



# OVERCOMING COMPASSION FATIGUE

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# Welcome

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## Today's Overview

- 1 • Introduction to the concept of Compassion Fatigue among First Responders
- 2 • Identify the symptoms of Compassion Fatigue and its impact on First Responders
- 3 • Self-Compassion as a way of preventing and treating Compassion Fatigue

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# What is Compassion Fatigue?

*"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet" (Remen, 1996).*

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## Compassion Fatigue Defined

- Defined as a state of exhaustion and dysfunction (biologically, psychologically, and socially) as a result of prolonged exposure to secondary trauma or a single intensive event (Figley, 1995).
- Series of psychosocial and emotional factors caused by a specific event or events indirectly affecting helpers.
- Emotional fallout from delivering services to those who were primarily traumatized.
- Compassion Fatigue is often described as the "cost of caring" for others who are experiencing emotional and physical pain (Figley, 1982).
- Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.

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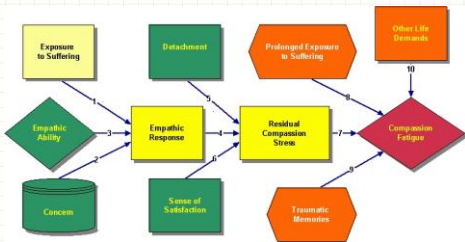
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## Compassion Fatigue Process



The Compassion Fatigue Process (Figley, 2001)

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# Who is affected by Compassion Fatigue?

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## At-Risk Professions

- Law Enforcement
- Fire Department
- EMS
- Healthcare Professionals
  - Doctors, mental health providers, social services, nurses
- Teachers
- Clergy
- Disaster Site Clean-up Crews
- Animal Shelter Staff
- Family Care Givers

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# Symptoms & Impact of Compassion Fatigue

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## Warning Signs and Symptoms

- Symptoms similar to PTSD but from secondary exposure
- Additionally cynical, discouraged or hopeless attitude about work or career
- Paradoxically you find it difficult to leave work at the end of the day
- Have reoccurring thoughts about a particular case

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## Symptoms

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual	Personal Relationships	Physical/Somatic	Work Performance
Lowered concentration Decreased self-esteem Apathy Rigidity Disorientation Perfectionism Minimization Preoccupation with trauma Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others	Powerlessness Anxiety Guilt Anger/rage Survivor guilt Shutdown Numbness Fear Helplessness Sadness Depression Emotional roller coaster Depleted Overly sensitive	Impatient Irritable Withdrawn Moody Regression Sleep disturbance Nightmares Appetite changes Hypervigilant Elevated Startle response Accident proneness Losing things	Questioning the meaning of life Loss of purpose Lack of self satisfaction Pervasive hopelessness Anger at God Questioning of prior religious beliefs Loss of faith in a higher power Greater skepticism about religion	Withdrawal Decreased interest in intimacy or sex Mistrust Isolation from others Over protection as a parent Projection of anger or blame Intolerance Loneliness Increased interpersonal conflicts	Shock Sweating Rapid heartbeat Breathing difficulties Aches and pains Dizziness Increased number and intensity of medical maladies Other somatic complaints Impaired immune system	Low morale Low motivation Avoiding tasks Obsession about details Apathy Negativity Lack of appreciation Detachment Poor work Staff conflicts Absenteeism Exhaustion Irritability Withdrawal from colleagues

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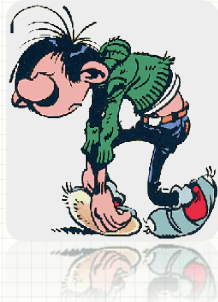
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## Impact

We have not been directly exposed to the trauma scene, but we hear the story told with such intensity, or we hear similar stories so often, or we have the gift and curse of extreme empathy and we suffer. We feel the feelings of our clients. We experience their fears. We dream their dreams. Eventually, we lose a certain spark of optimism, humor and hope. We tire. We aren't sick, but we aren't ourselves."  
- C. Figley, 1995



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## Impact

- Affects many dimensions of your well-being
- Nervous system arousal (Sleep disturbance)
- Emotional intensity increases
- Cognitive ability decreases
- Behavior and judgment impaired
- Isolation and loss of morale
- Depression and PTSD (potentiate)
- Loss of self-worth and emotional modulation
- Identity, worldview, and spirituality impacted
- Beliefs and psychological needs=safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control
- Loss of hope and meaning=existential despair
- Anger toward perpetrators or causal events

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## Difference Between Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

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## Why Not "Burnout"

- Defined as: "Exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration" (Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary)
- Gradually builds to a breaking point and the stress and frustration comes from all types of work-related stressors

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## Burnout

- Usually takes longer
- Compassion Fatigue may be a contributing factor
- Frustrations such as
  - Paper work and “red tape/bureaucratic issues
  - The environment (home and work)
  - Colleagues
  - Pace and or grind of work

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## The Difference?

Ask the Question:

“Do I Love My Job?”

Yes

*Compassion*

*Fatigue*

NO

*Burnout*

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## Who is More Likely to Develop Compassion Fatigue?

- Anyone with the capacity for true compassion, empathy, concern and caring
- We try to stay within professional boundaries and adhere to training guidelines
- But the greatest strength (compassionate connection) is also greatest vulnerability
- Not a characteristic to give up

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## PREVENTION & TREATMENT

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### Prevention



- Early Recognition and Awareness is Key!
- Restore a healthy balance in your life including:
  - Good sleep, good nutrition and exercise
  - Take Time Off From Work (mini-vacations)
  - Enhancing Your Skills by Attending Stress Reduction Courses
- Enhanced Self Care Skills

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### Treatment

- Get medical treatment for those symptoms that are interfering with your daily functioning
- Implement regular mini-escapes in your life, like recreation, creative therapies or other healthy diversion from the intensity of your work
- Don't medicate with drugs or alcohol.

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### Resiliency: The Ability to Keep On Going When the Going Gets Tough

- Must be well rested
- Resiliency sags when you are tired
- Utilize your positive supportive connections to process your feelings
- Take negatives and turn them into positives
- Research shows those who can “turn off thoughts about work” are more resilient during their careers

Resiliency: The Ability to Keep On Going When the Going Gets Tough

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### Stay Resilient

- You need to have good support
- You need to have the ability to talk about it
- Be able to disconnect work and home
- Strong connections with others

Stay Resilient

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### SELF-COMPASSION

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## What is Self-Compassion?

- The ability to show empathy, love, and concern for yourself.
- We are compassionate to others, but sometimes find it difficult to care for ourselves.

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## The Art and Science of Caring for Others without Forgetting Self-Care

- Writing in a journal
- Expressing feelings through music or art
- A “a ritual” at the end of each day to transition into your life outside of work....leaving your cares and stresses in the workplace
- Good relationship with colleague (s) where you can safely and confidentially discuss the issues that are bothering you.

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## Strategies for Exercising Self-Compassion

- Be kind to yourself. Refrain from harsh criticism.
- Give yourself permission to be human, with the potential to fail and make mistakes.
- Believe you are worthy of making you a priority.

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## Take Time to Smell the Roses

**If you are depressed, you are living in the Past. If you are anxious, living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the moment. – Lao Tzu**



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## Conclusion

- Unrecognized and Untreated Compassion Fatigue causes people to
  - Leave Their Professions
  - Self Treat with Drugs or Alcohol
  - Become Suicidal or Self Destructive
- Watch Out for Each Other
- If you see a colleague in distress – Reach Out To Them

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**QUESTIONS?**

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