

## Understanding the Impact of Compassion Fatigue on Behavioral Health Professionals

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## What is Compassion Fatigue

- **Compassion:** A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering a misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause
- **Fatigue:** Extreme tiredness, typically resulting from mental or physical exertion or illness
- **Compassion Fatigue:** The Cost of Caring

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## What is Compassion Fatigue

- Caregivers play host to a high level of secondary traumatic stress that may lead to compassion fatigue.
- Workers struggle to function in care-giving environments that constantly present heart wrenching, emotional challenges.
- A mission of affecting positive change in society can become elusive, if not impossible.
- This coupled with first-hand knowledge of disregard for the safety and well-being of others, takes its toll on everyone from full time employees to part time volunteers.
- Eventually, negative attitudes can prevail if we don't care for ourselves.

Adapted from The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project

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### What is Compassion Fatigue?

"We have not been directly exposed to the trauma scene, but we hear the story told with such intensity, or we hear similar stories so often, or we have the gift and curse of extreme empathy and we suffer. We feel the feelings of our (clients). We experience their fears. We dream their dreams. Eventually, we lose a certain spark of optimism, humor and hope. We tire.

We aren't sick, but we aren't ourselves."

— C. Figley, 1995

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### Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Individuals working with others who have experienced trauma are susceptible to SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS.
- Unresolved Secondary Traumatic Stress can result in COMPASSION FATIGUE over time.
- Continued Secondary Traumatic Stress, which has resulted in Compassion Fatigue, over time can result in BURNOUT which may result in our not being able to do the work of support we are drawn to.

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### Who is at higher risk?

- Those hesitant to set boundaries
- Overachievers
- Those with stressful homelives or situations
- Workplace changes and challenges
- Those who do not PRACTICE self-care

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### Potential Warning Signs

- Diminished creativity
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Minimizing
- Chronic exhaustion
- Physical ailments
- Avoidance
- Inability to listen
- Feeling helpless/hopeless
- Feel the need to rescue, heal, or fix
- Hypervigilance
- Dissociative moments
- Sense of persecution
- Guilt & Fear
- Anger and Cynicism
- Inability to Empathize
- Addictions
- Grandiosity
- Taking on a victim mentality
- Blaming others
- Justifying all behavior
- Frequent venting and complaining

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### Balancing the Scales: Compassion Satisfaction

- Compassion Satisfaction is about the pleasure we derive from being able to do the work we do. The compassion we experience in doing our work provides a sense of satisfaction.
- Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Satisfaction can be seen as the positive and negative consequences of working with individuals who have experienced or are currently experiencing trauma or suffering.
- A substantial amount of evidence suggests Compassion Satisfaction is an important part of the whole, thus increasing the significance of building resiliency and the transformation from negative to positive aspects.
- Compassion Satisfaction can serve as a natural, protective tool against the negative aspects of our work.

Adapted from Compassion Fatigue among Healthcare, Emergency, and Community Service Workers. A Systemic Review by Cary Cooper

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### Tips for Managing Compassion Fatigue

Do	Don't
▪ Find someone to talk to.	▪ Blame others.
▪ Understand that the pain you feel is normal.	▪ Look for a new job, get a divorce or have an affair.
▪ Exercise and eat properly.	▪ Make a habit of complaining to your colleagues.
▪ Get enough sleep.	▪ Work harder and longer.
▪ Take some time off.	▪ Self-medicate.
▪ Develop outside interests.	▪ Neglect your own needs and interests.
▪ Identify what's important to you	

From the American Institute on Stress Website

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Self-care

- Take something off your plate and don't replace it with anything.
- Delegate at work and at home.
- Learn to say no (or yes).
- Balance your schedule: intersperse easy with hard.
- Seek more and regular support/supervision. Ask for what you need.
- Increase your spiritual or mindfulness practice.
- Increase your self-observations and self-awareness.
- Find a quiet and undisturbed time for yourself everyday.

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Self-care

- Assess your trauma inputs.
- Avoid falling into a victim mentality.
- Create transition rituals
- Cherish your family and friendships.
- Attend education and training
- Engage in interests outside of your work.
- Add more movement and nourishment to your life.
- Engage in short term goal-oriented hobbies or sports.

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What Can We Do?

- Help remind our team of their why...and remember our own.
- Celebrate the wins together.
- Encourage our team to practice self-care...and practice it ourselves.
- Check in on our team...and cultivate relationships where others check in on us as well.
- Encourage and support good clinical supervision...and seek out good supervision for ourselves.
- Encourage our teams to seek additional help, if needed...and obtain that help if we need it as well.

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