

The Cost of Caring: How to Combat Compassion Fatigue



Emil Affsa III, LPC, LCADC, CCS
Christine Rehman, LPC, LCADC, ACS

Statewide TASC Coordinators – New Jersey
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Agenda

1. Learn the difference between compassion fatigue and burnout and understand how trauma and vicarious trauma can affect daily functioning.
2. Notice the signs of burnout in yourself and others.
3. Understand the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth.
4. Learn how to incorporate self-care techniques into your daily schedule.

Objectives #1 & # 2

1) Learn the difference between compassion fatigue and burnout and understand how trauma and vicarious trauma can affect daily functioning.

2) Notice the signs of burnout in yourself and others.

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How many
people
have you
helped?

In one sentence:

What brought you to the helping profession?

Burn out

Symptoms of Burnout:

- **Exhaustion:** People affected feel drained and emotionally exhausted, unable to cope, tired and down, and don't have enough energy. Physical symptoms include things like pain and gastrointestinal (stomach or bowel) problems.
- **Alienation from (work-related) activities:** People who have burnout find their jobs increasingly stressful and frustrating. They may start being cynical about their working conditions and their colleagues. At the same time, they may increasingly distance themselves emotionally, and start feeling numb about their work.

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- ▶ **Reduced performance:** Burnout mainly affects everyday tasks at work, at home or when caring for family members. People with burnout are very negative about their tasks, find it hard to concentrate, are listless and lack creativity.

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Definition

- ▶ Compassion fatigue (CF) is stress resulting from exposure to a traumatized individual. CF has been described as the convergence of secondary traumatic stress (STS) and cumulative burnout (BO), a state of physical and mental exhaustion caused by a depleted ability to cope with one's everyday environment.

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Vicarious Trauma

SYMPTOMS OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA

People respond to vicarious trauma in many ways. Some people are more affected than others and may experience a wide range of symptoms, which generally fall into one of five categories:

Emotional symptoms can include lasting feelings of grief, anxiety, or sadness. Some people may become irritable or angry, become distracted frequently.

Behavioral symptoms might include isolation, increase in alcohol or substance consumption, altered eating habits, and difficulty sleeping.

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Physiological symptoms, which affect physical well-being, can appear in the form of headaches, rashes, ulcers, or heartburn, among others.

Cognitive symptoms may take the form of cynicism and negativity or lead to difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions in daily life.

Spiritual symptoms can include a loss of hope, a decreased sense of purpose, and feelings of disconnect from others and the world in general.

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Trauma

Types of Trauma

Acute trauma reflects intense distress in the immediate aftermath of a one-time event and the reaction is of short duration. Common examples include a car crash, physical or sexual assault, or the sudden death of a loved one.

Chronic trauma can arise from harmful events that are repeated or prolonged. It can develop in response to persistent bullying, neglect, abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual), and domestic violence.

Complex trauma can arise from experiencing repeated or multiple traumatic events from which there is no possibility of escape. The sense of being trapped is a feature of the experience. Like other types of trauma, it can undermine a sense of safety in the world and brings about hypervigilance.

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Trauma, Trauma, Trauma

Secondary or vicarious trauma arises from exposure to other people's suffering and can strike those in professions that are called on to respond to injury and mayhem, notably physicians, first responders, and law enforcement. Over time, such individuals are at risk for compassion fatigue, whereby they avoid investing emotionally in other people in an attempt to protect themselves from experiencing distress.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) cover a wide range of difficult situations that children either directly faced or witnessed while growing up, before they developed effective coping skills. ACEs can disrupt the normal course of development and the emotional injury can last long into adulthood. The loss of a parent; neglect; emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; and divorce are among the most common types of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

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How can we NOT be effected?

So how do we protect ourselves?

Boundaries and why we need them?

What are healthy boundaries?

- **Physical boundaries:** Not working on weekends, making time to eat lunch every day, and taking sick days when you're ill (yes, even if you're working from home).
- **Mental boundaries:** Signing off at 5pm, setting Do Not Disturb (DND) when you're focusing on deep work and taking a break after meetings to decompress.
- **Emotional boundaries:** Expressing that you're uncomfortable with a coworker raising their voice at you, sharing your working hours and communication preferences with your team, and delegating tasks when you have too much on your plate.

Boundaries and Compassion Fatigue

How do boundaries protect us from Burn out And compassion fatigue. A lack of boundaries may be a catalyst for compassion fatigue.

Know what you want to say “yes” to according to your own priorities and values. It may help to tune into your body and notice physical sensations.

