



# Compassion Fatigue: *When the Distress of Others Becomes Contagious*

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Presented in partnership with:

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## Why This Topic Matters

- ❑ Human service work is largest risk factor for burnout
- ❑ Compassion fatigue (CF) often goes undetected
  - ❑ Early detection can prevent symptoms from reaching incapacitating levels
- ❑ Education about CF is a protective factor

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## Compassion Fatigue (CF)

- ❑ Emotional and physical fatigue due to chronic use of empathy
- ❑ Used interchangeably with secondary traumatic stress (STS) / vicarious trauma
- ❑ Combination of STS and professional burnout
- ❑ Tends to occur cumulatively over time
- ❑ Consequence of working with traumatized individuals

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## Characteristics

What might compassion fatigue look, sound and feel like?

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## Characteristics

- ❑ Decreased sense of personal or professional accomplishment
- ❑ Physical exhaustion / Difficulty sleeping
- ❑ Emotional exhaustion
- ❑ Inability to feel empathy
- ❑ Diminished capacity for intimacy / isolation
- ❑ Difficulty separating work from personal life
- ❑ Hypervigilance / Increased startle response
- ❑ Flashbacks, nightmares or intrusive thoughts

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Characteristics

- ❑ Depression and/or anxiety
- ❑ Chronic ailments such as headaches, gastrointestinal issues
- ❑ Self-medicating behavior
- ❑ Lack of self-care
- ❑ Excessive blaming
- ❑ Disillusionment

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Individual Risk Factors

- ❑ Greater exposure to trauma
- ❑ Personal trauma history
- ❑ Pre-existing anxiety disorders, depression or mood disorders
- ❑ Females
- ❑ Rural settings
- ❑ Socially isolated
- ❑ Younger professionals
- ❑ Personal coping style

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### Organizational Risk Factors

- High case loads
- Inadequate supervision
- No assigned mentor
- Lack of support from professional colleagues
- Poor on-the-job training
- Bureaucratic constraints
- Organizational culture

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### Organizational Culture

What organizational practices can help prevent compassion fatigue?

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### Untreated Compassion Fatigue

- Reduced job satisfaction
- Premature exit from profession
- Boundary/ethical violations
- Potential harm to others - inability to make sound decisions
- Reduced empathy for others (numbing)
- Avoidance

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**Protective Factors**

- Setting clear limits and honoring boundaries
- Self-care
  - Maintaining work / life balance
  - Social support
  - Self-reflection
  - Personal therapy
  - Mindfulness and spirituality
- Emotional intelligence
- Supervision / mentoring
- Training / knowledge / awareness

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**Continuum of Professional Behavior**

The diagram illustrates the Continuum of Professional Behavior. It features a horizontal axis with two white rectangular boxes at the ends. The left box is labeled "Under-Involved" and the right box is labeled "Over-Involved". Between these boxes is a larger blue rectangular box labeled "Zone of Helpfulness". A red horizontal line connects the "Under-Involved" and "Over-Involved" boxes to the center of the "Zone of Helpfulness" box.

*Professional boundaries: A nurse's guide to the importance of appropriate professional boundaries*

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**Honoring Boundaries**

What ideas can you share for honoring boundaries and maintaining a healthy work/life balance?

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Honoring boundaries

- Empathy vs emotional attachment
- Clearly establish limits to your role
- Allow others to do for themselves
- Be friendly but not friends
- Limit personal information you share
- Trust in team members and their abilities

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Standards of Self-Care

- Do no harm to yourself** in the line of duty when helping others
- Attend to your physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs as a way of **ensuring high quality interactions** to those who look to you for support
- Ultimately it is **your responsibility** to take care of yourself and no situation or person can justify neglecting it

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Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Emotional Intelligence is one's capacity to...

- recognize the impact of our own feelings have on ourselves
- tune into the feelings of those around us
- to manage our emotions and our actions
- to interact skillfully with the people around us

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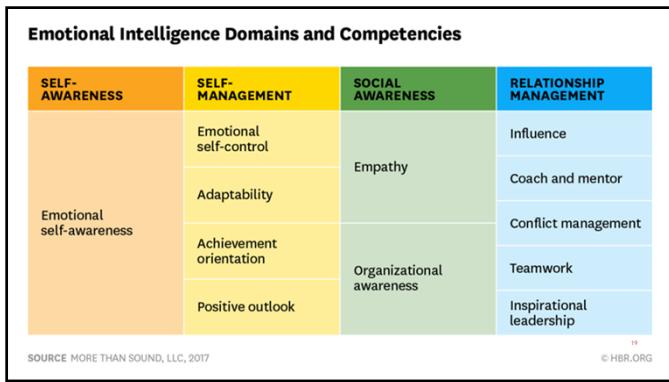
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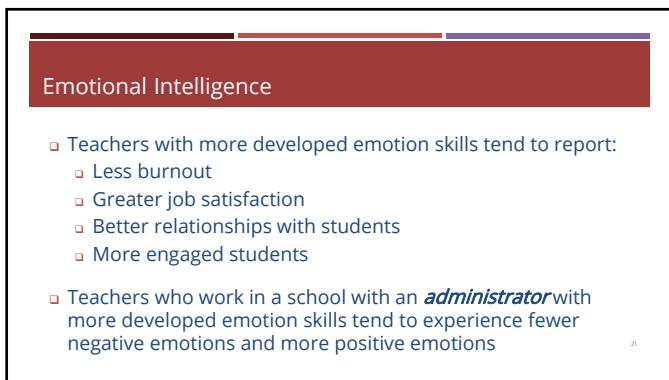
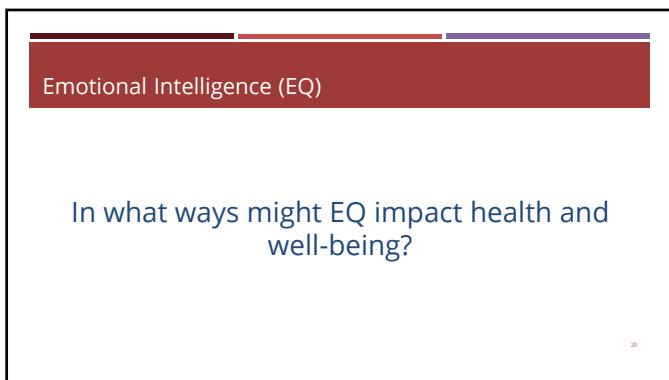
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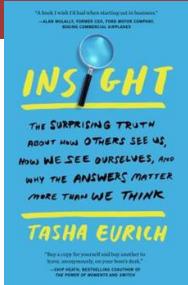


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Reflecting on My EQ

- [The Quick Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment](#)
- [Tips for Boosting your EQ](#)



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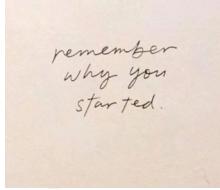
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Rediscover Joy

- [Each day, reflect on what you are grateful for](#)
- [Consider how you have changed the lives of others](#)
- [Reassess your goals and values](#)
  - [Does your job still give you meaning?](#)
  - [What changes do you need to make to find meaning again?](#)
- [Learn to be an optimist](#)
  - [Choose your thoughts](#)
  - [Celebrate what's right with the world](#)



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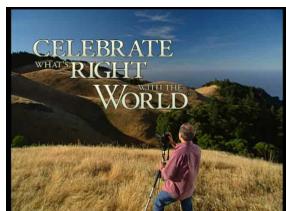
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## Contact Information

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