

Compassion Fatigue: When Helping Hurts

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Objectives:

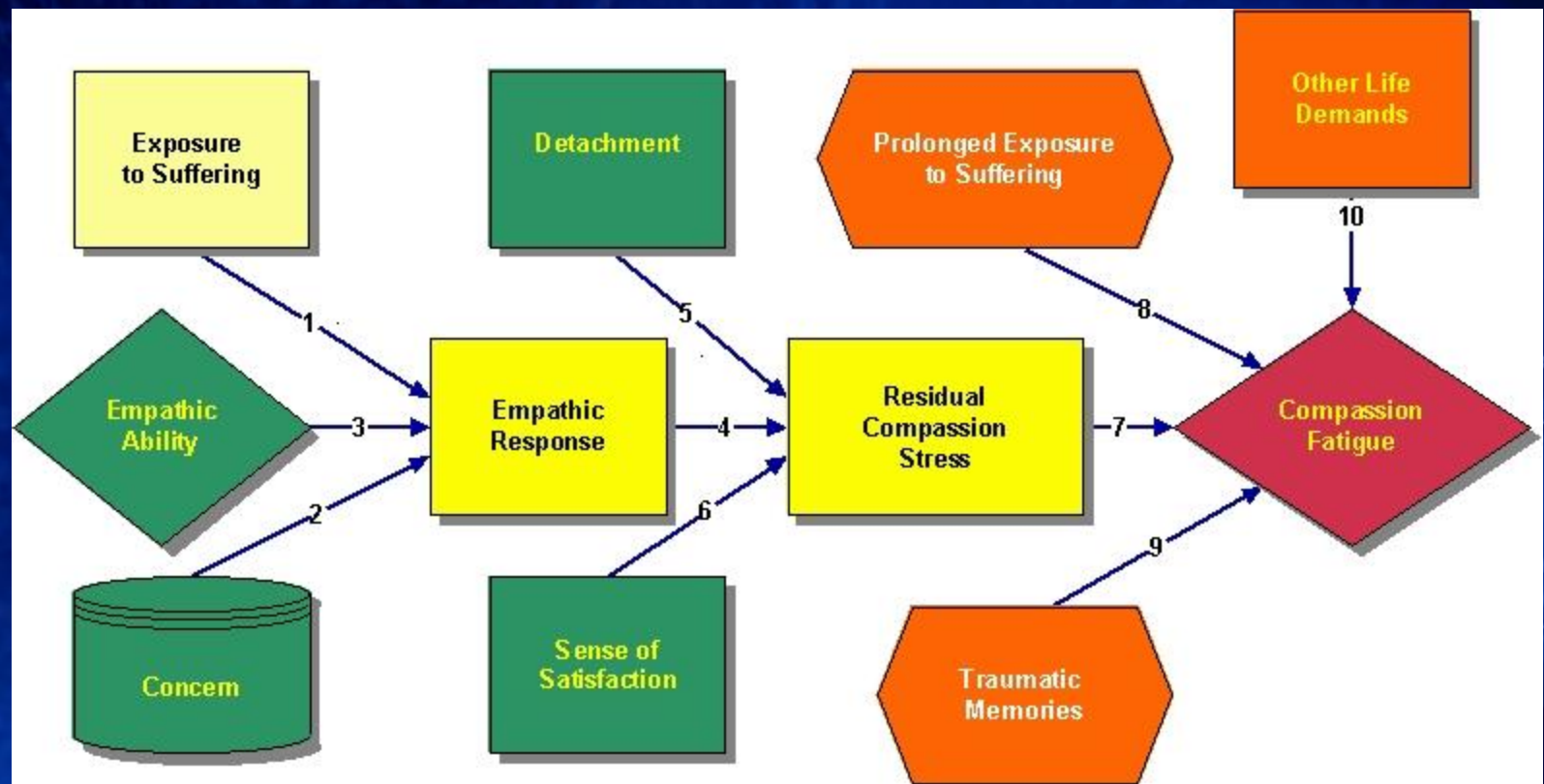
- At the end of this learning session you will be able to:
 1. Verbalize the Compassion Fatigue syndrome and the signs and symptoms of Compassion Fatigue.
 2. Discuss ways of prevention and treatment of Compassion Fatigue

Exactly What Is Compassion Fatigue?

