Mitigating the Risk of Compassion Fatigue through Building Resiliency

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“There are moments that the words don’t reach
There is a grace too powerful to name
We push away what we can never understand
We push away the unimaginable”

Lin-Manuel Miranda
“It's Quiet Uptown”
Hamilton: The Musical
Our Goals...

• Define Compassion Fatigue terms

• Identify Factors that Contribute to Compassion Fatigue

• Identify how Compassion Fatigue affects physical health, emotions, behaviors, and thoughts.
Our Goals...

• Develop an understanding of Five Resilience Factors:
  – Self Knowledge and Insight
  – Healthy Coping
  – Strong Relationships
  – Personal Perspective and Meaning
  – A Sense of Hope
Compassion Fatigue: An Occupational Hazard
“No Matter What I Do, It is Never Enough...”
“Are you kidding me?”
“You want me to take more?”
“Safety First”
“How Many Days Until Retirement?”
How much do they pay at Starbucks?
“I Could Drive the Really Big Rigs...”
You Cannot Immerse Yourself in this Work Without Getting Wet
Is Not

– A sign of weakness
– A sign of uncaring

And Cannot Be

– Wished away
– Ignored
– “Powered through”
Terminology

• Secondary Traumatic Stress
• Vicarious Traumatization
• Compassion Fatigue
• Burn Out

Self Care Plan Page 2
Secondary Traumatic Stress

Much like PTSD

- Preoccupation with images
- Nightmares/dreams
- Distress at reminders
- Hypervigilance
- Hyperstartle Response
- Avoiding reminders: thoughts, feelings, situations

Less common --
(Thank Goodness!)
But it does happen --
Compassion Fatigue

“....A debilitating weariness brought about by repetitive, empathic response to pain and suffering...”

Karl LaRowe, MSW
Erosion Over Time
Vicarious Traumatization

• Changes in Your World View
  • Sense of Identity
  • Spirituality
  • Personal Safety
  • Safety of Others
  • Trust in Other
**Burnout**

- Emotional exhaustion
- Detachment
- Decrease in feelings of personal accomplishment

This can happen in any occupation, not just those in helping professions.
Contributing Factors

- Specific Aspects of a Situation or Case
- Personal Factors
- External Issues
Specific Aspects of a Situation or Case

What Makes a Particular Case Impact Us More Than Another Case?

Self Care Plan Page 3
HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED...
An Abused Child

A Disengaged Client

Generations of Family Dysfunction
Very Short-Sighted People

People Who Put Themselves in Danger

An Abused Adult
...And people who are not sure if they even *want* help

**I WANT YOU TO PET ME**

**BUT I ALSO KINDA WANNA EAT YOU**
Everyone Will Have a Different Answer

Common Themes --

• Personal Involvement
• Personal “triggers”
• Degree of helplessness
• Degree of complexity
Personal Factors

Is it my clients or ME?
Protective and Risk Factors

Protective Factors
- Limited Exposure
- Experienced
- Identify if Multifaceted
- Self worth is multi dimensional
- Realistic expectations of others and self
- Flexible optimistic, proactive,
- Solid support system
- Well balanced
- Realistic view of self

Risk Factors
- Repeated exposure
- New to the field
- Identity is from work
- Self worth is determined by helping others
- Unrealistic expectations of others/selves
- Inflexible, pessimistic, reactive
- Limited support system
- Unbalanced work/home life
- Low self compassion
Who is not at risk?

Here’s a hint:

(Sociopaths)
Organizational Factors

- Rules/Regulations
- Organizational Change
- Leadership Issues
- Budgets
- Unsupportive Environments
- Physical Space
- External Factors
- Workload
Effects of Compassion Fatigue on Individuals

"Frank just up and exploded. I hope I never get that burned out."
Physical Signs

- Fatigue/chronic exhaustion
- Poor sleep
- Increase/Decrease in appetite
- Muscle tension
- Inactive
- Difficulty concentrating
Emotions

- Fear
- Lack of enjoyment
- Anger/Cynicism
- Grief
- Hopeless
- Confusion
- Numb
- Guilty
- Denial
Behavioral

- Avoidance
- Social withdrawal
- Disconnection
- Addictions
- Hypervigilance
- Hyper-startle reaction
Thoughts

- Minimizing
- Insensitivity to violence
- “I can never do enough”
- Blaming Others
- Difficulty making decisions
- Procrastination
- “It’s dangerous out there!”
These are normal responses that helped us survive.
My Experience…
Who is Responsible?