If you can't or don't want to participate, remember that saying “no” is perfectly okay.

If you feel that your boundaries are being crossed, respectfully let that person know.

1. Schedule proactive “meetings” to discuss your boundaries. Be firm but polite and strive to have a natural discussion that involves natural give and take on both sides. This is a way that leads to compassion.
2. Give explanations that are specific and relevant to the other person. This will not only decrease confusion but also increase the likelihood of success.
3. When setting a boundary, you must be willing to accept that you may not get what you want/need. Be willing to let go of the outcome.

Compassion Fatigue

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Compassion Satisfaction

Although there are risks to those working in the helping field, there are also rewards and benefits that come from this work. Compassion satisfaction is the positive consequence of helping behavior. Compassion satisfaction is the pleasure you derive from helping, positive feelings we have for colleagues and a good feeling resulting from the ability to assist others and make a contribution.

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Can anyone share how they establish and maintain boundaries at work?

Why is this important?

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It's the small things..

As helpers, we sometimes lose sight on what really helps someone.

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Unique to working in the substance abuse field

- ▶ If you do any research into CF, you will see there are many articles regarding: therapists, case managers, nurses, police & fire- roles where we are exposed to someone else's trauma.
- ▶ Be it listening to a client/participant share their story during an assessment/interview or court process
- ▶ Assisting while the client/participant is in crisis
- ▶ Helping someone process their trauma

As workers in the substance abuse field, there is one experience that many will encounter and for which schooling and training do not prepare us.

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How does it impact our work?

We often define our field as the helping field.

But what happens when we experience CF?

- 1) We are no longer “helping”. Could even be hurting.
- 2) Our physical and mental health are impacted.
- 3) Our coping skills may not work. We may not even try to use them.
- 4) We find little joy in our job, when normally we do.
- 5) We dread going to work. We may even feel depressed.

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Our armor -Visualization

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- ▶ 3 deep breaths
- ▶ Visualize someone who has made you stressed...
- ▶ Your shield is protecting you, you are not allowing the negative energy in. You feel strong.

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What else can we do.

- ▶ Positive Mental Imagery
- ▶ Brief progressive muscle relaxation
- ▶ Mind Your Monologue
- ▶ Manage Your Triggers
- ▶ Gratitude list (journal)
- ▶ Create a Short-term goal
- ▶ Create a Long-term goal
- ▶ Celebrate the success
- ▶ Do something that's good for you and share it with a teammate
- ▶ Maintain and preserve hope

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- ▶ What is gratitude?
- ▶ Definition
- ▶ Why it is so powerful

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Changing our view to focus on the positive

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Objective 3

- ▶ Understand the concept of Post Traumatic Growth.

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- ▶ In psychology, post-traumatic growth is positive psychological change experienced because of struggling with highly challenging, highly stressful life circumstances
 - ▶ Examples of areas for growth include personal strength, appreciation for life, new possibilities in life, spiritual change, and relationships with others.
 - ▶ Examples of PTG can be vast, ranging from writing books, finding new meaning in life, starting charities, and many more.

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How does Post traumatic growth promote resiliency?

- ▶ When you work with Trauma patients, they teach you to look for the progress and not focus on the trauma. Its easy to get lost in the client's trauma. It's our job to help them navigate their muddy waters. If we can help them see how they have changed for the good, this can help them begin to see that though they have experienced terrible or hurtful things, they are a stronger person for getting through it.
- ▶ Not only do they have to process their trauma, but they must figure out how to cope with it. These coping skills change their perception of the trauma. They find new meaning in what they experienced and can begin to see things will change and get better. They will move forward.

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We can learn something from our client's PTG

Witnessing success and seeing someone change is always a positive thing. In our profession, the losses tend to stay with us.

We need to hold on to the successes and remind ourselves of the people we have helped to

What are some ways we can personally hold on to these successes?

How do we preserve these moments so we can take them out when we need them?

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Think Back to this concept...
The ones we have lost stay
with us. It is equally
important to keep the ones
that succeeded. The ones
that remind
us to doing what we keep
doing.

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Objective 4

- ▶ Learn how to incorporate self-care techniques into their daily schedule.

Compassion fatigue Resources

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▶ https://proqol.org/Home_Page.php

▶ <https://compassionfatigue.org/index.html>

▶ <https://www.stress.org/military/form-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue>

There IS an app for that!

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Add a little humor to your day...

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And the most important thing...Have fun
when you can!

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Emil

Emil.Affsa@njcourts.gov

Christine

Christine.Rehman@njcourts.gov