

COMPASSION FATIGUE AN OVERVIEW

Working with individuals who have been traumatized takes its toll on caregivers. This workshop will provide opportunities for participants to:

- Understand their own personal response to the work they do
- Develop a personal prevention plan
- Explore strategies to support co-workers as a team

Compassion Fatigue

Defined: *Helpers become exhausted and overwhelmed in their effort to provide support.*



Impact of Compassion Fatigue on Workers and the Workplace can be:

Worker	Worker's Belief System	Workplace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generalized anxiety • numbing • overwhelmed • poor coping • anger • intrusive thoughts • nightmares • irrational fears • addictions • sleep disturbances • intrusive images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of trust, sense of safety • loss of connection with others • despair • cynicism • disillusionment • incapacity for intimacy • poor self-esteem • loss of sense of control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negativity • blaming • hostile environment • feelings of powerlessness

Figley Self-Awareness Exercises

A cautionary note: The scale developed by Charles Figley is extensive and may cause excessive worry if it appears that the rankings are too high. Use the scale with caution and as one of several components of your self-awareness assessment.

Complete the following assessment using the scale:

0 = Never 1 = Rarely 2 = A Few Times

3 = Somewhat Often 4 = Often 5 = Very Often

Items about you

- _____ 1. I am happy.
- _____ 2. I find my life satisfying.
- _____ 3. I have beliefs that sustain me.
- _____ 4. I feel estranged from others.
- _____ 5. I find that I learn new things from those I care for.
- _____ 6. I force myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
- _____ 7. I find myself avoiding certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
- _____ 8. I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
- _____ 9. I feel connected to others.
- _____ 10. I feel calm.
- _____ 11. I believe that I have a good balance between my work and my free time.
- _____ 12. I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- _____ 13. I have outbursts of anger or irritability with little provocation.
- _____ 14. I am the person I always wanted to be.
- _____ 15. I startle easily.
- _____ 16. While working with a victim, I thought about violence against the perpetrator.
- _____ 17. I am a sensitive person.
- _____ 18. I have flashbacks connected to those I help.
- _____ 19. I have good peer support when I need to work through a highly stressful experience.
- _____ 20. I have first-hand experience with traumatic events in my adult life.
- _____ 21. I have first-hand experience with traumatic events in my childhood.
- _____ 22. I think that I need to "work through" a traumatic experience in my life.
- _____ 23. I think that I need more close friends.
- _____ 24. I think that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.
- _____ 25. I have concluded that I work too hard for my own good.
- _____ 26. Working with those I help brings me a great deal of satisfaction.
- _____ 27. I feel invigorated after working with those I help.
- _____ 28. I am frightened of things a person I helped has said or done to me.
- _____ 29. I experience troubling dreams similar to those of the people I help.
- _____ 30. I have happy thoughts about those I help and how I could help them.
- _____ 31. I have experienced intrusive thoughts of times with especially difficult people I help.
- _____ 32. I have suddenly and involuntarily recalled a frightening experience while working with a person I helped.
- _____ 33. I am pre-occupied with more than one person I help.
- _____ 34. I am losing sleep over the traumatic experiences of a person I help.
- _____ 35. I have joyful feelings about how I can help the victims I work with.
- _____ 36. I think that I might have been "infected" by the traumatic stress of those I help.

- _____ 37. I think that I might be positively “inoculated” by the traumatic stress of those I help.
- _____ 38. I remind myself to be less concerned about the well-being of those I help.
- _____ 39. I have felt trapped by my work as a helper.
- _____ 40. I have a sense of hopelessness associated with working with those I help.
- _____ 41. I have felt “on edge” about various things. I attribute this to working with certain people I help.
- _____ 42. I wish that I could avoid working with some people I help.
- _____ 43. Some people I help are particularly enjoyable to work with.
- _____ 44. I have been in danger working with people I help.
- _____ 45. I feel that some people I help dislike me personally.

Items about being a helper and your helping environment

- _____ 46. I like my work as a helper.
- _____ 47. I feel like I have the tools and resources that I need to do my work as a helper.
- _____ 48. I have felt weak, tired and run down as a result of my work as a helper.
- _____ 49. I have felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
- _____ 50. I have thoughts that I am a “success” as a helper.

Appendix 2

- _____ 51. I am unsuccessful at separating helping from personal life.
- _____ 52. I enjoy my co-workers.
- _____ 53. I depend on my co-workers to help me when I need it.
- _____ 54. My co-workers can depend on me for help when they need it.
- _____ 55. I trust my co-workers.
- _____ 56. I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers.
- _____ 57. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping technology.
- _____ 58. I feel I am working more for the money/prestige than for personal fulfillment.
- _____ 59. Although I have to do paperwork that I don’t like, I still have time to work with those I help.
- _____ 60. I find it difficult separating my personal life from my helper life.
- _____ 61. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping techniques and protocols.
- _____ 62. I have a sense of worthlessness/disillusionment/resentment associated with my role as helper.
- _____ 63. I have thoughts that I am a “failure” as a helper.
- _____ 64. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
- _____ 65. I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work as a helper.
- _____ 66. I plan to be a helper for a long time.

Creative Selfishness

What Is It?

Creative selfishness is behavior that allows you to care for yourself without feeling guilty.

Creative selfishness is taking time to live your life with respect for you!

We have all been indoctrinated to be unselfish. Study a woman who practices unselfishness, and you may see a manipulative martyr who tries

to win love and sympathy by practicing “good” behavior. Look at the words: unselfish and selflessness. No self!

Isn't caring for others an important part of life? Yes! But only if you are caring and doing for others because you honestly feel rewarded by it, not because you're telling yourself this is what you are supposed to do to be a “good person.” Caring for others in order to be “good” means living without self-respect, and over time it can lead to compassion fatigue.

Creative selfishness sends a clear message to everyone in your life: I love you (or value you or respect you), but I am a separate person with needs of my own. By practicing creative selfishness, not only will you gain the time to care for yourself, you will also gain the respect of the significant people in your life.

When to Do It:

- If the idea of taking time for yourself is so foreign you needed someone to explain the concept to you.
- When the idea of saying no to someone makes you cringe.
- If you have no idea what a personal boundary is.

Eliminate guilt, Be firm, Define your boundaries, Say no, More help saying the “n” word, Be patient

(Reprinted with permission from *The Women's Comfort Book: A Self-Nurturing Guide for Restoring Balance in Your Life*, by J. Loudon. (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1992.))

Making a Commitment to Yourself

A. Write down three things you could do to address compassion fatigue for each area: professional, organizational and personal.

Professional

1.

2.

3.

Organizational

1.

2.

3.

Personal

1.

2.

3.

B. Next, place a star beside every strategy you could use during the next month.

C. Then, circle one in each category that you will try to do during the next week