

# Compassion Fatigue

## WHAT IS COMPASSION FATIGUE:

Compassion Fatigue symptoms are normal displays of stress that result from the caregiving one exerts on a regular basis. While the symptoms are often disruptive and depressive an awareness of the symptoms and their effect on your life may lead to a new resiliency. You may experience some of the below:

- Isolation from others
- Sleep disturbances
- Bottled up emotions
- Excessive blaming
- Hopelessness
- Anger, irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Substance abuse used to mask feelings
- Compulsive behaviors such as overspending, overeating, gambling, and sexual addictions
- Reoccurrence of nightmares and flashbacks to (secondary) traumatic event
- Poor self-care (i.e., hygiene, appearance)
- High self-expectations
- Low self-esteem
- Legal problems, indebtedness
- Mental and physical exhaustion
- In denial about problems
- Chronic physical ailments such as gastrointestinal problems, headaches, recurrent colds, hypertension
- Apathy, sad, and no longer finds activities pleasurable

## WHO IS AT RISK:

Those in caregiving professions (e.g., nurses, physicians, mental health workers, clergyman) as well as those who are actively engaged in taking care of a family member or another person for an extended period of time.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT:

Develop a self care plan to add balance to your life. This is an individual plan that may include physical, pleasurable and/or social activities. A balanced life will assist in stress management while providing care for others.

**Step 1:** Pick two or three activities as the starting place for your individual self care plan. Pick activities that you enjoy or have enjoyed in the past OR have an interest in OR realize that you need to work on in your life. Below are some ideas:

- Take action to change your environment
- Learn about compassion fatigue
- Share information and feelings with people who are supportive
- Listen to others who are suffering

- Clarify your personal boundaries: what works for you; what doesn't
- Express your needs verbally
- Health-building activities such as exercise, massage, yoga, meditation
- Eating healthy foods
- Drinking plenty of water
- Restful sleep
- Partaking in enjoyable activities
- Practicing self-care (e.g., schedule hair appointment, take bubble baths)
- Using natural healing products to care for and heal your body
- Practicing the art of self-management—just say “No”
- Developing a healthy support system: People who contribute to your self-esteem, people who listen well, people who care
- Organizing your life so you become proactive as opposed to reactive
- Reserving your life energy for worthy causes. Choose your battles.
- Living a balanced life: sing, dance, sit with silence, spend time with loved ones



**Step 2: Start slowly and progress gradually** – You'll avoid becoming discouraged and reduce the risk of injury if choosing a physical activity.

**Step 3: Set goals** – when, where, what, and how. Be specific and you will increase the likelihood you are successful. For example: I am going to walk 2x/week on Tuesday and Thursday for 30 minutes in the morning.

**Step 4: Keep Track and Reward yourself** – keep track of your self care plan. It will help you evaluate your progress and give you a sense of accomplishment. Once you reach your goal reward yourself.

**Step 5: Develop a back-up plan** – if you are unable to participate in your original goal then have a written idea of what you will do instead. For example if I planned to run outside and it was raining my backup plan is to run on the treadmill.

**Step 6: Share your plan** – be sure to include your friends and family with your self care plan. They can support you in your goals and help keep you accountable.

Your self care plan is ever evolving; it is not set in stone. Please change it as you go.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR COMPASSION FATIGUE

- Collinge, William, MD; Partners in Healing: Simple Ways to Offer Support, Comfort and Care to a Loved One Facing Illness
- Frankl, Viktor E.; Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy
- Lehrer, Jonah; How We Decide

- Mandel, Debra, Ph.D.; Healing the Sensitive Heart: How to stop getting hurt, build your inner strength, and find the Love you deserve
- Saakvitne, Karen W. and Pearlman, Laurie Anne; Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization
- Simon, David, M.D.; Free to Love, Free to Heal: Heal Your Body by Healing Your Emotions

