

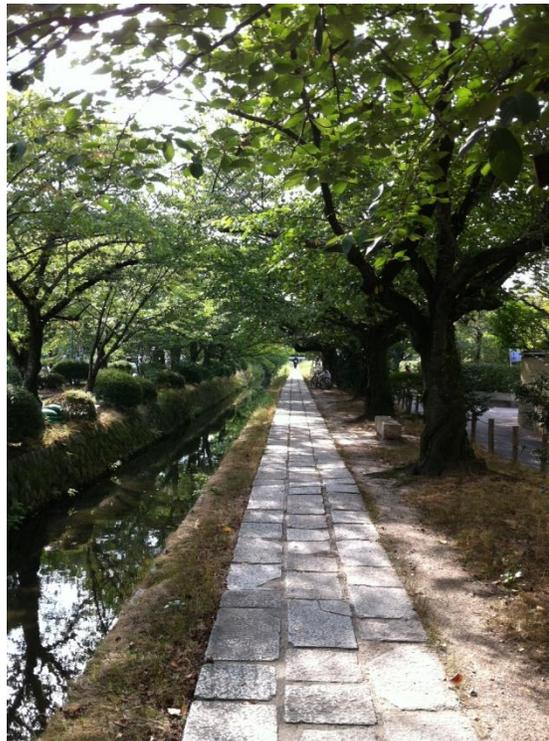


Overcoming Compassion Fatigue

The Prescription for Regaining Energy and Balance

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Understanding and Preventing Compassion Fatigue - A Handout For Professionals

by

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Most of us became counselors because we wanted to assist others in need. Yet our capacity for compassion, along with the intensity of our work can, at times, leave us vulnerable for "compassion fatigue." This is a term that was coined to describe the set of symptoms experienced by caregivers who become so overwhelmed by the exposure to the feelings and experiences of their clients that they themselves experience feelings of fear, pain, and suffering including intrusive thoughts, nightmares, loss of energy, and hypervigilance. It can be cumulative (from the effects helping many clients) or occur in response to a particularly challenging or traumatic individual case. This extreme state of anxiety and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped becomes traumatizing for the helper. For this reason it is sometimes called "vicarious traumatization" or "secondary traumatization"(Figley, 1995).

Who is at risk?

While our training, professionalism, and good boundaries within our helping roles are protective, really anyone with the capacity for true compassion, empathy, concern and caring is vulnerable to compassion fatigue. In other words, the greatest strength that you have to bring to your occupation- your capacity to develop a compassionate connection with your clients-is also your greatest vulnerability. Therefore, it is not a characteristic that you would choose to give up, rather it is more logical to educate yourself so you understand compassion fatigue and know what you can do if you begin experiencing symptoms. Realize that the more prolonged exposure to traumatic events you experience (working too long of hours), the more personal life demands you have, and the more isolated you become from others collectively increase your vulnerability for compassion fatigue.

Warning signs and symptoms

The symptoms of [compassion fatigue](#) are similar to those of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, only instead of the symptoms being based upon a trauma that you directly experienced, they are due to the trauma that your client(s) have experienced. Additionally, there is a cynical, discouraged or hopeless attitude about your work or your career that begins to set in. Paradoxically, you may find it difficult to leave your work at the end of the day. You may have thoughts that preoccupy you about a particular case. Being aware of what these symptoms mean and how they are affecting you is important. You can evaluate yourself with an excellent self-assessment tool that can be found at:

http://www.proqol.org/ProQOL_Test_Manuals.html. While this checklist is more comprehensive a few of the predominant symptoms of compassion fatigue are listed below:

