

COMPASSION FATIGUE: ...the state of being exhausted and dysfunctional (emotionally, sexually, biologically, spiritually, and relationally) as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress. We become exhausted by the exposure to experience after experience of emotionally draining people who look to or depend upon us for help.

Are you Caring or Caretaking?

- Is it easier for you to give than to receive?
- Do you give to the point of taking on people's problems?
- Do you often go above and beyond what is expected of you?
- Is it challenging for you to set limits and say "no"?
- Are you so focused on everyone else's problems that you overlook your needs and feel depleted?

Making sure you monitor your compassion fatigue.(my dad with the railroad stations on alternate sides of the track or the story of the pilot with his radar gain turned up)

Authentic Self Care Begins With the Following:

1. Self-care vs. selfish.
2. Be Kind to yourself. Allow yourself to put the oxygen mask on first.
3. Exchange information and feelings with people who can VALIDATE you!!!
4. Establish SAFE friendships
5. Listen to others who are suffering from compassion fatigue.
6. Clarify your personal boundaries.
7. Ask for what you need. Express yourself verbally.
8. Take action. Make a plan. What three oxygen masks are you going to use this week?

Self-Care: An Assessment

Consider the following 40 statements below, filling in the blanks that follow with the number that best corresponds with your life at this time.

Responses: 1 = Very True 2 = Somewhat True 3 = Rarely True

1. When people get upset, I try to smooth things out. ____
2. I am able to listen to other's problems without trying to "fix" them and/or take away their pain. ____
3. My self-worth is determined by how others perceive me. ____
4. When I am exposed to conflict, I feel it is my fault. ____
5. I feel guilty when others are disappointed by my actions. ____
6. When I make a mistake, I tend to be extremely critical of myself: I have difficulty forgiving myself. ____
7. I usually know how I want other people to treat me. ____
8. I tell people how I prefer to be treated. ____
9. My achievements define my self-worth. ____
10. I feel anxious in most situations involving confrontation. ____
11. In relationships, it is easier for me to "give" that to "receive". ____
12. I can be so focused on someone I am helping that I lose sight of my own perceptions, interests and desires. ____
13. It is hard for me to express sadness. ____
14. To make mistakes means that I am weak. ____
15. It is best to not "rock the boat" or "make waves". ____
16. It is important to put people at ease. ____
17. It is best not to need others. ____
18. If I cannot solve a problem, I feel like a failure. ____
19. I often feel "used up" at the end of the day. ____
20. I take work home frequently. ____
21. I can ask for help but only if the situation is serious. ____

22. I am willing to sacrifice my needs in order to please others. ____
23. When faced with uncertainty, I feel that things will get totally out of control. ____
24. I am uncomfortable when others do not see me as being strong and self-sufficient. ____
25. In intimate relationships, I am drawn to people who are needy or need me. ____
26. I have difficulty expressing my differing opinion in the face of an opposing viewpoint. ____
27. When I say "no", I feel guilty. ____
28. When others distance from me, I feel anxious. ____
29. When listening to someone's problems, I am more aware of their feelings than I am of my own feelings. ____
30. I find it difficult to stand up for myself and express my feelings when someone treats me in an insensitive manner. ____
31. I feel anxious when I am not busy. ____
32. I believe that expressing resentments is wrong. ____
33. I am more comfortable giving than receiving. ____
34. I become anxious when I think I've disappointed someone. ____
35. Work dominates much of my life. ____
36. I seem to be working harder and accomplishing less. ____
37. I feel most worthwhile and alive in crisis situations. ____
38. I have difficulty saying "no" and setting limits. ____
39. My interests and values reflect what others expect of me rather than my own interests and values. ____
40. People rely on me for support. ____

It is important for you to periodically review your self-care, along with your needs and action plans to meet those needs.

If you find that you responded with a 1 (Very True) to more than 15 of these items, it's definitely time to take a close and careful look at self-care issues.

This self-test is not intended to provide medical advice or diagnosis. Consult a physician or mental health professional if you think you might be suffering from Compassion Fatigue.

Consider each of the following characteristics about you and your current situation. Write in the number for the best response. Use one of the following answers.

