

Statewide VOP Conference Call
Wednesday, May 18, 2016; 2:00 – 2:50 p.m.
Hosts: Sarah Hinzman and Tonya Amos

Attending:

- Andy Webb – Bethany Manor, Story City
- Barb Buchanan – Living Center West, Cedar Rapids
- Diane Kleckner – Exira Care Center, Exira
- Elaine Cook – Solon Nursing Care Center, Solon
- Gregg Durlam – Sunny View Care Center, Ankeny
- Jill Leimkuehler – Northbrook Manor, Cedar Rapids
- Kay Cota – Embassy Healthcare Community, Sergeant Bluff
- Marilyn Spangler – Manorcare Locust Street, Davenport
- Pam Pickar – Heritage Residence, New Hampton
- Shirley Sorenson – Deerfield Retirement Community, Urbandale

Pre-Call Optional Assignment

Before proceeding, you may find it helpful to examine your level of stress as a volunteer in the human services field by taking this [compassion fatigue assessment](#) and scoring your responses as the instructions outline in the document. Substitute the items labeled [help] for Volunteer Ombudsman, advocate, etc. It is important that you take the assessment without reading the scoring instructions, so you have a more accurate score.

Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Compassion Satisfaction: Top 12 Self-Care Tips for Helpers

By Françoise Mathieu, M.Ed., CCC., Compassion Fatigue Specialist © WHP-Workshops for the Helping Professions, March 2007

Dr. Charles Figley, world renowned trauma expert and pioneer researcher in the field of helper burnout has called compassion fatigue a “disorder that affects those who do their work well” (1995) It is characterized by deep emotional and physical exhaustion, symptoms resembling depression and PTSD and by a shift in the helper’s sense of hope and optimism about the future and the value of their work. The level of compassion fatigue a helper experiences can ebb and flow from one day to the next, and even very healthy helpers with optimal life/work balance and self-care strategies can experience a higher than normal level of compassion fatigue when they are overloaded, are working with a lot of traumatic content, or find their case load suddenly heavy with clients who are all chronically in crisis.

Compassion fatigue can strike the most caring and dedicated nurses, social workers, physicians and personal support workers alike. These changes can affect both their personal and professional lives with symptoms such as difficulty concentrating, intrusive imagery, loss of hope, exhaustion and irritability. It can also lead to profound shifts in the way helpers view the world and their loved ones. Additionally, helpers may become dispirited and increasingly cynical at work, they may make clinical errors, violate

client boundaries, lose a respectful stance towards their clients and contribute to a toxic work environment.

It has been shown that, when we are suffering from compassion fatigue, we work more rather than less. What suffers is our health, our relationship with others, our personal lives and eventually our clients.

Developing an Early Warning System for Yourself

Compassion fatigue is a normal consequence of working in the helping field. The best strategy to address compassion fatigue is to develop excellent self-care strategies, as well as an early warning system that lets you know that you are moving into the caution zone of Compassion Fatigue.

(From the Mayo clinic) Stress is a normal reaction. Some people are naturally more resilient and seem to take everything in stride. Others get anxious at the first sign of a stressful situation

Do you know how you react to stress? Here are some common reactions:

- **Pain.** You may unconsciously clench your jaws or fists or develop muscle tension, especially in your neck and shoulders, all of which can lead to unexplained physical pain. Stress may also cause a variety of other health ailments, including upset stomach, shortness of breath, back pain, headaches and insomnia.
- **Overeating.** Stress may trigger you to eat even when you're not hungry, or you may skip exercise. In contrast, you may eat less, actually losing weight when under more stress.
- **Anger.** Stress may leave you with a short temper. When you're under pressure, you may find yourself arguing with co-workers, friends or loved ones — sometimes with little provocation or about things that have nothing to do with your stressful situation.
- **Crying.** Stress may trigger crying jags, sometimes seemingly without warning. Little things unrelated to your stress may leave you in tears. You also may feel lonely or isolated.
- **Depression.** Sometimes stress may be too much to take. You might avoid the problem, call in sick to work, feel hopeless or simply give up. Chronic stress can be a factor in the development of depression or anxiety disorders.
- **Negativity.** When you don't cope well with stress, you may automatically expect the worst or magnify the negative aspects of any undesirable situation.
- **Smoking.** Even if you quit smoking long ago, a cigarette may seem like an easy way to relax when you're under pressure. In fact, stress is a leading cause of having a smoking relapse. You may also find yourself turning to alcohol or drugs to numb the effects of stress.

