

Compassion Fatigue:
When the Distress of Others Becomes Contagious

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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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Poll

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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

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

(“Standards of self-care guidelines,” 2005)

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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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Emotional Intelligence Domains and Competencies

SELF-AWARENESS	SELF-MANAGEMENT	SOCIAL AWARENESS	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Emotional self-awareness	Emotional self-control	Empathy	Influence
	Adaptability		Coach and mentor
	Achievement orientation	Organizational awareness	Conflict management
	Positive outlook		Teamwork
			Inspirational leadership

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Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

In what ways might EQ impact health and well-being?

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Emotional Intelligence

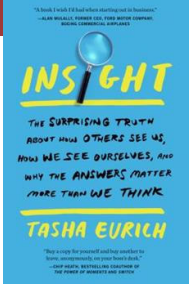
- ▢ Teachers with more developed emotion skills tend to report:
 - ▢ Less burnout
 - ▢ Greater job satisfaction
 - ▢ Better relationships with students
 - ▢ More engaged students
- ▢ Teachers who work in a school with an *administrator* with more developed emotion skills tend to experience fewer negative emotions and more positive emotions

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Reflecting on My EQ

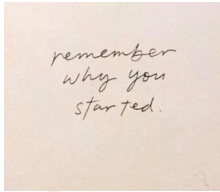
- [The Quick Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment](#)
- [Tips for Boosting your EQ](#)



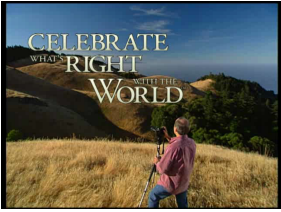
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Rediscover Joy

- 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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