

Practical Tools to Avoid Compassion Fatigue

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Compassion Fatigue: Warmup

- Meet a neighbor
- Partner 1: Ask them what they do for self-care? How do they take care of themselves? Do they set boundaries between work and home life?
- After a couple of minutes, switch
- Partner 2: Ask them what they do for self-care? How do they take care of themselves? Do they set boundaries between work and home life?
- Share your own experience with the group

Compassion Fatigue: What is it?

- Varying definitions

1. CF = A combination of burnout and secondary trauma (Social Work Today)
2. CF = A different term for secondary trauma; when helpers get PTSD-like symptoms from doing their jobs (Figley)
3. CF = “The negative aspects of helping,” (Stamm)
4. CF = “The physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdraw experienced by those who care for sick or traumatized people over an extended period of time (Merriam-Webster)

References: 1. Compassion Fatigue: Being an Ethical Social Worker (socialworker.com) 2. The American Institute of Stress (stress.org), quote by C. Figley, 1995 3. Understanding a theory and creating a model of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, Figley, 2006 (proqol.org) 4. Merriam Webster Online dictionary (Merriam-Webster.com)

Compassion Fatigue: Do I have it?

– Signs of compassion fatigue:

1. Overall exhaustion
2. Sleep issues, nightmares
3. Emotional regulation struggles
4. Behavior and judgment changes
5. Isolating
6. Dread of seeing/working with clients
7. Depression and PTSD-like symptoms
8. Decreased self-worth
9. Views about self and the world change (more discouraged, blaming clients or anger towards others)
10. Isolation
11. Loss of hope and meaning

References: Adapted from American Institute of Stress, [stress.org](https://www.stress.org), and Compassion Fatigue Solutions, [compassionfatigue.org](https://www.compassionfatigue.org)

Compassion Fatigue: Who can get it?

- Any helper can get CF. There are some things that can make you more vulnerable:

1. Regularly placing needs of others before your own
2. Not having enough effective, healthy coping skills
3. Inaccurate feeling of responsibility in others' lives
4. Lack of social support
5. Not understanding personal boundaries
6. Trouble communicating needs/asking for help
7. Unresolved issues from past trauma/stress



Reference: Adapted from Jessica Dolce, CCFE at jessicadolce.com

Compassion Fatigue: What if I have it?

- Here are some things that may help:

1. Develop/expand coping skills kit: What things actually help me unwind, renew, relax?
2. Reconsider boundaries: What can I control and what is out of my control? Where am I helping vs. enabling or interfering with others?
3. Revisit and expand your social support network. Who can I reach out to who has been helpful? Do I need to find new people for your support system?
4. Is there a regular self-care routine I can add, such as meditation, yoga, or exercise?
5. Do I need professional help (especially if there's any danger involved)? Can I visit a therapist or supportive supervisor?

Reference: Compassion Fatigue in Health Professionals, compassionfatigue.org

Practical Skills

- Skills I most often teach my clients:

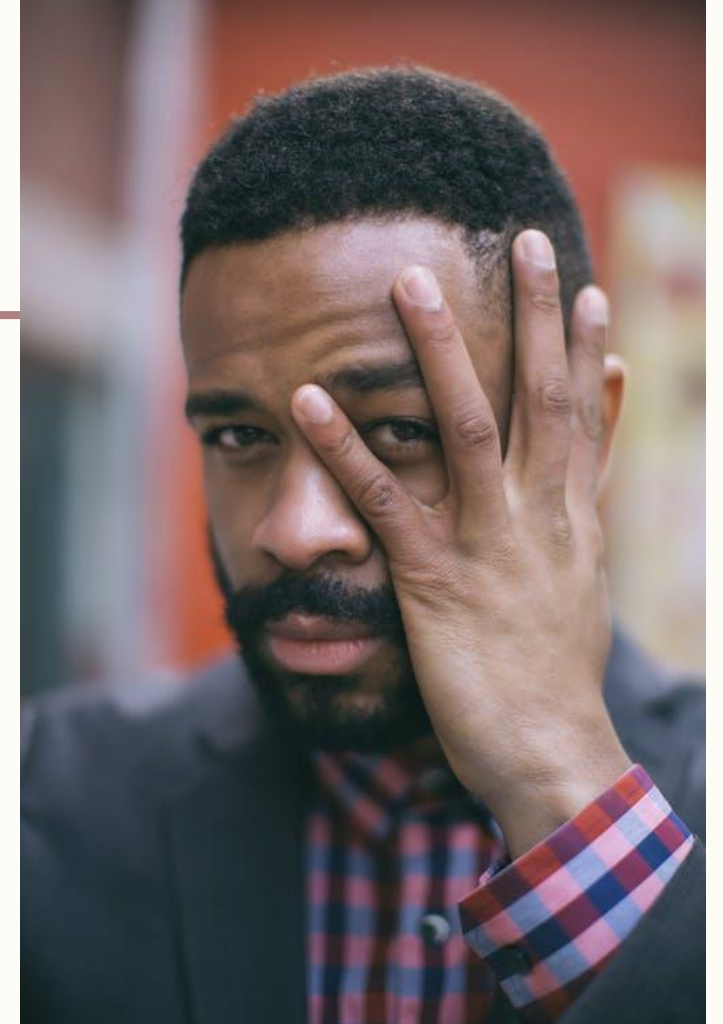
1. Diaphragmatic Breathing (Let's practice)
2. Grounding exercise
3. Leaves on a stream meditation (We may do this at the end if we have time)
4. Avoiding avoidance and taking small, active steps (good for anxiety, trauma, and depression)
5. Reach out to the people you find helpful
6. Cognitive (CBT) strategies like changing thoughts – learning these next

