

Workplace Relationships

Care for the Caregiver: Understanding and Coping with Compassion Fatigue

Working with clients in 'crisis' can have a traumatizing impact. The emotional and personal demands can lead to what is known as compassion fatigue or burnout. And those who engage in this type of work are known as 'Wounded Healers'.

Compassion fatigue can have a huge impact on your physical, mental and emotional health. Learn to recognize the warning signs of compassion fatigue and manage challenges in the workplace, so that you can better your health and wellness.

Spot the signs of compassion fatigue

The following can be signs of a 'Wounded Healer' or an individual suffering with compassion fatigue:

- Depression
- Despair
- Cynicism
- Alienation
- Withdrawal
- Heightened sense of vulnerability
- Emotional symptoms (state of shock and disbelief at trauma situation, mood swings, flooding of anger)
- Psychological symptoms (memory failures, concentration relapses, racing thoughts)
- Physical symptoms (aches and pains, gastro-intestinal malfunctioning, appetite swings, susceptibility to infection)

Caring for the Caregiver

Strategies for coping with compassion fatigue can include:

Shout Shout, Let it all out

- Talk about your feelings with others or make a record of how you feel.
- Talking to those in your immediate support network (family and friends as appropriate), seeking counselling or therapy can help you come to terms with the emotions your experience.
- Even keeping a journal or writing down how you feel can help.

Divert your attention

- Get involved in activities away from the immediate situation.

- Use your 'down time' to occupy your mind in a different way than you do at work. This is important is it will relieve your mind of stress and really exercise your mind in a different way.
- Read a book,
- Enjoy the outdoors,
- Indulge yourself in a new creative hobby like cooking, knitting or crafts.
- You could even join a club.

Also:

- **Let yourself relax – take time for yourself (take a bath, try a yoga class or reading a book)**
- Exercise
- Eat a balanced diet
- Try laughing more—it releases feel-good chemicals more powerful than morphine.

Often families of a 'Wounded Healer' also experience the ripple effect of compassion fatigue, so be sure to assess the impact on loved ones at home too.

Things to consider:

What is your 'normal' family setting like? How do you usually interact with one another? Have you as a 'Wounded Healer' communicated differently with your family, or been more emotional or angry towards family members of late?

Once you have thought about the above you can start to assess if there has been a change or shift in the 'norm' recently and if so, start to communicate to them what you have been going through and how you intend to deal with things differently in the future.

Get to know the warning signs of compassion fatigue. Then, find ways to cope, relax and resolve issues to protect your most important possession—your health and wellness.

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