

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion Fatigue is characterized by deep emotional and physical exhaustion, symptoms resembling depression and PTSD and by a shift in the helper's sense of hope and optimism about the future and the value of their work.

Negative consequences in your personal can include: *Difficulty concentrating, Intrusive imagery, Loss of hope, Exhaustion, Irritability, Developing a negative world view.*

Negative consequences at work can include: *Becoming dispirited and increasingly cynical, Making clinical errors, Violating client boundaries, Losing respect toward clients.*

The best strategy to address compassion fatigue is to develop excellent self-care Strategies, which can include:

1. Take Stock-What's on your plate?

Create a detailed list of all the demands on your time and energy (*Work, Family, Home, Health, Volunteering, other*).

Once you have the list, take a look at it to determine the following:

- What stands out?
- What factors contribute to making your plate too full?
- What would you like to change most?

Brainstorm with someone to identify strategies as to how to better manage your time and the demands you have.

2. Start a Self-Care Idea Collection

With friends: *Brainstorm to create a list of self-care ideas with friends. Challenge yourself to try something new.*

At work: *Try one of the following self-care tips:*

- Start a "best self-care idea of the week" contest
- Have a "self-care board" where people post their favorite ideas
- Implement a "5 minutes of self-care" at each staff meeting, where someone is in charge of bringing a new self-care idea each week

3. Find time for yourself every day – Rebalance your workload

Think of simple ways to take mini breaks during a work day, such as:

- Bring your favorite coffee cup to work
- At lunch close your door (if you have a door) and listen to 10 minutes of your favorite music
- Take a nap on a yoga mat at work during your lunch break
- Revise your workload so that you don't have to complete the most challenging tasks all in a row

Other simple suggestions at home can include:

- Taking a 30 minute bath with no one bothering you
- Going out to a movie
- Taking 10 minutes during a quiet time to sit and relax

4. Delegate - learn to ask for help at home and at work

Are there things that you are willing to let go of and let others do their own way? Consider holding a regular family meeting to review the workload and discuss new options. Do the same at work with colleagues.

SOURCE: compassionfatigue.ca

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5. Have a transition from work to home

The best strategies involved a transition ritual of some kind, such as:

- Listen to your favorite music and sing out loud on your long commute home
- Put on cozy clothes when you get home and put your work clothes “away” as in putting the day away as well
- Have a 10 minute quiet period to shift gears
- Go for a run
- When you get home from work, instead of going into the house straight away, stay outside for an extra 10 minutes to take in the natural surroundings

6. Learn to say no (or yes) more often

If you take on a lot of tasks, such as being involved in work committees or volunteering this can be very emotionally draining. For many helpers saying no is fraught with self-esteem and other personal issues and triggers. If you are not good at setting limits, explore the underlying reasons.

Try to identify one thing you could do to say no a bit more often. Conversely, maybe you need to stop saying yes to all requests, because you are feeling so depleted and burned down, feel resentful and taken for granted. Do you need to learn to say no or yes more often?

7. Assess your Trauma Inputs

Take a trauma input survey of a typical day in your life. Answer the following questions:

- Do you work with clients who have experienced trauma?
- Do you read about, see photos of, and are generally exposed to difficult stories and images at home or at work?
- At your work how many difficult stories do you hear, whether it be in a case conference, debriefing a colleague or reading files?

It is important to recognize the amount of trauma information that we unconsciously absorb during the course of a day. There is a lot of extra trauma input outside of client work that we do not necessarily need to absorb or to hear about.

8. Learn more about Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma

Learn more about CF and VT, including ways to recognize the signs and symptoms and strategies to address the problem by attending a workshop or read more on the topic.

9. Consider Joining a Supervision/Peer Support Group

Not all places of work offer the opportunity for peer support. You can organize such a group on your own (whether it be face to face meetings or via email or phone).

10. Attend Workshops/Professional Training Regularly

Researchers in the field of CF and VT have identified that attending regular professional training is one of the best ways for helpers to stay renewed and healthy.

11. Consider working part time (at this type of job)

Studies have shown that one of the best protective factors against Compassion Fatigue is to work part time or see clients on a part time basis and to have other duties the rest of the time.

12. Exercise

The key to actually increasing physical exercise is to be realistic in the goals we set out for ourselves. If you don't exercise at all, aiming to walk around the block twice a week is a realistic goal, running a 10km run in two weeks is not. You may not notice it right away, but making one small change to your daily routine can have tremendous results in the long term.

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