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# INTRODUCTION – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PRESENTERS

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## **What is Compassion Fatigue?**

Compassion Fatigue is the natural consequence of stress resulting from caring for and helping traumatized or suffering people or animals. Compassion Fatigue is a set of symptoms, not a disease. The outward signs we experience are displays of stress resulting from giving care to others. Compassion Fatigue is the name that has been attached to these symptoms so that we have a way of identifying it in ourselves and in others. Once identified, we are able to take action to manage the distress this disorder is causing in our lives.

In working with traumatized or suffering people or animals, the most common method of coping with the discomfort we experience is to stifle the emotions that arise. Sometimes it is the only way we can continue to do the caregiving work that we want to do. Once we are open to accepting the fact that Compassion Fatigue is creating our emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms, we can look at our pain and learn new ways in which to react to them and channel them into positive, healthy actions.

What is the basic message of Healthy Caregiving: Recognizing and Managing Compassion Fatigue?

While the work involved in recognizing and learning to manage Compassion Fatigue can be arduous and draining, the basic message is simply that help is available. Compassion Fatigue is a set of symptoms, not a disease. Once participants hear and comprehend that information, they have the power to open the door to healing. Sustainable healing allows the individual to live a life free of Compassion Fatigue symptoms. On the other hand, much like a wound, if we don't continue to care for the injured area, the wound can flare up and perhaps even become infected. This program carries the message of hope and healing, but maintaining healthy self-care practices is mandatory.

What is the goal of Healthy Caregiving: Recognizing and Managing Compassion Fatigue?

The general goal of any workshop or presentation is to dispel information, raise awareness about something, educate your audience, and finally, motivate your participants into taking action. With this particular training guide, the title pretty much says it all. You are working alongside your participants to help them to recognize the symptoms and causes of Compassion Fatigue, and then demonstrate in a number of ways in which to manage those symptoms. Hopefully, by the end of your time together, your audience members will want to take action and move in the direction of applying healthy self care to their caregiving avocation or vocation.

### **Who is my Audience?**

This will vary. If you are the training/development person at your facility, you will be asked to facilitate workshops with your colleagues, maybe volunteers and, perhaps, management. If you are a manager, you will probably be asked to present to your staff. If you are an educator, it will be your students, particularly those heading into the helping professions. The important thing to remember is that your participants will come in all sizes, shapes and colors. Translated this means that you will have some who grasp immediately what you are saying; others who will need additional help in understanding compassion fatigue. Herein lies the real challenge of leading workshops. You must have the ability to turn a corner, when necessary, be flexible when unplanned events occur, and also have the ability to keep control over your crowd in a non-threatening way. If you are a freelance facilitator or a consultant, your audiences will run the gamut from social service agency workers to hospital staff to animal caregivers to family caregivers. One thing is certain: You will never be bored.

### **Why are all of the exercises and journals focused on the caregiver? Why aren't the needs of the patients/clients addressed?**

Compassion fatigued caregivers usually have one thing in common: They are "other-directed" and put the needs of others before their own needs. The exercises and journaling are centered on the thoughts, feelings and actions of the participant, the caregiver. Most likely, very early in life, "other-directed" people have learned that the best way to receive affection, love, or attention, is by giving care to others. Sadly, the concept of "self-care" is absent from the list of life-coping skills. The first level of a Compassion Fatigue workshop is to focus on the caregiver by giving him the

opportunity, and in many instances- the permission – to think about himself. What are his needs, thoughts, hopes and desires? By asking these questions, you, the Presenter, are creating an awareness of “self,” which is sadly missing from the lives of so many fatigued caregivers. You will be surprised by how many of your participants have never really thought about what energizes, pleases or relaxes him!

## **What role do I play as the facilitator/workshop leader?**

There is one word that sums up Compassion Fatigue training – *challenging*. The main role you will need to take on is that of active listener, non-judgmental facilitator and compassionate educator. You might be the most entertaining, engaging presenter, but without the three elements above, you will not reach your audience. Your roles will vary, but always, your main role is to dispatch the information and facilitate the discussions and questions. Having an arsenal of examples to accompany the training pods is imperative, and this list will grow as you facilitate more workshops. As far as logistics, you may be asked to organize the entire workshop including finding an appropriate venue, providing lunch and snacks, and registering participants. Or perhaps you just need to show up fifteen minutes prior to the opening of the workshop and begin on time, while it is the job of others to organize the room. Below, you’ll find information pertaining to environment, room set up, audio-visual equipment, and presentation techniques that, hopefully, will be helpful to you. I’ve also included a sample introduction letter and registration form in the Resource section. Feel free to adapt any of these materials to your group or organization.

## **How can facilitating a HEALTHY CAREGIVING: RECOGNIZING AND MANAGING COMPASSION FATIGUE workshop or presentation help me?**

Healthy Caregiving is the ultimate goal of anyone who prides his or herself on caring for others. Since you are holding this Guide in your hands and reading this material, it is assumed that you fall into this category. You may be a manager, a volunteer coordinator, or a social service agency CEO who has been asked to present a Compassion Fatigue workshop. Chances are you’ve never heard of Compassion Fatigue. Chances are that you suffer from its ill effects yourself. Either way, this Presenter’s Guide will walk you through the steps to becoming an effective, compassionate facilitator or workshop leader. You will find that each time you present a workshop; the material will become more familiar to you. Your comfort level will rise as you become more and more acquainted with the symptoms, causes, and sustainable practices that can ultimately place you on the road to healthy self-care.

You will experience a high level of satisfaction knowing you are helping others to understand what this syndrome is all about. But more important, you will learn invaluable information about yourself as you guide others through the maze of Compassion Fatigue.

Why do caregivers need me to facilitate a workshop? Why can't they just learn about the symptoms, causes and healing by themselves?

Compassion Fatigue and all it entails is insidious. Often, a sufferer will recognize the symptoms in others, but not in his or herself. Compassion Fatigue is an inside job, and many people do not feel comfortable, or do not have the skills necessary to do the emotional, psychological and spiritual work involved in manifesting their own well-being. As a facilitator or leader, you are being called upon to facilitate both awareness and education. You can't make the journey for others, but you can certainly teach them what you know, listen to their stories, and set them on the course of healing, happiness and wholeness. Needless to say, raising awareness about Compassion Fatigue is very satisfying work.

**A note of caution:** Many of us who expedite Compassion Fatigue Awareness are not trained psychologists or psychiatrists. And it is important that we don't pretend to be. If, at any time, you begin to feel stressed, irritated or anxiety-ridden during the course of your workshop, recognize that something or someone has struck a personal raw nerve. It is always acceptable to take a break when necessary. It is also acceptable to refrain from facilitating and leading workshops if you find your own symptoms surfacing. Always be well-rested, safe, secure, and comfortable when overseeing any Compassion Fatigue workshop or presentation. The more you become acquainted with the in's and out's of Compassion Fatigue, the more you will be able to pinpoint audience members who need professional help. There are ways to direct that information to your audience without singling anyone out or making anyone uncomfortable. Honing those discernment skills will be discussed on the following pages.

Now that you have decided to move forward and present Compassion Fatigue workshops, this Guide will become your best friend. It contains everything you need to know. You have the following by your side: comprehensive information on the subject, a Glossary of Compassion Fatigue terms, a resource list for additional information and help, and a reading list for both you and your participants. There are exercises and tests to help you teach and aid your participants in better understanding the material. You will also find samples of an introductory letter and flyer announcing your course, registration form, a survey to present to participants when the workshop ends, and even a sample permission form allowing you to use participant's quotes for public relations.