- Feeling estranged from others (Having difficulty sharing or describing feelings with others)
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- Outbursts of anger or irritability with little provocation.
- Startling easily
- While working with a victim thinking about violence or retribution against the person or persons who victimized.
- Flashbacks connected to my clients and families.
- Needing closer friends.-feeling there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.
- Working too hard for your own good.
- Frightened of things traumatized people and their family have said or done to me.
- Experience troubling dreams similar to a client of mine and their family.
- Experienced intrusive thoughts of sessions with especially difficult clients and their families.
- Suddenly and involuntarily recalled a frightening experience while working with a client or their family.
- Preoccupied with a client or their family.
- Losing sleep over a client and their family's traumatic experiences.
- Felt trapped by my work as a helper.
- Felt a sense of hopelessness associated with working with clients and their families.
- Have felt weak, tired, and rundown as a result of my work as a helper.
- Have felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
- unsuccessful at separating work from personal life.
- Feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers
- Thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
- Feel I am working more for the money than for personal fulfillment.
- Find it difficult separating my personal life from my work life.
- A sense of worthlessness/disillusionment/resentment associated with my work.

Prevention, Resiliency and Treatment

Early recognition and awareness is crucial in being able to be resilient to [compassion fatigue](#). Compassion fatigue is treatable! Keeping your life in balance or getting it back in balance, by taking some time off work, or enhancing your self-care are critical techniques. Keeping your body and your health in good shape is essential. You are not going to be resilient if you are not well rested. You may need medical attention if the symptoms of compassion fatigue, such as sleep disturbance, start interfering with your ability to function. If you are eating poorly and not exercising you are more vulnerable physically and emotionally to the effects of distress. Therefore, keeping a healthy balance in your life is a requirement to prevent and treat compassion fatigue. Caregivers that have a structured

schedule that allow them time to organize and do good self-care are more resilient (Panos, 2007).

Another essential factor to prevent and treat compassion fatigue is to have some good relationships with colleagues, a supervisor, or a therapist that you can safely and confidentially discuss the distresses you are experiencing. Isolation is a symptom of compassion fatigue and is ultimately dangerous. To be resilient you need to have good support and connections with others.

Many counselors report that creative therapies such as writing in a journal, or expressing their feelings through music or art are helpful. Diversions and recreation that allow you to take mini-escapes from the intensity of your work is absolutely essential- not optional as some may think. Research on resiliency in pediatric healthcare workers show that those that have the ability to "turn their thoughts about work off" are more resilient throughout their career. Sometimes this involves developing a little ritual at the end of the day to transition into your life outside of work, while leaving your cares and stresses in the workplace (Panos, 2007).

What to do if you have symptoms of Compassion Fatigue:

- Have a recognition and awareness of the symptoms of compassion fatigue in yourself.
- Restore a healthy balance in your life, including good sleep, good nutrition and exercise.
- Get medical treatments for those symptoms that are interfering with your daily functioning?
- Utilize your positive supportive connections with others to process your feelings.
- Implement regular mini-escapes in your life, like recreation, creative therapies or other healthy diversions from the intensity of your work.
- Don't medicate yourself with drugs or alcohol! Don't use other self-defeating addictions! Get professional help for yourself if needed to get back on track.

Conclusion

Unrecognized and untreated compassion fatigue causes people to leave their profession, fall into the throws of addictions or in extreme cases become self-destructive or suicide. It is important that we all understand this phenomenon for our own well-being, but also for our colleagues. If you notice a colleague in distress- reaches out to them. Give them this article and let them know you care and are available to talk if they need.

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Websites with information or resources on Compassion Fatigue

Gift From Within-PTSD Resources- www.giftfromwithin.org

DVD When Helping Hurts: Preventing & Treating Compassion Fatigue-
<http://www.giftfromwithin.org/html/video4.html#4b>

http://www.proqol.org/ProQOL_Test_Manuals.html.

Green Cross Foundation. www.greencross.org

References and Suggested Reading:

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[Preventing Compassion Fatigue: Power Point Presentation](#) by Dr. Angie Panos

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Measuring Life Stress

Today's score: _____

Interpretation:

_____ 37% chance of a minor illness in the next two years

_____ 51% chance of developing a major illness in the next two years

_____ 79% chance of a major health breakdown in the next two years

Questions to Consider:

Does your score seem to accurately reflect the level of stress in your life as you see it? Why or why not?