- **Defined as “State of exhaustion and dysfunction (biologically, psychologically and socially) as a result of prolonged exposure to secondary trauma or a single intensive event. (C.R. Figley, 1995)**
- **Series of psychosocial and emotional factors caused by a specific event or events indirectly affecting helpers.**
- **Emotional fallout from delivering services to those who were primarily traumatized.**

Compassion Fatigue In Many Forms

- Healthcare Professions
 - Physicians, Nursing, Social Services, Mental Health Providers
- Other Helping Professions
 - Teachers, Clergy, Attorneys, Disaster Site Clean-up Crews, Animal Shelter staff etc.
- Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement
- Family Care Givers
- Charitable Giving (Over-exposure)



The Compassion Fatigue Process (Figley, 2001)

The Process

Why Not “Burnout”

- Defined as: “Exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration” (Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary)
- Gradually builds to a breaking point and the stress and frustration comes from all types of work-related stressors

Burnout

- Usually takes longer
- Compassion Fatigue may be a contributing factor
- Frustrations such as
 - Paper work and “red tape/bureaucratic issues
 - The environment (home and work)
 - Colleagues
 - Pace and or grind of work

The Difference?

Ask the Question:

“Do I Love My Job?”

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graph TD; Q["Do I Love My Job?"] --> Y["Yes"]; Q --> N["NO"]; Y --- C["Compassion"]; Y --- F["Fatigue"]; N --- B["Burnout"]
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Yes

Compassion

Fatigue

NO

Burnout

Who is More Likely to Develop Compassion Fatigue?

- Anyone with the capacity for true compassion, empathy, concern and caring
- We try to stay within professional boundaries and adhere to training guidelines
- But the greatest strength (compassionate connection) is also greatest vulnerability
- Not a characteristic to give up

Compassion Fatigue

- Recognize the symptoms
- Educate yourself
- Recognize that:
 - The more prolonged exposure
 - Working long hours
 - More personal demands
 - More isolated you allow yourself to become

Increases your vulnerability

Warning Signs and Symptoms

- Symptoms similar to PTSD but from secondary exposure
- Additionally cynical, discouraged or hopeless attitude about work or career
- Paradoxically you find it difficult to leave work at the end of the day
- Have reoccurring thoughts about a particular case

Symptoms

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual	Personal Relationships	Physical/Somatic	Work Performance
<p>Lowered concentration Decreased self-esteem Apathy Rigidity Disorientation Perfectionism Minimization Preoccupation with trauma Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others</p>	<p>Powerlessness Anxiety Guilt Anger/rage Survivor guilt Shutdown Numbness Fear Helplessness Sadness Depression Emotional roller coaster Depleted Overly sensitive</p>	<p>Impatient Irritable Withdrawn Moody Regression Sleep disturbance Nightmares Appetite changes Hypervigilant Elevated Startle response Accident proneness Losing things</p>	<p>Questioning the meaning of life Loss of purpose Lack of self satisfaction Pervasive hopelessness Anger at God Questioning of prior Religious beliefs Loss of faith in a higher power Greater skepticism about religion</p>	<p>Withdrawal Decreased interest in intimacy or sex Mistrust Isolation from others Over protection as a parent Projection of anger or blame Intolerance Loneliness Increased interpersonal conflicts</p>	<p>Shock Sweating Rapid heartbeat Breathing difficulties Aches and pains Dizziness Increased number and intensity of medical maladies Other somatic complaints Impaired immune system</p>	<p>Low morale Low motivation Avoiding tasks Obsession about details Apathy Negativity Lack of appreciation Detachment Poor work Staff conflicts Absenteeism Exhaustion Irritability Withdrawal from colleagues</p>

Prevention

- Early Recognition and Awareness is Key!
- Restore a healthy balance in your life including:
 - Good sleep, good nutrition and exercise
 - Take Time Off From Work (mini-vacations)
 - Enhancing Your Skills by Attending Stress Reduction Courses
- Enhanced Self Care Skills

Don't Wear This Button



Resiliency: The Ability to Keep On Going When the Going Gets Tough

- Must be well rested
- Resiliency sags when you are tired
- Utilize your positive supportive connections to process your feelings
- Take negatives and turn them into positives
- Research shows those who can “turn off thoughts about work” are more resilient during their careers

Stay Resilient

- You need to have good support
- You need to have the ability to talk about it
- Be able to disconnect work and home
- Strong connections with others

Treatment

- Get medical treatment for those symptoms that are interfering with your daily functioning
- Implement regular mini-escapes in your life, like recreation, creative therapies or other healthy diversion from the intensity of your work
- Don't medicate with drugs or alcohol.

The Art and Science of Caring for Others without Forgetting Self-Care

- Writing in a journal
- Expressing feelings through music or art
- A “a ritual” at the end of each day to transition into your life outside of work....leaving your cares and stresses in the workplace
- Good relationship with colleague (s) where you can safely and confidentially discuss the issues that are bothering you.

Conclusion

- Unrecognized and Untreated Compassion Fatigue causes people to
 - Leave Their Professions
 - Self Treat with Drugs or Alcohol
 - Become Suicidal or Self Destructive
- Watch Out for Each Other
- If you see a colleague in distress – Reach Out To Them

Questions?

