

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Recognizing and Managing Compassion Fatigue: A Path to Wellness

**CAN WE
BURN
OUT?**

Within the past ten years, the secrets to recognizing and managing Compassion Fatigue trickled down from academia to those of us in the caregiving professions. Thanks to the work of leading traumatologists and psychologists, we now share a comprehensive knowledge of the secondary traumatic stress that plagues caregivers worldwide. As more information becomes available, we better understand what is necessary to alleviate the suffering that Compassion Fatigue causes in our lives. *In turn, we help ourselves so we can continue to help others.*

With focused attention on creating good health, we embrace new ways to approach self-care. As an understanding of our destructive patterns unfolds, we begin to see how these behaviors affect our ability to provide healthy caregiving to others. *Symptoms such as isolation, emotional outbursts, substance abuse and health-depleting addictions rob us of our well-being.* Accepting and naming these symptoms is the first step toward healing. Pinpointing their origin, which often involves stepping back in time to explore faulty perceptions, can be daunting and painful. But to forgive our past and accept the role it plays in our present actions delivers us on the doorstep of emotional and physical healing.

Once we suffer from Compassion Fatigue, it is always with us. We must be diligent about managing its symptoms. Compassion Fatigue waits in the wings for us to revert back to unhealthy thoughts and actions and then surfaces once again. Managing the symptoms successfully takes commitment and resiliency.

Practicing healthy coping skills such as physical exercise, meditation, yoga, or walking Fido is mandatory. Since our ways of coping are as unique as we are, the work involved is well worth the effort. For the most part, those of us who suffer from Compassion Fatigue are "other-directed." We place the needs of others before our own needs. The work before us is to become acquainted with ourselves - our likes, dislikes, strengths and shortcomings.

Every day on the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project© website, I hear from caregivers who have experienced Compassion Fatigue and have traveled the path leading to self-acquaintance. Now, it is important to them to pass their knowledge on to oth-

ers. As trainers, they experience satisfaction in sharing their success story with other caregivers. They enter their workshops armed with the latest findings on the signs and causes of Compassion Fatigue, and also how to alleviate the disturbing symptoms.

Encouraging their participants to disregard old destructive patterns, they educate them as to how to create a healthier lifestyle.

The road to wellness begins with one step—awareness. Once we accept that Compassion Fatigue is real and harbors the ability to sap our energy and passion for life, we can reverse the process.

By embracing authentic, sustainable self-care, we open the door to a better life. And, ultimately, happiness.

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The basics of Compassion Fatigue may be found at <http://www.compassionfatigue.org>. Visit the site for information on:

- What is Compassion Fatigue?
- What are the symptoms?
- What are the causes?
- What is the Path to Wellness?
- Compassion Fatigue Self-Test

The Compassion Fatigue Self-test is based on the ProQOL R-IV, PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE. The following are a few statements that help guide you through the test.

I am proud of what I can do.

I feel "bogged down" by the system.

I can't recall important parts of my work with trauma victims.

I am a very sensitive person.

I am happy that I chose to do this work.