Tips To Combat Compassion Fatigue and Improve Self-Care (From Mathieu article)

1. **Take Stock: What's on your plate?**

Take a non-judgmental inventory of your life. Make a list of all the demands on your time and energy (work, family, home, healthy, volunteering, etc.). In each category, list the main stressors (number of clients, amount of paperwork, difficult people, etc.)

Once you make the list, take a look at it. What stands out? What factors are contributing to making your plate too full? Life situations or things you have taken on? What would you most like to change? Share with someone you trust and have a brainstorming session.

2. Learn to say no (or yes) more often

Folks attracted to our field are natural helpers. Do you find yourself trying to be the source of all help to all people in your life? That can be draining. Saying no can be fraught with self-esteem. Are you good at setting limits for yourself? Is there one thing you could do to say no a little more often?

Conversely, maybe you have stopped saying yes to all requests, because you are feeling so depleted and burned down, feel resentful and taken for granted. Have you stopped saying yes to friends, to new opportunities?

3. Finding motivation

Make a transition ritual between your facility visit and going home (take a short walk, change clothes, watch birds at your birdfeeder, etc.)

Talk with a peer, your VOP Coordinator, or Local Ombudsman to vent and seek another perspective and support. Attend Peer Group meeting.

Attend a local caregiver support group to learn more about coping strategies and the diagnoses you may encounter.

4. Find time for yourself every day/brainstorm a list of self-care activities

Do one nourishing activity a day. Treat self-care as a daily practice.

Self-care ideas from attendees:

- Take walks or go for a hike
- Take a yoga class once a week/practice yoga at your comfort level
- Exercise/[Silver Sneakers](#)
- Ride your bicycle
- Go camping
- Gardening or yard work
- Tackle a home improvement project...build a patio and then enjoy sitting on it
- Spend time with your pets
- Call a close friend or relative to talk
- Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself (family, friends, etc.)

- Take a [meditative retreat](#)
- Get a massage
- Try adult coloring books
- Pray/Spend some time being quiet
- Spend a few minutes breathing deeply, concentrating only on your breathing
- Take a nap
- Take a bath
- Have your favorite flavor of coffee or tea
- Listening to music you enjoy, or relaxing/meditative music
- Watch a funny movie/show or read a favorite book
- Have a glass of wine
- Chocolate!

See additional self-care tips from "Tiny Buddha" on pages 6 and 7.

5. Rebalance your workload

Try to avoid tackling all your most challenging situations in one visit.

Visit with residents who are positive overall during your next visit. Enjoy the pleasant conversations and the happiness your visits bring.

Just sit with folks in the memory care unit for a while. Be present without having to talk.

If you find yourself getting emotional, step away from the situation, calm down, and return at a later time to re-address.

6. Create a trauma filter

In our role, we may be exposed to the trauma others have experienced.

Are you unconsciously exposing yourself to other sources of trauma? Watching the news, listening to radio news, or reading the paper every day? Try to find a balance of media intake. Watch, listen to, or read something else once in a while as a distraction to all the negative things that happen in the world.

- At the end of the day, take your concerns and tie them up in an imaginary bag and drop the bag by the door when you leave. Then you don't take them home with you and you know where to pick them up in the morning.
 - Barb: I would also do that at each resident's room door as well.
- Accept that you cannot save everyone.
- If someone passes away, reminisce with facility staff. They may be feeling what you feel. Remembering someone can be therapeutic.
- Learn more about compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

7. "Dig where the ground is soft" or "low hanging fruit"

Start to improve your self-care AND assisting residents by starting with the low hanging fruit. What is the easiest to visualize improving upon? Acknowledge and celebrate small accomplishments.

Additional tips and discussion

Marilyn: I feel satisfied knowing that I'm visiting those who are less fortunate. I know it helps them, and it helps me appreciate what I have.