What does your perception of life events have to do with the effects of stress on you?

Does your current level of stress care enhance your stress resiliency or leave you vulnerable?



How Vulnerable Are You to Stress?

Today's score: _____

Interpretation:

_____ Excellent Resistance to stress

_____ Some Vulnerability to stress

_____ Serious Vulnerability to stress

Self Care Plan:

List items on which you scored three or higher:

- Notice that nearly all of the items describe situations and behaviors over which you have a great deal of control.
- List those items in your self-care plan.
- Concentrate first on those that are easiest to change- for example, eating a hot, balanced meal daily and having fun at least once a week- before tackling those items that seem difficult.

www.stressreductions.com



Satisfaction with Life

Directions

- Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree
- Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by place the appropriate number in the line preceding that item.
- Please be open and honest in your responses.

Scale

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- _____ 1. In most way my life is close to my ideal.
- _____ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- _____ 3. I am satisfied with life.
- _____ 4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- _____ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.
- _____ **TOTAL (Add items 1 through 5)**

35-32	26-31	21-25	20	15-19	14-Oct	9-May
Extremely Satisfied	Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Neutral	Slightly Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied

Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larson, R.J., & Griffin, S. (1985) The satisfied with life scale. Journal of Personality Assessment, 49, 71-75.

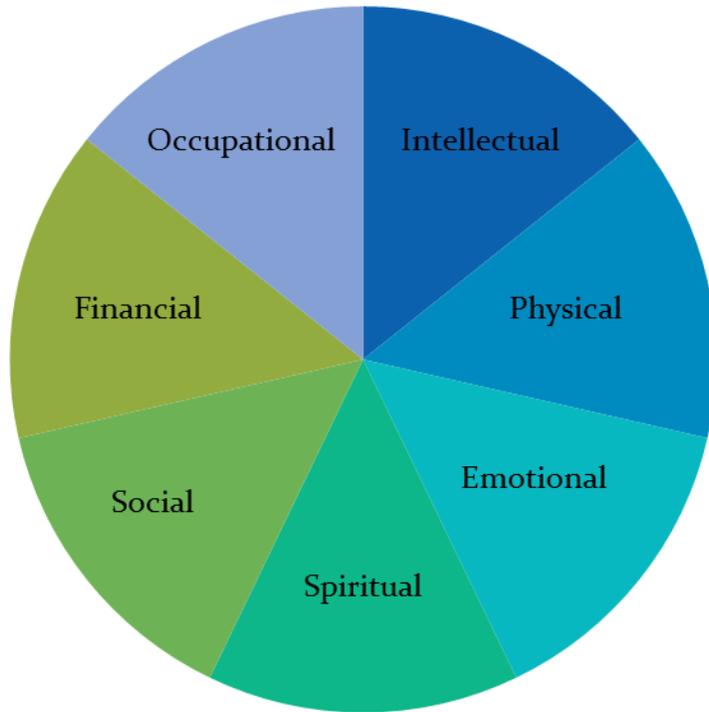
Checking Your Basic Needs @ Work *

* Adapted from Life Makeovers ©(2000) by Cheryl Richardson.

Self-Care @ Work	Yes	No	Comments/Reflections
Do I take a lunch break every day and do something unrelated to work?			
Do I work reasonable hours?			
Do I schedule "breathing room" every day so I can step back and reevaluate my priorities?			
Is my office free of clutter?			
Do I have adequate lighting and clean air?			
Do I delegate work to free my time and empower others?			
Do my family/friends honor my work time? If no, have I asked them?			
Do I have blocks of interrupted time without distractions and interruptions?			
Do I have a DO NOT DISTURB sign?			
Have I scheduled specific times for returning phone calls and checking emails?			
Do I drink enough water when I am at work?			
Do I have comfortable shoes/slippers at my office?			
Do I schedule time off from work (sick leave and/or vacation time) to take care of myself?			
Do I have someone to talk to about my professional life?			
Do I have creature comforts that make my office pleasant? (music and other sounds, aroma,			
Do I say yes to commitments that I later regret?			

