

# **What About Me?!**

Helping Professionals Overcome  
Compassion Fatigue/Vicarious Trauma



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# **Objectives:**

**1) Define compassion fatigue**

**2) Recognize symptoms related to compassion fatigue**

**3) Identify and implement interventions to prevent & cope with compassion fatigue**





# **What is Compassion Fatigue?**

# Compassion Fatigue



The cumulative physical, emotional, and/or psychological effects of continual exposure to stories of trauma and suffering when working in a helping field

(American Bar Association, n.d.)



# Is Burnout Different?



**Yes!**

- Similar symptoms, but **not** related to exposure to trauma and suffering
- Caused from prolonged, yet unsuccessful striving toward unrealistic expectations
- Anyone can experience it

(Teater & Lugate, 2014)



**So how do we  
know if we have  
Compassion  
Fatigue?**

# **Physical Symptoms:**

- **Physical exhaustion**
- **Insomnia or hypersomnia**
- **Headaches and migraines**
- **Stomach complaints**
- **Muscle tension**
- **Elevated blood pressure**





# **Behavioral :**

- **Increased use of alcohol and drugs**
- **Other addictions**
- **Absenteeism**
- **Anger and irritability**
- **Seeing yourself as indispensable**
- **Avoidance of clients**





# **Behavioral continued:**

- Impaired ability to make decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Problems in personal relationships
- Compromised care for clients





I'm not good enough

## **Psychological:**

- Emotional exhaustion
- Distancing
- Negative self-image
- Depression
- Reduced empathy
- Dread of working with certain clients
- Feeling professional hopelessness
- Disruption of worldview



# **Psychological** **continued:**

- **Hypervigilance**
- **Hypersensitivity or insensitivity to emotional material**
- **Cynicism**
- **Difficulty separating personal and professional lives**
- **Failure to nurture and develop non-work-related aspects of life**



# Beyond the Cliff

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky





# Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)

*Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue  
(ProQOL) Version 5 (2009)*

When you *[help]* people you have direct contact with their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you *[help]* can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences, both positive and negative, as a *[helper]*. Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these things in the last 30 days.

**1=Never**

**2=Rarely**

**3=Sometimes**

**4=Often**

**5=Very Often**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I am happy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I am preoccupied with more than one person I *[help]*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I get satisfaction from being able to *[help]* people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I feel connected to others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I feel invigorated after working with those I *[help]*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a *[helper]*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a person I *[help]*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I *[help]*.

**So how do we  
prevent or cope  
with Compassion  
Fatigue?**



## *Self-Care Assessment Worksheet*

This assessment tool provides an overview of effective strategies to maintain self-care. After completing the full assessment, choose one item from each area that you will actively work to improve.

Using the scale below, rate the following areas in terms of frequency:

5 = Frequently

4 = Occasionally

3 = Rarely

2 = Never

1 = It never occurred to me

### **Physical Self-Care**

\_\_\_ Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch and dinner)

\_\_\_ Eat healthy

\_\_\_ Exercise

\_\_\_ Get regular medical care for prevention

\_\_\_ Get medical care when needed

\_\_\_ Take time off when needed

\_\_\_ Get massages



- **Identify Work Hazards**
- **Set Boundaries**
- **Use Healthy Escapes**
- **Improve Work Environment**
- **Talk about compassion fatigue with co-workers & supervisors**
- **Seek Personal Therapy**



## Mental Focus Exercise

Stare at any object and try to remain focused on just that object for as long as possible. Keep a mental watch on when your mind starts to wander, then just bring it back to the object. The longer you can remain focused, the more your mindfulness will increase.





# Musical Stimuli Exercise

Listen to your favorite song and pay attention to how it makes you feel. What emotions stir? What memories come up, and how do those memories make you feel? Engage the emotions and see where they lead.







# Guided Meditation

(5 Minute Mindfulness Meditation, 2015)



# References

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