SELF-CARE STRATEGIES: BUILDING EMOTIONALLY RESILIENT PARENTS/ADULTS

Strategies needed for parenting (and life)!

Created and Presented by Hailey Uphaus
Sponsored by

[Logo]
Objectives:

- Gain a basic understanding of stress, vicarious trauma (A.K.A. secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, or the cost of caring), burnout, emotional resiliency, and self-care
- Gain an understanding of the importance of self-care
- Identify ways to increase your emotional resiliency as you are introduced to practical self-care strategies that address six life-balancing components
- Create a personalized Self-Care Wheel and receive downloadable documents to support your self-care plan
“By taking care of you, you take care of me.”
Why do we need this?
What are some of your stressors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRESSORS</th>
<th>TOOLS FOR MANAGING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What are some ways you relieve/reduce/cope with stress?
STRESS

appointments  neighbors
bills  divorce
work  boss
new home  work up all night
relocation  spouse
pressure  tension
change  work
fatigue 阳历
deadlines  mondays
change  work
job review  wear all night
weekdays  spouse
report cards  change
money  new boss
headaches  responsibilities
new school  marriage
employer  snap
headache  sick day
grades  children
duties  promotion
death  sick day
report cards  new boss
Definitions:

- Stress
- Secondary Traumatic Stress or Compassion Fatigue a.k.a “The Cost of Caring”
- Vicarious Trauma
- Burnout
- Compassion Satisfaction
FOUR TYPES OF STRESS

CHRONIC EUSTRESS
- Long, lasting and recurrent
  (Good stress)
- E.g. An individual who loves their work & finds it challenging and fulfilling. Cognitive stress is placed on the mind, but it further develops and grows in a more creative manner.

ACUTE EUSTRESS
- Short term, generally not remembered or retained
  (Good stress)
- E.g. Taking part in physical challenge. The stress experience within the body is sometimes referred to as an ‘adrenaline rush'; this stress aids awareness and muscular strength in order to complete.

CHRONIC STRESS
- Consistent & unavoidable
  (Bad stress)
- E.g. Experienced by a person in a highly stressful job or a particularly difficult relationship. It is chronic stress that is the most common cause of burnout.

ACUTE STRESS
- Short term—treatable and manageable
- Acute stress is the most common form of stress. Occurs within one month after exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor (e.g., death of a loved one or serious accident).
Secondary Traumatic Stress & Related Conditions

- Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) refers to the presence of Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) symptoms caused by at least one indirect exposure to traumatic material.

- Compassion Fatigue, a less stigmatizing way to describe secondary traumatic stress and has been interchangeably used with STS

- Vicarious Trauma, refers to changes in the inner experience of the caregiver resulting from empathic engagement with an individual who has experienced trauma. It is a theoretical term that focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on the covert cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person’s traumatic material

- Burnout, is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced feeling of personal accomplishment. While it is also work related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the term is not used to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure specifically.
## Signs and Symptoms of STS and Vicarious Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Behavioral/Emotional</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lowered Concentration</td>
<td>• Withdrawal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Apathy</td>
<td>• Sleep disturbance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rigid thinking</td>
<td>• Appetite change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perfectionism</td>
<td>• Hyper-vigilance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preoccupation with trauma</td>
<td>• Elevated startle response</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Poor boundaries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Viewing the work/lives of others as less important</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Difficulty relating to others’ day-to-day without</td>
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<td></td>
<td>comparing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Reduced productivity</td>
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<td>• All “home” or “work” thinking (difficulty with balance)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guilt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Anger</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Numbness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sadness/ prolonged grief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased heart rate</td>
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<td>• Difficulty breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Muscle and joint pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Impaired immune system</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased severity of medical concerns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Headaches, stomach aches</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exhaustion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Irritability</td>
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</table>

LET’S GET REAL!
Here are some things we know...

- Studies show that from 6% to 26% of therapists working with traumatized populations, and up to 50% of child welfare workers and educators, are at high risk of secondary traumatic stress or the related conditions of PTSD and vicarious trauma.

