

Healing the Helpers: Supporting Family Caregivers

Compassion Fatigue

The profound emotional and physical exhaustion that helping professionals and caregivers can develop over the course of their career

Helping professionals: 40–85 %
Hospice nurses: 79 %
Social workers: 85 %

Risks

Factors Increasing Risk:

- Working in isolation
- Lack of social support
- Longer exposure to vicarious trauma
- Personal trauma history (60% of helpers)
- Act of human cruelty vs accidental or impersonal
- Several other stressors in helper's life at the time of secondary trauma
- Anxiety-prone or habitually negative
- Idealistic expectations of ability to help others without consequence to self

Factors Reducing Risk:

- Reduced dose or intensity of exposure
- Older age
- Strong social support
- Impersonal rather than interpersonal trauma
- Calm, non-anxious temperament
- Willingness to look for meaning in suffering
- Greater experience dealing with traumatized people
- Close connections with colleagues

Warning Signs

- **Physical**
 - Physical exhaustion
 - Insomnia/hypersomnia
 - Headaches/migraines
 - Getting sick more often
 - Emotional stress becomes physical symptoms (Somatization and hypochondria)
- **Behavioral**
 - Increased use of alcohol/drugs
 - Other addictions
 - Absenteeism
 - Anger/irritability
 - Exaggerated sense of responsibility
 - Avoidance of clients/family/friends
- **Psychological**
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Distancing/avoiding friends/family
 - Isolated
 - Negative self-image
 - Insensitivity to emotional materials
 - Problems with intimacy
 - Hypervigilance

"Everything you do in life
stems from the relationship
you have with yourself"

- Michelle Maros



Data adapted from "Healing the Helpers: Supporting Family Caregivers", a webinar originally held on 6/5/2021. Presented by Jesse Fairchild, LCPC.

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What to Do

- **Stewardship:** the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care
- **Trauma stewardship:** the overall practice of caring for oneself in order to remain effective at-and to avoid the negative effects of caring for others

Making the Caring Cycle Sustainable

- Compassion for self and others
- Empathy for self and others
- Understanding of values/purpose
- Self-knowledge
- Self-awareness

Returning to Self: Self-Awareness

- Being in tune with stress signals
- Current feelings, actions, and reactions
- Dynamics from our past influencing present
- How do we deal with anger, hurt and resentment?
- Is there a balance between nourishing and depleting activities in your life?
- Exercise, interests, personal debriefing?
- Counseling? Social support?
- How do you sabotage self-care?

Resources

Calm

Application used for meditation

Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)

A self-report for those experiencing extremely stressful events

Self-Care Toolbox

What are my warning signs?



Regular check-in

Set a regular time



Over what do I have:

Control
Influence
Concern



Enjoyable stress relief strategies?

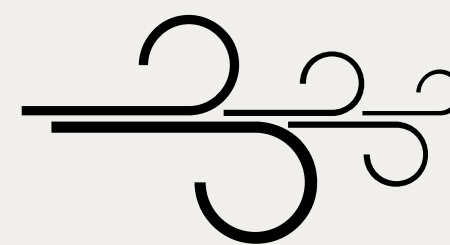


Stress reduction strategies?



Stress resiliency strategies?

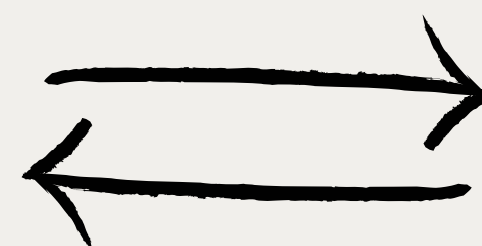
Breathing Meditations



Breathing
Meditation



Metta
Meditation



Tonglen
Meditation



Body Scan
Meditation

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