You  Co-workers  Supervisors  Organization
Compassion Fatigue Resilience
Work of Eric Gentry, Ph.D.

Old Paradigm

• Objectivity/Stoicism
• Leads to:
  – Repression
  – Isolation
  – Feels of Inadequacy
  – Strong but Bitter
  – Physical/emotional/social consequences
• Focus on external locus of control

New Paradigm

• Can’t avoid pain
• Don’t need to suffer if willing to grow/evolve
• Can be healthy in toxic environment
• Internal locus of control
Eric Gentry: Antibodies

CDC definition of disease
“Absence of effective antibodies”

Compassion Fatigue Resiliency

- Build “effective antibodies” to manage toxic (trauma exposed) environment
- Can learn these resiliency skills
Eric Gentry: Developmental Process

• Learning and using resiliency skills is a natural developmental process

• Stages:
  – “Zealot”
    • Genuine joy in your work
    • Enjoy this time
    • Don’t condemn it
  – “Thwarted Intention” leads to maturation
    Something gets in the way (system or traumatic events)
    Heighted anxiety/depressed feeling
    Feeling weight of toxicity
    “Grow or Go Or ?”
Five Resiliency Factors:
Lord and O’Brien (2009)

- Self Knowledge and Insight
- Healthy Coping
- Strong Relationships
- Personal Perspective and Meaning
- Sense of Hope
Resiliency Factor One: 
Self Knowledge and Insight

- Recognizing My Triggers
- Recognizing Resilience
- Recognizing What I Can and Cannot Control
Triggers:
What’s in Your Suitcase?

- Negative Childhood Events
- Noteworthy Family Situations
- Important Losses
- Specific Traumas
Recognizing Resilience

In What Ways Am I Already Resilient and Strong?
Recognizing What I Can – and Cannot -- Control

There are actually only 4 solutions to every problem.

Really?
Really!

Adapted from the work of Marsha Linehan, Ph.D.
#1: Solve the Problem

Is it in your power to solve the problem?

If so...

- Determine what the obstacles might be
- Brainstorm
- Pros and Cons
- Ask for Advice
- Try a Possible Solution
- Evaluate the Results
- Decide and Do
#2: Change Your Perception

If you do not have complete control over a situation –

**Change how you view it**

- Try to look from the other person’s **perspective**
- View the situation as an **opportunity to grow**, learn something new
- **Evaluate** the way you are thinking about it: “Fact vs. Crap”
#3: Radically Accept the Situation

Radical Acceptance means:

“I’m in this situation. I don’t approve of it. I don’t think it’s OK....

...but it is what it is and I can’t change it.”
#4: Stay Miserable

Maybe you aren’t ready to:

• Take action
• Change your perspective/attitude
• Accept what cannot be changed
• Process your feelings with a friend
• Accept support
Resiliency Factor Two: Healthy Coping

• Behavioral Strategies
  – Emotional regulation

• Cognitive Strategies
  – “Three Good Things”
  – Re-Framing Thoughts

• Self-Care
Behavior: Stress Response

Perceived Threat

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
When the danger passes...
back to homeostasis
So, What Can Go Wrong?

- We have a hard time letting go
- We look for the next bad event
- We never truly get back down to a calm state
What Can Go Wrong if We Stay Stressed?

We lose:

- Ability to make decisions
- Ability to plan
- Ability to reason
- The sense of what we should do
Breathe...

And Calm Down
Behavior: Calm Down

• Relax core muscles

• Breathing exercises
  – Belly Breathing, Equal breathing
  – Candle and Flower
  – 4-7-8 (breath in for 4, hold for 7, out for 8)

• Anchor to a repeat behavior
  – Before seeing a patient/client, before documentation, or set a reminder on your phone
What’s Going On in My Head? Recognizing Unhelpful Thoughts

- We provide ourselves with many “messages”
- Some are True
- Some are False

- We bend toward the negative!
What is Really True?

• The “true” part of the statement makes us believe it is **ALL** True

• We don’t always examine the *validity* of what we tell ourselves
Examples of *Mostly* Untrue Thoughts

“Everyone hates me”

Worse Case Scenario

“I can’t say ‘No’”

“I’m never good enough”

Atelphobia;
the fear of not being good enough.
What happens if we believe our **untrue** thoughts are **true**?
Sometimes our thoughts are so automatic, we don’t have the time to evaluate whether they are true or not.
The “Voice of Reason”

There is often a “balanced position” that can help us acknowledge BOTH aspects of the statement -

This helps us –

• Be Accountable -- and
• Be Realistic
Cognitive Strategies

“Something must be wrong with me.”
  “Everyone is affected by STS”

“I can’t let anyone know.”
  “Getting support helps me manage better.”