1= Rarely/Never

2= At Times

3= Not Sure

4= Often

5= Very Often

1. I force myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
2. I find myself avoiding certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
3. I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
4. I feel estranged from others.
5. I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.
6. I have outbursts of anger or irritability with little provocation.
7. I startle easily.
8. While working with a victim I thought about violence against the person or persons who victimized.
9. I am a sensitive person.
10. I have had flashbacks connected to my clients and families.
11. I have had first-hand experience with traumatic events in my adult life.
12. I have had first-hand experience with traumatic events in my childhood.

13. I have thought that I need to "work-through" a traumatic experience in my life.

14. I have thought that I need more close friends.

15. I have thought that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.

16. I have concluded that I work too hard for my own good.

Items about your clients and their families:

17. I am frightened of things traumatized people and their family have said or done to me.

18. I experience troubling dreams similar to a client of mine and their family.

19. I have experienced intrusive thoughts of sessions with especially difficult clients and their families.

20. I have suddenly and involuntarily recalled a frightening experience while working with a client or their family.

21. I am preoccupied with more than one client and their family.

22. I am losing sleep over a client and their family's traumatic experiences.

23. I have thought that I might have been "infected" by the traumatic stress of my clients and their families.

24. I remind myself to be less concerned about the well-being of my clients and their families.

25. I have felt trapped by my work as a helper.

26. I have felt a sense of hopelessness associated with working with clients and their families.

27. I have felt "on edge" about various things and I attribute this to working with certain clients and their families.

28. I have wished that I could avoid working with some clients and their families.

29. I have been in danger working with some clients and their families.

30. I have felt that some of my clients and their families dislike me personally.

Items about being a helper and your work environment:

31. I have felt weak, tired, rundown as a result of my work as a helper.

32. I have felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.

33. I am unsuccessful at separating work from personal life.

34. I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers.

35. I feel I am working more for the money than for personal fulfillment.

36. I find it difficult separating my personal life from my work life.

37. I have a sense of worthlessness/disillusionment/resentment associated with my work.

38. I have thoughts that I am a "failure" as a helper.

39. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.

40. I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work life.

SCORING INSTRUCTIONS

Make sure you have responded to ALL questions.

Next, circle the following 23 items: 1-8, 10-13, 17-26 and number 29.

Now ADD the numbers you wrote next to the items circled.

Note your risk of Compassion Fatigue

26 or LESS = Extremely LOW risk

27 to 30 = LOW risk

31 to 35 = Moderate risk

36 to 40 = HIGH risk

41 or more = Extremely HIGH risk

To determine your risk of **Burnout**, ADD the numbers you wrote next to the items NOT circled.

Note your risk of Burnout

19 or less = Extremely LOW risk

20 to 24 = LOW risk

25 to 29 = Moderate risk

30 to 42 = High risk
43 or more = Extremely high risk

Overcoming Compassion Fatigue

You're drained, tapped out, have little energy to give others. We've all been there. Usually, after a little break we revive and step back up to the plate. What happens,

however, when these feelings don't pass - going beyond fatigue and turning into something much worse, like apathy? This could spell trouble for those caring for an elderly parent or sick child, or for health care professionals rendering care to others. In this interview, one of the nation's leading medical experts talks about compassion fatigue, a condition that plagues many individuals working in and out of the home. What actions can you take to prevent this serious occupational health hazard and risk to caregivers in general?

Q: What is compassion fatigue?

A: This term has replaced the more familiar term "burn-out." It refers to a physical, emotional and spiritual fatigue or exhaustion that takes over a person and causes a decline in his or her ability to experience joy or to feel and care for others. Compassion fatigue is a one-way street, in which individuals are giving out a great deal of energy and compassion to others over a period of time, yet aren't able to get enough back to reassure themselves that the world is a hopeful place. It's this constant outputting of compassion and caring over time that can lead to these feelings.

Q: What causes it?

A: Compassion fatigue comes from a variety of sources. Although it often affects those working in care-giving professions - nurses, physicians, mental health workers and clergymen - it can affect people in any kind of situation or setting where they're doing a great deal of caregiving and expending emotional and physical energy day in and day out.

Q: Who is most at risk of developing compassion fatigue?