* Adapted from Life Makeovers© (2000) by Cheryl Richardson.

Wellness Wheel



Intellectual Wellness

Engaging in creative and stimulating mental activities to expand knowledge and skills

Am I engaged in the process of intellectual wellness?

Am I open to new ideas?

Do I seek personal growth by learning new skills?

Do I search for lifelong learning opportunities and stimulating mental activities?

Do I look for ways to use creativity?

Physical Wellness

Developing healthy activities to take care of your body

Am I engaged in the process of physical wellness?

Do I know important health numbers, like my cholesterol, weight, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels?

Do I get annual physical exams?

Do I avoid using tobacco products?

Do I get sufficient amount of sleep?

Do I have an established exercise routine?



Emotional Wellness

Taking care of yourself and developing ways to enhance your inner resources

Am I engaged in the process of emotional wellness?

Am I able to maintain a balance of work, family, friends, and other obligations?

Do I have ways to reduce stress in my life?

Am I able to make decisions with a minimum of stress and worry?

Am I able to set priorities?

Spiritual Wellness

Ability to establish peace and harmony, and having a sense of purpose in our lives

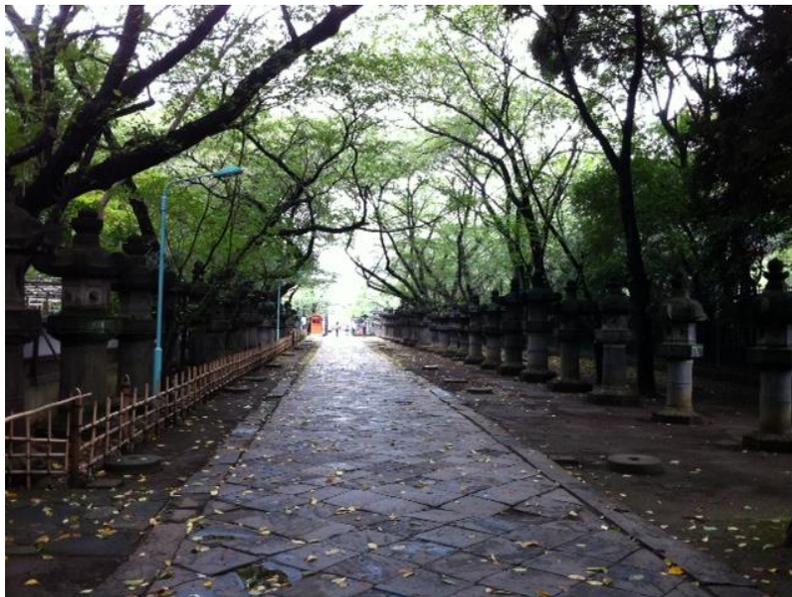
Am I engaged in the process of spiritual wellness?

Do I make time for relaxation in my day?

Do I make time for meditation and/or prayer?

Do my values guide my decisions and actions?

Am I accepting of the views of others?



Social Wellness

Developing healthy relationships with those around you

Am I engaged in the process of social wellness?

Do I plan time to be with my family and friends?

Do I enjoy the time I spend with others?

Are my relationships with others positive and rewarding?

Do I explore diversity by interacting with people of other cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs?

Financial Wellness

Maintaining a balanced budget for expenses while also practicing money-saving techniques

Am I engaged in the process of Financial Wellness?

Do I have a balanced budget that manages both income and expenditures?

Do I make good consumer choices?

Do I focus on saving money instead of spending money?