- Anyone who works directly with traumatized children, and is in a position to hear the recounting of traumatic experiences, is at risk of secondary traumatic stress.

- The risk of STS appears to be greater among women and among individuals who are highly empathetic by nature or have unresolved personal trauma.

Emotional Resiliency: one’s ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. More resilient people are able to "bounce back” and adapt to adversity without lasting difficulties; less resilient people have a harder time with stress and life changes, both major and minor.
What are traits of someone with emotional resilience?

They know their boundaries.
They keep good company.
They cultivate self-awareness.
They practice acceptance.
They’re willing to sit in silence.
They don’t have to have all the answers.
They have a menu of self-care habits.
They enlist their team.
They consider the possibilities.
They get out of their head.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/design-your-path/201305/10-traits-emotionally-resilient-people
Research Has Shown

Resilience comes as a result of learning coping skills through experiences and the ability to anticipate and except change.

Resilience is actually ordinary, not extraordinary — people commonly demonstrate resilience and it’s never too late to learn!

Being resilient does **NOT** mean...

you won’t experience difficulty or distress, emotional pain, negative thoughts or sadness, or seek guidance from others/professionals to navigate during life’s challenges or adversities.
Emotional Resiliency = Self-Care

- **Self-Care**: refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress, maintain and enhance our short and longer-term health and well-being.

- Self-care is necessary for our effectiveness and success in honoring your professional and personal commitments.
FOSTERING RESILIENCY BY PRACTICING SELF-CARE

= 

A RESPONSIBLE PARENT/ADULT
“The name of the game is taking care of yourself, because you’re going to live long enough to wish you had.”

Grace Mirabella, 1950’s Editor in Chief of Vogue Magazine
Take a moment to list all the roles you play, both in your personal and professional life.
LET’S BRAINSTORM!
Physical Self-Care

- Safe housing
- Develop a regular sleep routine
- Aim for a healthy diet with meal prep
- Take lunch breaks
- Go for a walk at lunch-time
- Walk your pets after work
- Take a personal day
- Exercise regularly
- Apps to develop healthy habits
  (relaxation breathing, listen to music, counting steps, and mindful moments)
- Physical intimacy
- Bubble baths
- Turn off technology
Psychological Self-Care

- Self reflection
- Power words and affirmations
- Attitude of gratitude
- Journaling
- Therapy
- Engage in non-work hobbies
  (gardening, coloring/drawing, crafts, pets)
- Make/take time for relaxation
- Read Self-Help books
- Aromatherapy
- Make/take time to engage with friends & family
- Practice asking/receiving help from others
Emotional Self-Care

- Positive affirmations
- Reflective practices
  (mindfulness, meditation, talking with a friend or family member)
- Be in nature
- Self-Love and Self-Compassion
  “If you wouldn’t say it to a friend/partner/child, don’t say/think it to your self.”
- Laughter
- Say “I love you.”
- Family movie night
- Date Night
- Imagery
- Practice forgiveness of self & others
- Hug/Cuddle your partner/child/pet
We need 4 hugs a day for survival. We need 8 hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth.

— Virginia Satir —
Spiritual Self-Care

- Meditate
- Prayer
- Attend/recommit to your church, mosque, synagogue, temple, etc.
- Seek a spiritual community
- Sing, dance, listen to music and play
- Dream interpretation
- Healing touch (Reiki)
- Viewing sun rises or sunsets
- Play with your kids
- Being present
Mind Full, or Mindful?
Headspace App
Calm App
Shine App
Learn ‘who’ you are
Identify what you want out of life
Make a plan – ideas coming up!!
Set short & long term goals
Create a vision board
Foster existing friendships
Prioritize close relationships (partners, family and children)
Seek new friendships
Go on a date (partner, friend or children)
Get out of debt
Foster forgiveness in your self & others
Personal Self-Care