Reference: Jennie Lannette Bedsworth, MSW, LCSW



Natural Emotions

1. Allow these to happen
2. Validate your own feelings
3. Allow yourself to grieve/be sad if needed
4. Express these in whatever way is normal/helpful for you



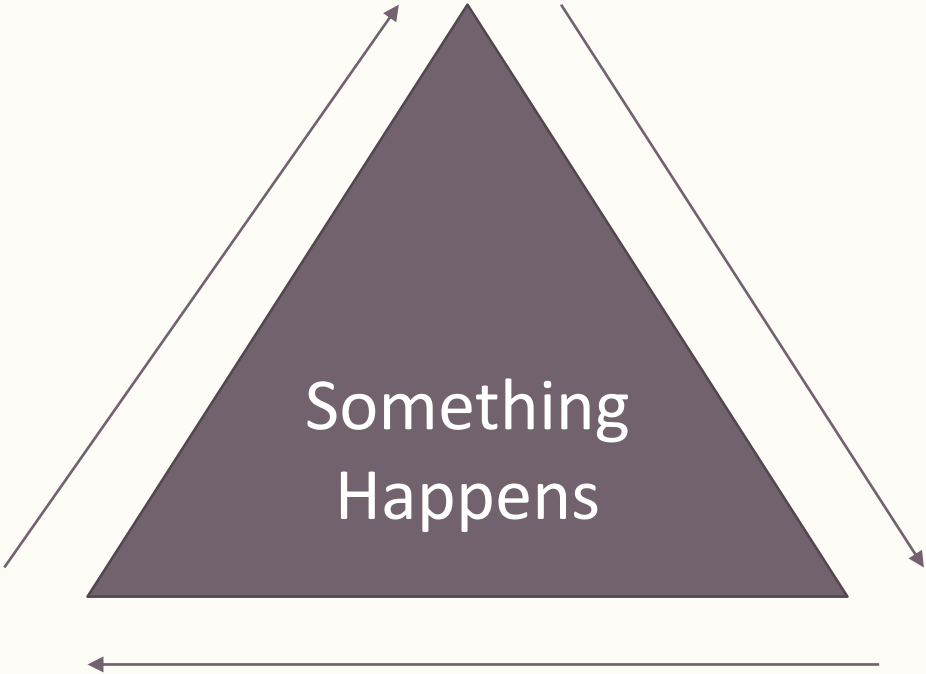
Manufactured Emotions

Based on the “story” our brain makes up about what happens

Let's Practice!

My behavior reflects how I feel and contributes to my next thought

I tell myself something about what happens



Something Happens

I feel worse (for longer) or better, depending on the story I tell myself

How to Change our Stories

Try asking yourself these questions ...



- Is this thought/belief protecting me in some way, or did it used to? Is it still helping me, or is it not anymore?
- What is the evidence for or against this belief/thought?
- Is this type of thinking a habit for me, rather than being based in facts?
- Could something different actually be true?
- If this negative thought IS true, could I deal with it better than I am giving myself credit for?
- What is a more helpful thought that I can buy into?
- How can I remind myself of this more helpful thought?

Make a reminder for your new, more helpful thought at the Self-Care Station

Take the PROQOL

- Professional Quality of Life Measure
- To get your proqol results, go online to see how to score each area (notice one area involves reversing your numbers)

Visit http://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html



What's one thing I can do today
to build resilience?

Leaves on a stream meditation



Questions/Needs?

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