A: Although those in the health care and mental health professions are most at risk of developing these feelings, it is not limited to these arenas. It affects those who don't work outside the home as severely as those who do. Take someone who is actively engaged in taking care of a family member, especially during a crisis period when there is a higher need to give out feelings of compassion and sensitivity. If the crisis doesn't pass quickly and the individual continues functioning at this level, he is just as susceptible to compassion fatigue over time as those in high-risk professions.

Q: What are some telltale signs of compassion fatigue?

A: First, you should understand that it's a process. It's not a matter of one day, you're living your life with a great deal of energy and enjoyment, and the next, you wake up exhausted and devoid of any energy - both physical and emotional. Compassion fatigue develops over time - taking weeks, sometimes years to surface. Basically, it's a low level, chronic clouding of caring and concern for others in your life - whether you work in or outside the home. Over time, your ability to feel and care for others becomes eroded through overuse of your skills of compassion. You also might experience an emotional blunting - whereby you react to situations differently than one would normally expect.

Q: If you have this condition, what can you do?

A: The most critical need is to acknowledge that you may be experiencing it. All of us have multiple demands and energy drains in our lives - some positive, some negative - which all require a great deal of emotional and physical attention. There are, however, many hands-on things you can do to mitigate the feelings of compassion fatigue. For one, start refocusing on yourself. Before you can tend to and be sensitive to the needs of

others, you have to take care of your own well-being. This can be as simple as getting plenty of rest, becoming more aware of your dietary and recreational habits, and cutting out negative addictions in your life like nicotine, alcohol and caffeine. Remember, the healing process takes time, as does the development of the problem.

Q: What if you're in a high-risk profession and the feelings don't pass? Should you quit your job, request a transfer or take an extended vacation?

A: All of these are options depending on your situation. Sometimes people who witness a lot of trauma as part of their jobs - like law enforcement agents, paramedics and fireman - will opt to choose different lines of work. Even if they recuperate and successfully combat these feelings, they sometimes feel they don't want to begin again the process of exposing their heart and feelings day in and day out. For others, a vacation may do the trick. Vacations are healthy, restorative interventions that can head off negative feelings so that they don't progress beyond the point of no return. Transferring to another unit either temporarily or permanently is another alternative. A job that's more mechanical and less human service-oriented can sometimes give people just the respite they need to regain their balance and their empathy towards others.

Q: Is there anyway to prevent compassion fatigue?

A: Preventing compassion fatigue is really the key. It's much easier to stop it from occurring in the first place than it is to repair things once it sets in. You have to continually practice good emotional health maintenance along the way and maintain some sort of balance in your life. There has to be a portion of your life in which you need to take, rather than give. Beyond practicing fundamental self-care skills, you need to put yourself in situations in which you see the positives in life, for example, attending a field trip with your child where you're truly enjoying the experience, or volunteering where you're able to give and receive. Sometimes, you can't prevent compassion fatigue from occurring. We see this a lot with individuals working in professions with a high degree of human interaction and human service. However, practicing some of these techniques can restore your ability to feel compassion for and sensitivity to the troubles and difficulties of others.

Q: If you're in a health care profession, could you be a danger to your patients if you have compassion fatigue?

A: Maybe yes, if you took the scenario to its extreme; however, this isn't what usually happens. What typically occurs is a numbing of feelings or a distancing and detachment from a patient and his family. It rarely results in a serious medical mistake, but rather prevents the individual from bonding and connecting with those under his care. It's akin to being on auto-pilot in which those affected put up an interior wall to separate their feelings from the tasks they need to do.

Q: What if you're caring for an elderly parent and develop these feelings?

A: You need to seek assistance from others - siblings, relatives, friends and neighbors - to give yourself a breather. You also might rotate duties with a sibling, for example. If you're the one responsible for accompanying your parent to chemotherapy sessions - a highly charged and draining event - you might let your brother or sister do that task for a while you pick up another.

Q: We're all bombarded with bad news everyday just by listening to the news or reading the paper. Can this desensitize us as well and what can we do about it?

A: We live in a world in which the media constantly bombards us with images of poverty and violence, bringing us to a point where we almost shut down because it becomes too emotionally taxing to feel for others. One way to prevent this from happening is to refrain from watching the news or reading the paper for a while. This mild escapism can help prevent your heart strings from being constantly tugged by all the sad things taking place in the world.