

Understanding Compassion Fatigue

Compassion Fatigue: A gradual lessening of compassion for others or self over time. It is common among individuals who work directly with trauma. Compassion Fatigue is the profound emotional and physical exhaustion that helping professionals and caregivers can develop over the course of their career as helpers.

Vicarious Trauma: the profound shift in world view that occurs in helping professions when they work with clients who have experienced trauma; helpers notice that their fundamental beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by being repeatedly exposed to traumatic material.

Burnout: The result of prolonged stress. Burnout is the physical and emotional exhaustion that workers experience when they have low job satisfaction and feel powerless and overwhelmed at work.

What Are Some of the Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue?

Every person will have unique warning signs that they are moving into compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue can take a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional toll on people who experience it. Common symptoms of compassion fatigue include:

- Chronic physical and emotional exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Feelings of inequity toward the therapeutic or caregiver relationship
- Irritability
- Feelings of self-contempt
- Difficulty sleeping
- Weight loss/Weight gain
- Headaches
- Poor job satisfaction
- Disconnected from others; lacking feelings

1. Name, acknowledge, and feel your emotions. Feelings in themselves do not cause trauma, but resisting your feelings creates suffering.
2. Create a self-care toolbox of activities that sustain and restore you.
3. Take mini-breaks during the day & be sure to do at least one nourishing activity daily.
4. Assess your trauma input.
5. Learn to say no (or yes) more often. Take regular stock of your schedule and create one that works for you.
6. Set your own boundaries rather than allowing others to set boundaries for you.
7. Delegate tasks at work and at home.
8. Limit rumination by engaging in activities that require your full attention. Step off the “hamster wheel”. Taking a break from over-thinking will lead you closer to a solution, as worry will only lead you farther from where you want to be.
9. Exercise regularly and eat nourishing foods.
10. Work within your expertise & invest in training to support career growth.
11. Resist the urge to withdraw. Reach out for supportive social connection.
12. Join and/or create a support group.
13. Seek counseling when needed.
14. Engage in outside hobbies.

Questions about Compassion Fatigue?

Contact your EAP at 800-433-2320