- Take a nap
- Seek a personal/spiritual mentor
- Volunteer
- Attend the special events of your family and friends
- Return to a passion/hobbie: write, cook, learn to play guitar, color, prayer, antique shopping, gardening, etc.
Professional Self-Care Continued

- Take your lunch (get out of your office/classroom/house)
- Take your breaks
- Create a “Calming” spot for employees/staff
- Encourage and model positive practices used for customers relations, students with employees/staff (Warm Fuzzies, Self-Reflection, Mindfulness, Incentives, etc.)
- Design/participate in team building activities
- Set boundaries (every time you say “yes” to something you are saying “no” to something else)
- Be your colleague’s keeper
Professional Self-Care Continued

- Arrive to work on time
- Regularly consult with more experienced colleagues/mentorship
- Leave work at work
- Plan/map your career goal(s)
- Seek out higher level learning opportunities and/or professional development that is meaningful
- Take a personal day
- Use your vacation
- Therapy (insurance offerings)
- Create a book club, support club, mentoring club
- Seek out & encourage ways to bring the “FUN” into the work place
What are the benefits of practicing Self-Care?
• Powerful presence
• Ability to develop and keep a fresh perspective
• Increased coping mechanisms “BOUNCE BACK”
• Increased integrity and dignity
• Health and vibrancy
• Enhanced creativity in dealing with challenges
• Create a positive environment with your attitude
• Increased self-confidence, balance and well-being
• Career satisfaction (finding your passion again)
• Improved personal and professional relationships
• IT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER PARENT!!!
Remember stress begins and ends with us!

There are many stressors that occur from uncontrollable forces outside of the self; the stress we experience is often times dependent on our choices.

Our outcomes from stress are dependent on our responses, our lifestyle and our attitudes.
The Secret to Creating Balance in Your Life

OKDani.com
LET’S CREATE!
5 Steps to Creating Habits of Self-Care

1. Build in rest as a **catalyst** for productivity not a **break from** it.
2. Streamline your schedule by doing fewer things, better.
3. Pair a self-care habit with your regular routine so it becomes automatic.
4. Focus on the habit of the habit: value right actions over right results.
5. Connect with like minds.
SIZING UP STRESS IN MY LIFE

My Stress Audit
How is my body feeling today?
Do I have a problem that could be stress-related?

Have I become more short-tempered or irritable than I used to be?
Am I often tired or exhausted?
Am I having trouble concentrating?
Am I overeating or not eating healthy food?
Am I smoking, eating, thinking, nagging, drinking too much?

A PLAN THAT WORKS FOR ME

What can I do today to relieve some of my stress?
Connect with others
Listen to music
Say a prayer
Exercise
Enjoy a cup of tea or coffee
Create artwork
Take a walk
Meditate
Take a hot bath or shower
Watch a good movie
Breathe deeply
Join a support group
Reach out to other parents

IDENTIFY SOMETHING(S) I CAN DO TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF MYSELF...

1. I will take 15 minutes each morning, after I get the kids on the bus to enjoy a cup of coffee – ALONE.
2. _____________________________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUN</th>
<th>MON</th>
<th>TUE</th>
<th>WED</th>
<th>THU</th>
<th>FRI</th>
<th>SAT</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Family Out To Eat</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Late Start</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stay Late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Late Start</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Get my hair done</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Late Start</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Stay Late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Late Start</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Stay Late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Coffee Family Movie Night</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Download & Print Free Calendars From www.wiki-calendar.com
When I make a “BINGO” I will reward myself with ... 1. a nap
2. watching Harry Potter with my daughter (all day binge, maybe)
3. an ice cream cone
IGNACIO's Self Care Plan!

**Mind**
- Meditate
- Take lots of breaks
- Music
- Fun!
- Life-long learning

**Body**
- Tea
- Nourishing food
- Exercise
- Sleep eight hours
- Everything in moderation

**Spirit**
- Meditate
- Human connections
- Self-reflection
- Fulfillment though using my awesome skills

Supportive People In My Life:
- Gretchen
- Mom
- Mi Viejo
- Alberto
- Lynne
- Caroline
- Reed
- Deborah

I want to accomplish:
- Peace
- Serenity
- Control
- Happiness
- Good work
- Be a good person
LET’S REVIEW!
Why do we need this?
Emotional Resiliency

Self-Care Strategies
Toxic stress, Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue can create long lasting effects on a person’s overall health.