Do I have a plan and am I prepared to deal with all expenses (living, short-term, long-term, emergencies)?



Occupational Wellness

Ability to gain personal fulfillment from a job while maintaining balance in all other areas of life

Are you engaged in the process of Occupational Wellness?

Do I enjoy going to work most days?

Do I have a manageable workload at work?

Do I feel that I can talk to my boss and co-workers with problems arise?

Setting Your Personal SMART Goals

Specific -- Measurable -- Attainable -- Realistic -- Time-Based

GOALS

Example: I will eat a balanced breakfast no later than 10 a.m. each day for the next week.

List three **PERSONAL** goals here:

1.

2.

3.

RESOURCES

Identify the resources available to you for the implementation of your personal self-care goals.

Example: Cafeteria in building where I work.

SUPPORT

Identify the loved one/friend to whom you will turned for support in the implementation of your personal self-care goals.

Tying it all together

Using your answers from the Inventories and knowledge gained from the wellness wheel, identify the things you do well (strengths), the areas where you can improve (weaknesses), the tools you can use to improve (opportunities) and lastly list the reactions to stress that you exhibit or want to avoid (threats).

The diagram consists of four rounded rectangular boxes arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each box is connected to the others by a central diamond-shaped line. The boxes are labeled as follows:

- Top-left box: **Strengths**
- Top-right box: **Weaknesses**
- Bottom-left box: **Opportunities**
- Bottom-right box: **Threats**

Table 1: Caregiver Reactions

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Diminished concentration •Confusion •Spaciness •Loss of meaning •Decreased self-esteem •Preoccupation with trauma •Trauma imagery •Apathy •Rigidity •Disorientation •Whirling thoughts •Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others •Self - doubt •Perfection •Minimization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Powerlessness •Anxiety •Guilt •Anger/Rage •Survivor guilt •Shutdown •Numbness •Fear •Helplessness •Sadness •Depression •Hypersensitivity •Emotional roller coaster •Overwhelmed •Depleted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clingy •Impatient •Irritable •Withdrawn •Moody •Regression •Sleep Disturbances •Appetite changes •Nightmares •Hypervigilance •Elevated startle response •Use of negative coping (smoking, alcohol, or other substances) •Accident proneness •Losing things •Self harm behaviors

Spiritual	Interpersonal	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Questioning the meaning of life •Loss of purpose •Lack of self-satisfaction •Pervasive hopelessness •Ennui •Anger at God •Questioning of prior religious beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Withdrawn •Decreased interest in intimacy or sex •Mistrust •Isolation from friends •Impact on parenting (protectiveness, concern about aggression) •Projection of anger or blame •Intolerance •Loneliness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Shock •Sweating •Rapid heartbeat •Breathing difficulties •Aches and pains •Dizziness •Impaired immune system

Impact on Professional Functioning

Performance of Job Tasks	Morale	Interpersonal	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Decrease in quality •Decrease in quantity •Low motivation •Avoidance of job tasks •Increase in mistakes •Setting perfectionist standards •Obsession about details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Decrease in confidence •Loss of interest •Dissatisfaction •Negative attitude •Apathy •Demoralization •Lack of appreciation •Detachment •Feelings of incompleteness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Withdrawal from colleagues •Impatience •Decrease in quality of relationship •Poor Communication •Subsume own needs •Staff conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Absenteeism •Exhaustion •Faulty judgment •Irritability •Tardiness •Irresponsibility •Overwork •Frequent job changes