Barb: It's not about changing sometimes, but listening and having a presence. There was a neat activity my facility did for Mother's Day where they took pictures of all the women's hands and wrote a tribute to "a mother's hands".

Jill: I love listening to the experienced volunteers and learning from there. I agree, you can't save everyone.

FROM THE [TINY BUDDHA BLOG](#)

TINY SELF-CARE IDEAS FOR THE MIND

1. **Start a compliments file.** Document the great things people say about you to read later.
2. **Go cloud-watching.** Lie on your back, relax, and watch the sky.
3. **Take another route to the facility that you serve.** Mixing up your routine in small ways creates new neural pathways in the brain to keep it healthy.
4. **Pay complete attention to something you usually do on autopilot,** perhaps brushing your teeth, driving, eating, or performing your morning routine.
5. **Fix a small annoyance at home that's been nagging you**—a button lost, a drawer that's stuck, a light bulb that's gone.
6. **Punctuate your day with a mini-meditation** with one minute of awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations; one minute of focused attention on breathing; and one minute of awareness of the body as a whole.
7. **Be selfish.** Do one thing today just because it makes you happy.
8. **Do a mini-declutter.** Recycle three things from your wardrobe that you don't love or regularly wear.
9. **Unplug for an hour.** Switch everything to airplane mode and free yourself from the constant *bings* of social media and email.
10. **Edit your social media feeds, and take out any negative people.** You can just “mute” them; you don't have to delete them.
11. **Get out of your comfort zone,** even if it's just talking to a stranger at the bus stop.

TINY SELF-CARE IDEAS FOR THE BODY

1. **Oxygenate by taking three deep breaths.** [Breathe into your abdomen](#), and let the air puff out your stomach and chest.
2. **Get down and boogie.** Put on your favorite upbeat record and shake your booty.
3. **Stretch out the kinks.** If you're at work or at a facility, you can always head to the bathroom to avoid strange looks.
4. **Run (or walk, depending on your current physical health) for a few minutes.** Or go up and down the stairs three times. If you are at a facility, take a walk outside of the building.
5. **Make one small change to your diet for the week.** Drink an extra glass of water each day, or have an extra portion of veggies each meal.
6. **Give your body a treat.** Pick something from your wardrobe that feels great.
7. **Be still.** Sit somewhere green, and be quiet for a few minutes.
8. **Get fifteen minutes of sun,** especially if you're in a cold climate. (Use sunscreen if appropriate.)
9. **Inhale an upbeat smell.** Try peppermint to suppress food cravings and boost mood and motivation.

10. Have a good laugh. Read a couple of comic strips that you enjoy.

11. Take a quick nap. Ten to twenty minutes can reduce your sleep debt and leave you ready for action.

TINY SELF-CARE IDEAS FOR THE SOUL

1. Imagine you're your best friend. If you were, what would you tell yourself right now? Look in the mirror and say it.

2. Use your commute to the facility for a "Beauty Scavenger Hunt." Find five unexpected beautiful things on your way to the facility.

3. Help someone. Carry a bag, open a door, or pick up an extra carton of milk for a neighbor.

4. Check in with your emotions. Sit quietly and just name without judgment what you're feeling.

5. Write out your thoughts. Go for fifteen minutes on anything bothering you. Then let it go as you burn or bin the paper.

7. Play with a pet. If you don't have one, go to the park and find one. (Ask first!)

8. Get positive feedback. Ask three good friends to tell you what they love about you.

9. Make a small connection. Have a few sentences of conversation with someone in customer service such as a sales assistant or barista.

10. Splurge a little. Buy a small luxury as a way of valuing yourself.

11. Have a self-date. Spend an hour alone doing something that nourishes you (reading, your hobby, visiting a museum or gallery, etc.)

12. Take a home spa. Have a long bath or shower, sit around in your bathrobe, and read magazines.

13. Plan a two-day holiday for next weekend. Turn off your phone, tell people you'll be away, and then do something new in your own town.

14. Ask for help—big or small, but reach out. You can always reach out to your Program Coordinator or the Local Ombudsman if you need assistance.

With a little bit of attention to your own self-care, the fog will lift. You'll feel more connected to yourself and the world around you. By doing this you will help yourself and the people that you serve on a regular basis.