Self-Care Strategies strengthen our emotional resiliency “bounce back,” during difficult times.

Practicing self-care will lead to increased satisfaction and productivity within our lives.

Ultimately leading us to be happier parents/caregivers and children.
References & Resources:

- The Resilient Practitioner by Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison
- http://ineedmovation.com/100-benefits-of-meditation/
- www.olgapeonix.com (Self-Care Wheel)
- CULT OF PEDOGOGY
- https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/design-your-path/201305/10-traits-emotionally-resilient-people
- Headspace App
- Calm.com
- Shine App
This self-care wheel was inspired by and adapted from “Self-Care Assessment Worksheet” from *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization* by Pearlman and Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton 1996). Created by Olga Phoenix Project: Healing For Social Change (2013).
Skovholt Practitioner Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory

The purpose of the inventory is to provide self-reflection for practitioners and students in the caring professions. Practitioner here refers to individuals in the caring professions—such as the helping professions, teaching and health care. Examples are psychologist, counselor, social worker, academic advisor, K-12 teacher, college professor, clergy, human resources specialist, physician, registered nurse, dentist and family law attorney.

Questions are addressed to both active practitioners and also students in training programs. There is no total number that is considered best. In fact, some of the questions are not relevant to some professionals or students who fill out this inventory. The inventory is intended to help decrease stress, not increase it!

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The checklist consists of four sub-scales: Professional Vitality, Personal Vitality, Professional Stress and Personal Stress.

\[1=\text{Strongly Disagree, } 2=\text{Disagree, } 3=\text{Undecided, } 4=\text{Agree, } 5=\text{Strongly Agree}\]

**Professional Vitality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I find my work as a practitioner or as a student to be meaningful</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I view self-care as an ongoing part of my professional work / student life</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I am interested in making positive attachments with my</td>
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<tr>
<td>clients /students/patients</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I have the energy to make these positive attachments with my</td>
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<tr>
<td>clients /students/patients</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The director / chair at my site / school is dedicated to practitioner welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. On the dimension of control of my work / schooling, I am closer to high control than low control</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. On the dimension of demands at my work/ schooling, I have reasonable demands rather than excessive demands from others</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. My work environment is like a greenhouse--where everything grows--because the conditions are such that I feel supported in my professional work</td>
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</table>
Subscale Score for Professional Vitality (Possible score is 8-40)  

Personal Vitality

9. I have plenty of humor and laughter in my life.............................................1  2  3  4  5

10. I have a strong code of values / ethics that gives me a sense of direction and integrity.................................................................1  2  3  4  5

11. I feel loved by intimate others.................................................................1  2  3  4  5

12. I have positive /close friendships.............................................................1  2  3  4  5

13. I am physically active and receive the benefits of exercise .......................1  2  3  4  5

14. My financial life (expenses, savings and spending) is in balance.............1  2  3  4  5

15. I have lots of fun in my life.................................................................1  2  3  4  5

16. I have one or more abundant sources of high energy for my life.
   (examples—other people, pleasurable hobby, enjoyable pet, the natural world, a favorite activity).........................................................1  2  3  4  5

17. To balance the ambiguity of work in the caring professions, I have some concrete activities in my life that I enjoy where results are clear cut (e.g. a rock collection, painting walls, growing tomatoes, washing the car) ..................1  2  3  4  5

18. My eating habits are good for my body..................................................1  2  3  4  5

19. My sleep pattern is restorative...............................................................1  2  3  4  5

Subscale Score for Personal Vitality (Possible score is 10-55)  

Professional Stress

20. There are many contradictory messages about both practicing self-care and meeting expectations of being a highly competent practitioner / student. I am working to find a way through these contradictory messages. .................................................................1  2  3  4  5

21. Overall, I have been able to find a satisfactory level of “boundaried generosity” (defined as having both limits and giving of oneself) in my work with clients / students / patients .................................................................1  2  3  4  5
22. Witnessing human suffering is central in the caring professions (e.g. client grief, student failure, patient physical pain). I am able to be very present to this suffering, but not be overwhelmed by it or experience too much of what is called ‘sadness of the soul.’

