

The Emotional Bind of Compassionate Caregiving

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Objectives

- Discuss the emotional impact of caregiving
- Understand the concept of **Compassion Fatigue** and ideas for managing it

The Emotional Bind of Compassionate Care

- How do you effectively manage the heavy emotional labor of your work while preserving emotional balance and professionalism?

What happens when we are “chronic caregivers”?

- Lots of automatic physical responses, feelings, and thoughts!
- These reactions often need to be controlled or suppressed in the service of “good caregiving”
 - Rather than processed or allowed to naturally extinguish

What are the effects of being exposed to others' trauma?

- Sometimes not too different from direct trauma
 - Unwanted thoughts, nightmares, "flashbacks," physical distress
 - Avoiding reminders
 - Feeling unsafe, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, irritability



Compassion Fatigue



- Stress resulting from sharing in stories of or witnessing distress of others you are trying to help
 - “A disorder that affects even those who are doing their work very well.”
- Can begin to challenge basic beliefs about safety, trust, control, etc.
- Ebbs and flows, but even very healthy individuals with good life/work balance may experience it

Symptoms and Impact of Compassion Fatigue



Emotional Indicators

- Anxiety, negative hyperarousal
- Intrusive imagery
- Numbness, flooding
- Lowered frustration tolerance, irritability
- Grief
- Anger

Physical Indicators

- Headaches, GI symptoms
- Insomnia, nightmares, sleep disruptions
- Decreased immune response
- Fatigue, lethargy
- Concentration difficulties
- Increased accident-proneness

Personal Indicators

- Decrease in subjective sense of safety
- Self-isolation
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Diminished functioning in non-professional circumstances
- Increases in ineffective or self-destructive self-soothing behaviors

Work Indicators

- Avoidance of certain patients
- Hypervigilant response to certain cases
- Diminished sense of purpose, enjoyment
- Feeling ineffective
- Feeling disorganized, unmotivated
- Boundary problems
- Cynicism, blaming others

Compassion Fatigue Symptoms

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual	Personal Relationships	Physical/ Somatic	Work Performance
Lowered Concentration	Powerlessness	Impatient	Questioning the meaning of life	Withdrawal	Rapid heartbeat	Low motivation
Decreased self-esteem	Anxiety	Irritable	Loss of purpose	Decreased interest in intimacy or sex	Breathing difficulties	Avoiding tasks
Apathy	Guilt	Withdrawn	Lack of self satisfaction	Mistrust	Fatigue	Obsession about details
Rigidity	Anger/rage	Moody	Pervasive hopelessness	Isolation from others	GI symptoms	Apathy
Disorientation	Survivor guilt	Sleep disturbance	Anger at God	Over protection as a parent	Aches and pains	Negativity
Perfectionism	Shutdown	Nightmares	Questioning of prior Religious beliefs	Projection of anger or blame	Dizziness	Boundary problems
Minimization	Numbness	Appetite changes	Loss of faith in a higher power	Intolerance	Increased number and intensity of medical maladies	Poor work
Preoccupation with trauma	Fear	Hyper-vigilant	Greater skepticism re: religion	Loneliness	Impaired immune System	Absenteeism
Distorted Cognitions	Sadness	Accident proneness		Increased interpersonal Conflicts		Exhaustion
	Emotional roller coaster	Losing Things				Withdrawal from Colleagues
	Depleted					
	Overly sensitive					

Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue



Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Sustainable self-care
 - Not just sleep and nutrition and exercise -- it's how you prioritize yourself
 - Talk with others who are good models
 - Think back to things that brought you joy in childhood

Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Balanced workload with small bits of time for yourself each day
- Ask for help
 - Don't wait for others to read your mind
 - Who could/would step in if you needed to be idle?

Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Mindful transitions from work to home
 - Be purposeful about ritual – changing clothes, walking, music, etc.
- Limit trauma inputs

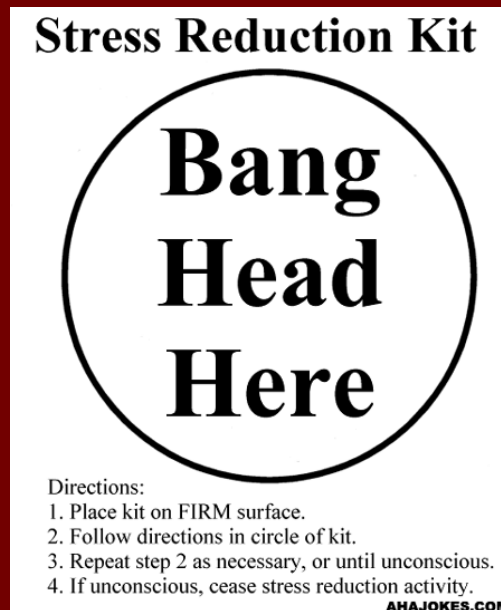


Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Say no (or yes) more often
- Look for peer supervision and support
- Keep learning

Tips for Preventing/Lessening Compassion Fatigue

- Explore other (indirect care) duties
- Find small changes that are easy to make in activity level, nutrition, sleep, etc.



Final Thoughts

- Suppression = Short-Term Gain and Long-Term Pain
- Self-Awareness + Self-Care = Resilience
- Small Changes + Time = Big Results
- You don't have to do it alone!

Final Thoughts

- Dig where the ground is soft.
~ Chinese proverb