“S/he didn’t get better, so I failed.”
  “Interventions may have failed. I did the best I could.”

“I could have done more.”
  “I’m not in complete control.”
Activity: Three Good Things
Last Act of the Day

• Three things that went well today

• Your role in making those things happen

• Do it for the next week
Basic Self Care

- Basic Health
- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Take of physical illness
- Sunshine
- Relaxation
- Fun/engaging activities
Self-Care

*Immediate* activities

- *Routine* activities
- *Planned* activities
- “In the moment”
Resiliency Factor Three: Strong Relationships

- Family and Friends
- Co-workers
- Patients and Families
- Yourself (self compassion)
Reflections on Connections

Who brings you JOY?
Reflections on Connections

Who keeps you centered?
Reflections on Connections

Who holds me Accountable?
Reflections on Connections

Which relationships affect my self care

Positive

Negative?

Or
Reflections on Connections

Which relationships would you like to change?
Compassion Fatigue Coach

Someone who

✓ Supports you
✓ Validates you

but also

✓ Calls you on your “stuff”
What do they do?

– Listen to your story

– Share insights, thoughts, gently correct erroneous beliefs

– Remind you to breathe!
Compassion Fatigue Coach

At least one at home  
At least one at work
Relationship with Clients and Families

Compassion Satisfaction

✓ Treasure these
✓ Share them with others

But

✓ Don’t use them as the only means of self validation/self worth
How can you keep track of moments of Compassion Satisfaction?

- Box of complements/mementos
- Three positive interactions today
- Share your stories with your Accountability Partner(s)
Relationship with Self: Self Compassion

- **Self-kindness**: Being kind, gentle and understanding with yourself

- **Recognition of common human experience**: We all struggle, we all are imperfect, we all make mistakes, are rejected, fail etc.

- **Mindfulness**: Observing life “as it is” without being judgmental

Based on the work of Christine Neff, Ph.D.
Myths of Self Compassion

• Self compassion is self-pitying or egocentric
• Self compassion is self-indulgent
• Self-criticism is an effective motivator
Pathways to Self Compassion

- Care for yourself **physically**
- Be kind under stress
- Accept painful feelings
- Appreciate your **strengths**
- See **loving-kindness** as an antidote to fear
- Watch your language: pay attention to negative self talk
Brene Brown:
Are You Judging Those Who Ask for Help?
Resiliency Factor Four: Personal Perspective and Meaning

- Values/Mission Statement
- Living with Intentionality
- My piece of the situation
- How do I create meaning out of tragedy?

There is great meaning in life for those who are willing to take the journey.

- Jim England
Mission Statement:  
The Meaning of My Presence in the World

“Defining the personal, moral and ethical guidelines within which you can most happily express and fulfill yourself.”

Steven Covey
My Presence in the World

- Values Clarification
- Personal Strengths
- Influential Person(s)

Leads to...

Personal Mission Statement

Self Care Plan Pages 11-12
Gentry: Living with Intentionality

Mission/Values + Calm Space =

Living with Intentionality
Concrete Ways to Remind Ourselves of our Calling...

- Special object
- Index card of values
- Post your mission statement
- Symbol on our badge
Resiliency Factor Five: Sense of Hope

“When this is all over and that banner goes up, there’s really only one thing left to do. Repeat.”

- Dan Gilbert
Resiliency Factor Five: Sense of Hope

- Ability to Have Fun
- Sense of Humor
- Optimism
- Gratitude
Sense of Humor

Healthy humor can reframe a problem as “a challenge” rather than as “a catastrophe”
Ability to Have Fun

Our ability to have fun can:

• Shift our focus
• Provide us with a break from negativity
• Stop rumination
• Make a connection
Optimism

The skill of focusing on the positive –

Without denying the negative....

And channeling one’s energy toward what is controllable
Add an “Intentional” practice

- Gratitude Journal
- Share with friend, family, co-workers
Gratitude Activity

• An everyday blessing

• Someone in your life

• Retrospective gratitude

• Something that went well today

...I am grateful for...
But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer.

Viktor E. Frankl

Symphony of Love

Photo Credit: SashaJ @ Flickr
THANK YOU

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