

Compassion Fatigue and Mental Health



Compassion fatigue is a very important topic for all of us learn about, as it can affect a great number of people from different walks of life. Compassion fatigue refers to a host of negative or difficult physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of helping other people; especially as a result of experiencing things that are stressful or traumatic (Bhandari, 2022). We all provide some form of support to other people. For those working in education, this can be especially true as we care for, and are responsible for the well-being of so many young people while also caring for our own families, friends, and coworkers. In this newsletter, we hope to provide working definitions for compassion fatigue while also providing concrete advice for how to recognize its signs and steps that can be taken to reduce its impact.

Who is at Risk of Compassion Fatigue?



Some of us may be at elevated risk of compassion fatigue as a result of our profession. This could include therapists, doctors, nurses, first responders, or other service providers. This is likely due to the fact that these positions require a great deal of empathy and position the people doing them to be exposed to situations that can be very upsetting. It is important to remember, however, that anyone can experience compassion fatigue; we all help people in some capacity.



Compassion Fatigue has Many Names!

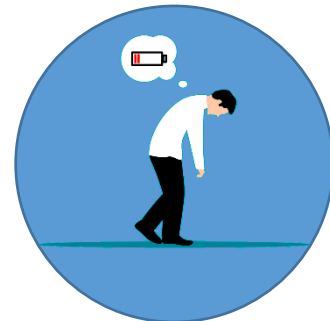
As times have changed, different terms may have been used to describe compassion fatigue, including:

Vicarious
Trauma

Second
Hand
Shock

Secondary
Stress
Reaction

Secondary
Traumatic
Stress



Compassion Fatigue and Catholicity

“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”
(Hebrews 13:16)

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

The bible calls on everyone to be kind, compassionate, and helpful to others. To give charitably and to do good deeds for others. These are very noble aims, and they will bring with them many rewards – but to keep ourselves going, we may need to take steps to stave off compassion fatigue!

Why does Compassion Fatigue Happen?

Doctor Charles E. Figley, the founder of the traumatology institute at Tulane University says that compassion fatigue occurs when we take on the stress and trauma of other people. In addition to this stress that comes with supporting people living through terrible situations, compassion fatigue also has a large burnout component. This occurs when we are overwhelmed by the demands of our work, or life in general, and don't have resources to cope or improve our situation. Working in schools, there are so many demands on our time, attention, and compassion. Classrooms are full of students, all with different needs, and many of the students we are supporting are living through extremely tragic situations. As people who care deeply and are driven to help others, this inevitably weighs on us.



Recognizing the Signs of Compassion Fatigue



Signs that you are experiencing compassion fatigue could include:

- Mood swings
- Increased pessimism
- Social withdrawal
- Substance use
- Depression
- Increased Anxiety
- Reduced productivity
- Sleep disturbance
- Headaches
- Digestion Issues

and more

Steps we can Take to Fight Compassion Fatigue

Make Sleep a Priority

Sleeping is one of the healthiest things our bodies can do. Fight one of the most damaging symptoms of compassion fatigue by getting enough sleep each night!

Make time to Exercise

The research is conclusive. The importance of exercise to our physical and mental health can't be overstated. Any type of exercise can work!

Seek out Health Food

When experiencing compassion fatigue, it can be difficult to plan meals, but efforts to eat healthy, well balanced meals will yield important results to our health.

Integrate Mindfulness

When we experience burnout or compassion fatigue, we feel pulled in too many directions and drained. Mindfulness can help quell some of these feelings.

Stay Hydrated

Keeping yourself hydrated has great benefits to our health and can help stave off compassion fatigue. Make sure you drink enough water through the day!

Get a Massage

Compassion Fatigue can create stiff, sore muscles. Treat yourself and get a massage to help relieve some of this discomfort. You deserve some relaxation!

Unpack Self-Care

Address your own attitudes about self-care. Do you believe in it? Do you believe you deserve it? Don't forget, self-care can be a proactive way to avoid future burnout!

Seek Professional Help

Compassion fatigue can be an unruly beast! It has affected so many people. You do not have to fight the battle alone! Consider meeting with a professional for help.