



Compassion Fatigue Solutions inc.
Workshops for the Helping Professions

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Appendix A

Handouts & Worksheets

First Self Assessment Exercise

Observe the work that you do. Does it have:

- A large volume of demand? (and often increasing demands, such as more and more clients to see or more and more paperwork to do) ?
- Continually dwindling resources?
- Exposure to difficult stories of loss, pain, death and suffering?
- Do you work with clients who face seemingly insurmountable obstacles, have chronic needs or even clients who get worse rather than get better?

All of these elements can contribute to compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma

Ask yourself the four following questions:

1) Where do the stories go?

What do you do at the end of a work day to put difficult stories client away and go home to your friends and family?

2) Were you trained for this?

Did your training offer you any education on self care, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or burnout? If it did, how up to date are you on those strategies? If it didn't, which is still true for the majority of us over a certain age, how much do you know about these concepts?

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3) What are your particular vulnerabilities?

Two things we know for sure about the field of helping: one, that a large percentage of helpers have experienced primary trauma at some point in their past, which may have led them to being attracted to the field in the first place. Two, that personality types who are attracted to the field of helping (rather than, say, mechanical engineering) are more likely to feel highly attuned and empathy towards others, which makes them good at their job and also more vulnerable to developing CF, VT and Burnout.

4) How do you protect yourself while doing this very challenging work?

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Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma - Signs and Symptoms

Physical Signs and Symptoms

- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Somatization and hypochondria

Behavioural Signs and Symptoms

- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Absenteeism
- Anger and Irritability
- Avoidance of clients
- Impaired ability to make decisions
- Problems in personal relationships
- Attrition
- Compromised care for clients
- The Silencing Response
- Depleted parenting

Psychological signs and symptoms

- Emotional exhaustion
- Distancing
- Negative self image
- Depression
- Sadness, Loss of hope
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism
- Resentment
- Dread of working with certain clients
- Feeling professional helplessness
- Diminished sense of enjoyment/career
- Depersonalization/numbness
- Disruption of world view/ Heightened anxiety or irrational fears
- Inability to tolerate strong feelings
- Problems with Intimacy
- Intrusive imagery – preoccupation with trauma
- Hypersensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli
- Insensitivity to emotional material
- Difficulty separating personal and professional lives
- Failure to nurture and develop non work related aspects of life

Sources: Saakvitne (1995), Figley (1995), Gentry, Baranowsky & Dunning (1997), Yassen (1995).

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Exercise: What's on your plate

Take a blank sheet of 8 ½ by 11 paper and draw a large dinner plate on it.

First: In your plate, write all the things you do/are responsible for, roles, jobs, responsibilities, life needs and issues presently. Write as many concrete details as possible. Think of a typical day in your life from start to finish e.g.: “get up, make lunches for kids, make breakfast, clean up, call plumber, drive to work, etc.)

Second: Look at the things within the plate you **would like to change and underline them** (Don't worry whether or not they are actually changeable in reality at the moment)

Third: Look at the things that are changeable at the moment (even by 1%) and circle these

Fourth: Write around the plate things you **wish you had more time for**

Fifth: Look at what you have lost touch with and did well in the past (running, reading, singing.....?)

Sixth: Think about why/how you did these things in the past

Seventh: Reflect on why you are not doing them now (or a % of them – if you used to be a competitive figure skater, you may now enjoy skating once a week for fun?)

Ask yourself how can you make choices to integrate the things you wish you had more time for, in your life now.

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Go further

Choose one thing on your plate that you can delegate, say no to, back out of or make one small step towards any of these goals. For example, you have agreed to have your partner's family for a large family dinner and it was identified as the one thing you wish you could have said no to. Take 10 minutes to yourself and brainstorm every option you can think of, no matter how silly or unrealistic. Force your inner critic to sit out, when he/she starts to say No you can't do that, tell her/him to be quiet while you finish the exercise. For example, call everyone back and tell them that you have a huge bug problem and the exterminator will be there; call and ask everyone to bring a dish rather than making dinner yourself; call and ask if this could be moved to another week after being honest about how tired you are feeling; ask your partner to make dinner for his/her family while you go out on the town with friends you haven't seen in a long time.

As you re-read your answers, and hopefully some of them are more outrageous than you would normally be, check your responses. For example, how did it feel to read the last one? Most of the helpers we work with have said that they would NEVER back out of something they offered to do unless it was a life or death problem. Well, what does that say to your body? It says to your body "create a life or death problem for me so I can get out of things I don't want to do". Now you are really in a fix because your compassion fatigue may also be protecting you from standing up for yourself.

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IDEA FACTORY

Commitment to Changes I could make in the next...

Week:

Month:

Year:

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