

## *Compassion Fatigue*

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There is a cost to caring.  
Charles Figley

## The (short) History of “Compassion Fatigue”

## What is Compassion Fatigue?

Burnout - gradual, from emotional exhaustion, time off typically relieves it

Compassion Fatigue  
comes on suddenly  
confusion  
isolation  
changes in daily functioning

Compassion Fatigue can change  
our interactions with the world,  
our families, our friends.

What causes it?

*Exposure*

*Empathy*



## What are the signs?

### Behavioral reactions:

- impatience with others
- sleep disturbances
- nightmares
- startle response
- hypervigilance
- use of negative coping
- losing things

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## What are the signs?

### Spiritual reactions:

- loss of purpose
- sense of meaninglessness
- anger at God
- questioning prior spiritual beliefs
- pervasive hopelessness

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## What are the signs?

### Interpersonal reactions:

- withdrawing/isolating
- decreased interest in sex or intimacy
- mistrust of others
- impact on parenting
- projection of anger or blame
- intolerance of others' behaviors

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## How do we cope?

- We intellectualize
- We deny
- We minimize
- We over identify
- We get depressed
- We get anxious
- We use drugs and alcohol

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## How do we cope?

### Silencing clients:

- Changing the subject
- Avoiding the topic
- Faking interest or faking listening
- Being angry/sarcastic with clients
- Giving pat answers
- Wishing they would "get over it"

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It is unethical *not* to attend to your self care as a practitioner, because self care prevents harming those we serve.

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## How to Prevent Compassion Fatigue

Balance work and your life outside of work

Get adequate sleep, nutrition, exercise

The “two colleagues” guideline

Remember the joys and achievements of the work

## How to Prevent Compassion Fatigue

Do your own therapy as maintenance

Spend time with non-traumatized people

A word about supervisors...

## Ask yourself...

Are there specific clients whose stories I have difficulty listening to?

In what ways do I silence my clients?

What am I defending against?

Why is this so hard for me to hear?

What do I need to remain clinically effective?

## How to Prevent Compassion Fatigue

### 6 circles exercise

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