23. I have found a way to have high standards for my work yet avoid unreachable perfectionism.

24. My work is intrinsically pleasurable most of the time.

25. Although judging success in the caring professions is often confusing, I have been able to find useful ways to judge my own professional success.

26. I have at least one very positive relationship with a clinical supervisor / mentor / teacher.

27. I am excited to learn new ideas—methods—theories—techniques in my field.

28. The level of conflict between staff / faculty at my organization is low.

Subscale Score for Professional Stress (Possible score is 8-40)

Personal Stress

29. There are different ways that I can get away from stress and relax (examples-- TV, meditating, reading for fun, watching sports).

30. My personal life does not have an excessive number of one-way caring relationships where I am the caring one.

31. My level of physical pain / disability is tolerable.

32. My family relations are satisfying.

33. I derive strength from my religious /spiritual practices and beliefs.

34. I am not facing major betrayal in my personal life.

35. I have a supportive community where I feel connected.

36. I am able to cope with significant losses in my life.

37. I have time for reflective activities such as journaling-expressive writing.
38. When I feel the need, I am able to get help for myself .........................................................................1 2 3 4 5

Subscale Score for Personal Stress (Possible score is 10-50)  

Total Score for the Four Subscales (Possible score is 38-195)  

There are a total of 38 questions in the Skovholt Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory. All are scored in a positive direction with 0 low and 5 high. As stated earlier, the scoring system is a method for self-reflection by practitioners and students in the caring professions. There is no total number that is considered best. In fact, some of the questions are not relevant to some professionals or students who fill out this inventory. The inventory is intended to help decrease stress, not increase it!

As a way to consider professional resiliency and self-care in your career work, consider these questions. First, scan the questions and focus on your high answers, those with 4 and 5 responses. What do you conclude? Write here.

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Then focus on your low answers, those with 1 and 2 responses. What do you conclude? Write here.

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________


_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Finally, consider the different topics covered in the inventory, your answers and the comments you made for future self-reflection, clinical supervision and discussion with others. Best wishes!

Tom Skovholt
Self-Care Bingo

When I reach a “bingo” I will treat myself with...

______________________________________________________
WAYS TO AVOID COMPASSION FATIGUE

I CAN:

1. Have a manageable patient load, know and set boundaries and limits.
2. Use as many “others” as possible in my work with patients, work as a team.
3. Take a “Mental Health Day” when needed.
4. Laugh, joke, have time to unwind.
5. Have a holistic approach to taking care of myself – mind, body, feelings, spirituality. Let go, do not allow stress or take on others’ stress, reduce anxiety, recognize choices.
6. Have an understanding supervisor.
7. Have supervision with supervisor and peers.
8. Get and give feedback with supervisor and peers.
9. Read materials and go to workshops and training seminars related to compassion fatigue.
10. Be assertive with feelings and concerns.
11. Let people know my limits.
12. Process, talk things out. Talk to a health care professional if needed.
13. Have a safe work environment.

(Adapted by Lisa D. Butler, PhD from materials provided by the Social Work Department of Roswell Park Cancer Institute. http://roswellpark.org.)
The Cost of Caring: 10 Ways to Prevent Compassion Fatigue

February 9, 2016 • By GoodTherapy.org Staff

Compassion fatigue can be a serious occupational hazard for those in any kind of helping profession, with a majority of those in the field reporting experiencing at least some degree of it in their lives. This is no surprise, as it is typically those with the most empathy who are the most at risk. Compassion fatigue is characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion and a profound decrease in the ability to empathize. It is a form of secondary traumatic stress, as the stress occurs as a result of helping or wanting to help those who are in need. If left untreated, compassion fatigue not only can affect mental and physical health, but it can also have serious legal and ethical implications when providing therapeutic services to people. While it is not uncommon to hear compassion fatigue referred to as burnout, the conditions are not the same. Compassion fatigue is more treatable than burnout, but it can be less predictable and may come on suddenly or without much warning, whereas burnout usually develops over time.