Table 2: Healthy Coping Strategies

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Moderation •Write down things •Make small, daily decisions •See the decisions you are already making •Give yourself permission to ask for help •Plan for the future •Get the most information you can to help make decisions •Anticipate needs •Remember you have options •Review previous successes •Problem solve •Have a Plan "B" •Break large tasks into smaller ones •Practice, Practice, Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Moderation •Allow yourself to experience what you feel •Label what you are experiencing •Give yourself permission to ask for help •Be assertive when necessary •Keep communication open with others •Use your sense of humor •Have a buddy with whom you can vent •Use "positive" words and language •Practice, Practice, Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Moderation •Spend time with yourself •Spend time with others •Limit demands on time and energy Help others with tasks •Give yourself permission to ask for help •Do activities that you previously enjoyed •Take different routes to work or on trips •Remember you have options •Find new activities that are enjoyable and (mildly) challenging •Set goals, have a plan •Relax •Practice, Practice, Practice
Spiritual	Interpersonal	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Moderation •Discuss changed beliefs with spiritual leader •Meditation •Give yourself permission to ask for help •Practice ritual of your faith/beliefs •Spiritual retreats/workshops •Prayer •Remember you have options •Mindfulness •Find spiritual support •Read spiritual literature •Practice, Practice, Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Moderation •Give yourself permission to ask for help •Take time to enjoy time with trust friend/partner •Hugs •Healthy boundaries •Remember the "I" statements •Use humor to diffuse tense conversations •Play together •Talk with trusted partner/friend •Apologize when stress causes irritable behavior or outbursts •State needs and wants as clearly as possible •Practice, Practice, Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Moderation •Aerobic exercise •See doctor and dentist •Routine sleep patterns •Minimize caffeine, alcohol, and sugar •Give yourself permission to ask for help •Eat well-balanced, regular meals •Drink water •Wear comfortable clothes •Engage in physical luxuries: spa, massage, bath, exercise trainer •Remember to breathe - deeply •Take mini-breaks •Practice, Practice, Practice

Resources

Intellectual Wellness

ULEARN

On intranet under: Quick Links/ULearn

Contact: Randi McKinney 682-885-2577 or Randi.McKinney@cookchildrens.org

Individualized Coaching

Contact: Randi McKinney 682-885-2577

Tuition Assistance

Intranet under: Employee/Human Resources/Tuition

Contact: Jill Suda 682-885-1348

Management Enrichment

Management courses provide the necessary skills to manage and understand Cook Children's supervisory tactical and organizational procedures, policies and processes. For questions concerning online and instructor-led management courses, contact Elaina Rowe at 682-885-8093.

Physical Wellness

Healthy Me

On Intranet under: Resources/Healthy Me

Contact: Jennifer Crowther 682-885-4968

Medical

On Intranet under: Resources/Human Resources/Benefits

Contact: Janine Airhart 682-885-7539

Emotional Wellness

EAP

Call 1-866-219-1232 24/7 access. Or go online to www.eapwl.com

Username: cook password: cook

Yoga

Monday/Wednesday 3:30 p.m. in Medical Center (PAV Classrooms)

Monday/Wednesday/Thursday 5:30pm in ROB

Contact: Jennifer Crowther 682-885-4968

Mindful Meditation

Tuesday's/Thursday's at 12:00pm in 901 building

Tuesday's 3:00pm in 901 building

Contact: Jennifer Crowther 682-885-4968

Spiritual Wellness

Pastoral Care

On Intranet under: Resources/Pastoral Care

Contact: 682-885-4030

Financial Wellness**Retirement**

Customer Service #: 1-800-343-0860

Website: www.401k.com

Monthly Informational session calendar located on Intranet under: Resources/Human Resources/Benefits/Fidelity

Flexible Spending Accounts

Resources/Human Resources/Benefits/Fidelity

Customer Service #: 1-800-422-4661 Website: www.tasconline.com

Employee Concierge/Discounts

Cooknet/Departments/Concierge and Travel Services for a list of all different offerings.

Phone: 682-885-2849

Email us at: concierge1.services@cookchildrens.org or travel.services@cookchildrens.org

Fitness Discounts: on Intranet under: Resources/Healthy Me/Fitness Center discounts

Occupational Wellness**PTO**

Policy on intranet under: Departments /Health Care System/Payroll/PTO