



## The ABC's of Compassion Fatigue

In a world in which we are all striving to live as our most mindful and compassionate selves; where we are encouraged to reach out to others we recognise may be suffering from mental and emotional distress; teamed with the barrage of tragedy and devastation being brought into our personal worlds through television and social media; compassion fatigue is no longer something only health professionals can experience.

With symptoms similar to that of Burnout, Compassion Fatigue has been defined as the emotional residue of exposure to working with those suffering from the effects of traumatic events. What this means is that those who regularly find themselves an empathic listener to the traumatic stories and suffering of clients', friends or family members have the potential to experience compassion fatigue. The result of this is that you may find yourself becoming numb and disconnected to the suffering of others.

So while we strive to help others, it is important to also be aware of how this may have an impact on our own health.

The first step in knowing how to avoid or manage Compassion Fatigue is of course Awareness.

### Awareness

**Signs of compassion fatigue include:**

- Feeling burdened by the suffering of others
- Blaming others for their suffering
- Isolating yourself
- Loss of pleasure in life
- Difficulty concentrating
- Insomnia
- Physical and mental fatigue
- Bottling up your emotions
- Increased nightmares
- Feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness
- Frequent complaining about your work or your life
- Overeating
- Excessive use of drugs or alcohol
- Poor self-care
- Beginning to receive a lot of complaints about your work or attitude
- Denial

### Balance

**Keep Balance in Your Life**

- Practice excellent self-care
- Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion
- Allow yourself to take mini-escapes- these relieve the intensity of your work

- Transform the negative impact of your helping others (find meaning, challenge negativity, find gratitude)
- Get professional help when needed to get back on track- we all need coaches and consultants at times
- It's okay to say No. If you are finding yourself overwhelmed, it may be necessary to not be that empathetic listener sometimes

- What made you laugh today? (Share it!)

## Connections

Talk out your stress- process, your thoughts and reactions with someone else (co-worker, therapist, clergy, friend, family, supervisor). Let someone be the empathic listener for you!

Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress.

A great reducer of stress can be pets. Pets accept whatever affection you are able to give them without asking for more— Pets are basically invulnerable to “provider burnout”

Sources:

The American Institute of Stress. 2017. *Compassion Fatigue*. (ONLINE) Available at: <https://www.stress.org>. (Accessed 25 July 2017).

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*To learn more about Suicide and how you could help in the fight against suicide, contact TALK SUICIDE Support Service on 1800 008 255 to discuss tailoring a training package to suit your needs.*

TALK SUICIDE Support Service is an initiative of Suicide Prevention Pathways Inc. (SPP) offering programs that educate, raise awareness and above all provide emotional and practical support to those at risk of suicide and their family and friends. For more information visit [spp.org.au](http://spp.org.au) or call us on 1800 008 255.

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### Find Your Passion

- We all have hidden sources of energy and healing power.
- When you identify the things that fuel you, the things that you have true passion for, your fatigue will disappear.
- Balancing your life involves putting the things that we value and have passion for in our schedule.

### Balance for Your Soul

- Have quiet alone time in a calm, beautiful place- a safe retreat where you feel renewed
- Have an awareness of what restores and replenishes you.
- Find ways to acknowledge loss and grief
- Stay clear with commitment to career goals or your personal mission
- Know how to focus on what you can control
- Look at situations as entertaining challenges and opportunities, not problems or stresses

### Balancing Activity

- List one mini-escape or diversion that worked well to restore and renew you
- List one thing that brings you joy
- Name 3 things you feel grateful for today
- Think of something that has brought you a sense of joy (Make your top ten list)
- Who do you love that you can reach out to today? (Call them!)