Because it can arise so abruptly, it can be important for therapists and others in the helping professions to protect themselves from this condition. Here are 11 ways to prevent compassion fatigue from happening to you:

1. GET EDUCATED

If you know you are at risk for compassion fatigue, taking the time to learn the signs and symptoms can be a helpful means of prevention.

The most common signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue include:

- Chronic exhaustion (emotional, physical, or both)
- Reduced feelings of sympathy or empathy
- Dreading working for or taking care of another and feeling guilty as a result
• Feelings of irritability, **anger**, or **anxiety**
• Depersonalization
• Hypersensitivity or complete insensitivity to emotional material
• Feelings of inequity toward the therapeutic or **caregiver** relationship
• Headaches
• Trouble sleeping
• Weight loss
• Impaired decision-making
• Problems in personal **relationships**
• Poor work-life balance
• Diminished sense of career fulfillment

Knowing the signs and symptoms and continuing to check in with yourself can help you better prevent and manage compassion fatigue if it arises. Many people find that ranking their level of compassion fatigue on a scale of 1-10 is an effective strategy. For example, a rank of 6 might mean you are declining social invitations due to feeling drained and a 7 might be difficulty sleeping due to excessive **worry** about someone else’s well-being.

Cultivating a high level of self-awareness and understanding of how your 6 differs from your 7 can help you gage where you are so you can implement necessary strategies to avoid the red zone that would likely be a 9 or 10.

It is not only the work itself that poses a risk, but the person’s life conditions as well. For example, someone who is not only taking care of people at work, but also caring for a child or adult family member at home may be even more susceptible to compassion fatigue. If you are currently experiencing increased life stressors at home as well as in the **workplace**, prevention strategies against compassion fatigue may be important.

If you think you may be experiencing compassion fatigue, you can take a compassion fatigue self-assessment developed by the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project [here](#).

**2. PRACTICE SELF-CARE**

Practicing **self-care** can be a critical method of protecting yourself against compassion fatigue. It is not uncommon for those who are constantly concerned with the needs of others to wind up neglecting their own.
Those who practice good self-care are significantly less vulnerable to stress and compassion fatigue than those who fail to do so. A good self-care regimen will look different for each person, but it should generally include:

- Balanced, nutritious diet
- Regular exercise
- Routine schedule of restful sleep
- Balance between work and leisure
- Honoring emotional needs

Making time for these self-care activities leaves less room for overworking, which can lead to compassion fatigue, said Nicole Urdang, MS, NCC, DHM, a holistic psychotherapist based in New York.

“Overworking is often at the heart of compassion fatigue and its first cousin: vicarious trauma,” Urdang said. “Taking the very best care of yourself includes setting limits.”

3. SET EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

It can be especially important for therapists, social workers, nurses, and caregivers alike to set firm emotional boundaries to protect themselves. Empathy and compassion are generally at the forefront of a human services career.

If left untreated, compassion fatigue not only can affect mental and physical health, but it can also have serious legal and ethical implications when providing therapeutic services to people. The challenge is to remain compassionate, empathetic, and supportive of others without becoming overly involved and taking on another’s pain. Setting emotional boundaries helps maintain a connection while still remembering and honoring the fact that you are a separate person with your own needs.

