Question

- What is the most problematic difficulty/issue/symptom that you are dealing with right now?
- What is hardest to manage with right now? How can I be of most help to you in managing this?
- Is there anything that is a bit better today? What do you attribute that to?

(containment)



Compassion Fatigue Generating Situation

- Trying to mind read what a patient knows about their illness?
 - Tripping over diplomatic questions.

Compassion Fatigue Prevention

- It would be very helpful for me to be able to assist you best if you could let me know what you know about your illness right now?
- It would be very helpful for me to be able to assist you best if you could let me know what your family knows about your illness at this point?



Consider these Compassion Fatigue Prevention Tactics

1. Is it possible for you to see the most suffering patients/clients when you have the most energy?
2. Think of a question that you routinely ask. Could you ask it in a more contained way?
3. Did you check in around any positives?
 - a) Was anything a little bit easier today?



Consider these Compassion Fatigue Prevention Tactics

- b) Leave with a message of truth and strength and joy... it will give you joy, i.e.
 - “Pain is exhausting.... You are managing very well”.
 - “This is a tough journey.... and you are making great headway”.
 - “I can see why your family is concerned. You are a special person. They are lucky to have you”.



We take care of those giving care to enhance and support those who require care.

It can take a toll on us all.... so we need to be mindful of what we can do.

Understanding, Reducing & Preventing
Compassion Fatigue can help.

If you need support we are here.

604-872-4929 • 1-800-505-4929

www.efap.ca

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