If people in a human services career are exposed to too much trauma, they may begin to feel overwhelmed, and people may feel that overwhelm in different ways, Urdang said. “It might manifest as insomnia, overeating, skipping meals, addictive behavior, isolating oneself, depression, anxiety, or anger. We might find ourselves fighting with partners or children, having no patience, feeling exhausted, noticing a lowered libido, unmotivated, and, paradoxically, being less interested in what our clients have to say,” she said. “Believe it or not, these are all helpful, as they quickly alert us to our depleted state. If we are paying attention and are committed to radical self-care, we can act on this awareness by rebalancing our life. If that is not possible, simply taking short breaks throughout the day to close your eyes, focus on your breath, or put your hands on your heart and send yourself some compassion can all make a big difference.”
4. ENGAGE IN OUTSIDE HOBBIES
Maintaining a solid work-life balance can help protect you from compassion fatigue. When all your time is spent working or thinking about work, it can be easy to burn out. Studies have shown work-life balance is becoming more important to workers, and making time for leisure activities and personal hobbies outside of work can help lower stress levels and improve overall life satisfaction.

5. CULTIVATE HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS OUTSIDE OF WORK
While it is great to have strong relationships with your co-workers, it is equally important to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships outside of work. It can sometimes be difficult for co-workers to avoid talking about work even outside the workplace. Connecting with friends who are not aware of the ins and outs of your work situation can provide much needed emotional and professional relief.

6. KEEP A JOURNAL
Journaling is an excellent way to process and release emotions that may arise from your line of work. Taking the time to cultivate self-awareness and connect with your personal thoughts and feelings can help prevent suppression of emotions, which can lead to compassion fatigue over time.

7. BOOST YOUR RESILIENCY
Resilience is our ability to bounce back from stress. While some people seem to naturally be more resilient than others, resilience is a skill that can be learned and cultivated.
“Resilience can be thought of as the ability to adapt to and become stronger through adversity,” said Marjie L. Roddick, MA, LMHC. “It can be a protective factor against compassion fatigue, so those with higher resiliency are better able to prevent compassion fatigue. Resilience is something that can be learned, and enhancing or boosting it can reduce the effects of compassion fatigue as new coping methods are learned.”

8. USE POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES
While it may be tempting to wash away the stress and emotional burdens of your job with alcohol or drugs, this can actually work in the reverse and compound stress in the long run. Consider making a list of positive coping strategies to use in times of stress. This might include deep breathing, meditation, taking a walk, talking with a friend, watching a funny movie, or relaxing in a hot bath.
9. IDENTIFY WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

Workplace strategies are often an important part of compassion fatigue prevention. If your employer does not currently have any in place, consider suggesting their implementation.

Some workplace strategies that have been proven to be beneficial are:

- Support groups and open discussions about compassion fatigue in the workplace
- Regular breaks
- Routine check-ins
- Mental health days
- Onsite counseling
- Relaxation rooms, massage, meditation classes, etc.

10. SEEK PERSONAL THERAPY

If you find yourself feeling emotionally vulnerable, significantly stressed, or overwhelmed, consider seeing a therapist who can help you process your feelings and implement strategies to help you combat compassion fatigue and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

References:


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Twelve Warning Signs of Health

- Persistent presence of support network
- Chronic positive expectations: tendency to frame events in a constructive light
- Episodic peak experiences
- Sense of spiritual involvement
- Increase sensitivity
- Tendency to adapt to changing conditions
- Rapid response and recovery of adrenaline system due to repeated challenges
- Increased appetite for physical activity
- Tendency to identify and communicate feelings
- Repeated episodes of gratitude, generosity or related emotions
- Compulsion to contribute to society
- Persistent sense of humor

Collected from a bulletin board in Waldport, Oregon
No author's name given
12 Traits of Tough-Minded Optimists

- Seldom surprised by trouble
- Look for partial solutions
- Believe they control their futures
- Allow for regular renewal
- Interrupt negative trains of thought
- Heighten their powers of appreciation
- Imagine and rehearse success
- Cheerful even when they're not happy
- Believe they have an almost unlimited capacity for stretching
- Like to swap good news
- Accept what cannot be changed
- Build lots of love into their lives

Alan Loy McGinnis, The Power of Optimism