

Compassion Fatigue

How knowing the signs can help you continue making a difference!

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Burnout vs. Compassion Fatigue

Why is it important to know the difference?

- Both are serious challenges faced by individuals working in the non-profit sector
- Both can have a significant impact on professional and personal life
- Both include physical and emotional impacts
- Have some similar warning signs



What is the Difference between Compassion Fatigue and Burnout?

The primary difference is their origin

Burnout- the impact of a stressful workplace

Originates from occupational stress and being overworked

Caused by a pile up of work-related attributes such as stress, toxic coworkers, long hours, lack of resources and poor work culture

Emerges gradually over time

Compassion Fatigue- the impact of helping others

Originates from working with victims of trauma

Also called secondary traumatic stress and vicarious traumatization

Rapid or gradual onset- can be felt after the first experience of absorbing traumatic material, or build up over time

Burnout

Burnout usually develops in a sequence:

1. A high level of ambition leading the individual to try to “prove themselves.”
2. Working harder.
3. Neglecting personal emotional/physical/spiritual needs in pursuit of work.
4. Awareness by the worker that there is something wrong, but an inability to see what.
5. Changing personal values and value systems for efficiency at work.
6. Denial of work-related problems.
7. Social withdrawal.
8. Changes in behavior.
9. Depersonalization; person may see themselves as only useful for work.
10. Feelings of emptiness.
11. Depression.
12. Physical and emotional collapse – burnout.

The process outlined by psychologists Herbert Freudenberger and Gail North

Compassion Fatigue

Sometimes referred to as vicarious trauma

- Decline in feelings of compassion towards others due to exposure to their trauma
- Involves individuals who work directly with victims of physical, psychological, or sexual trauma
- Individuals experiencing compassion fatigue are not the ones directly traumatized, but the ones who are helping trauma victims (vicarious trauma)
- This consistent exposure to trauma leads to significant emotional strain on the worker
- This exposure eventually leads to a desensitization, which further leads to the adverse psychological effects defining compassion fatigue, such as depression and hopelessness

Compassion Fatigue

Why are we vulnerable?

- ❖ Our natural compassion towards others can cause us suffer emotional effects similar to those of the trauma victim.
- ❖ Many of us have experienced our own trauma- which is often the reason we got into this line of work.
- ❖ We are trained to utilize compassion and empathy to help others, which makes us vulnerable.
- ❖ Our natural compassion can lead us to take on responsibility for other people's hardships.

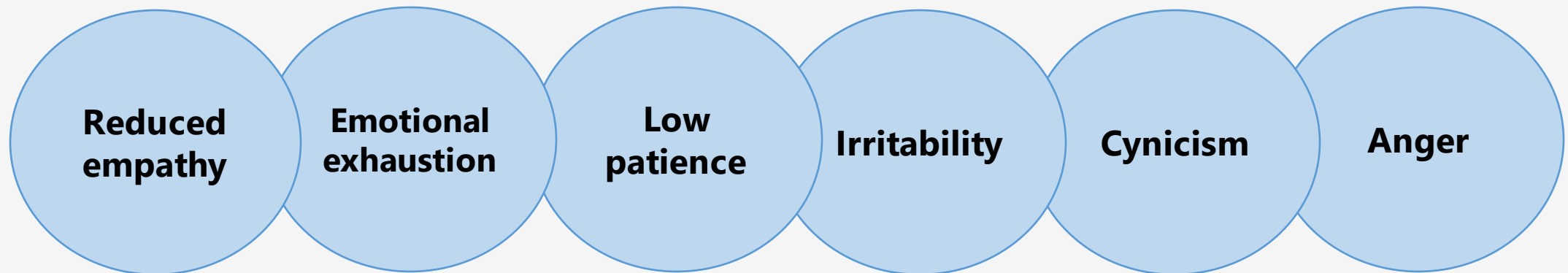


Compassion Fatigue- what are the symptoms?

Early warning signs include:



- ❖ Symptoms can mimic PTSD
- ❖ Self-blame is common
- ❖ Compromised care



Compassion Fatigue

More symptoms...

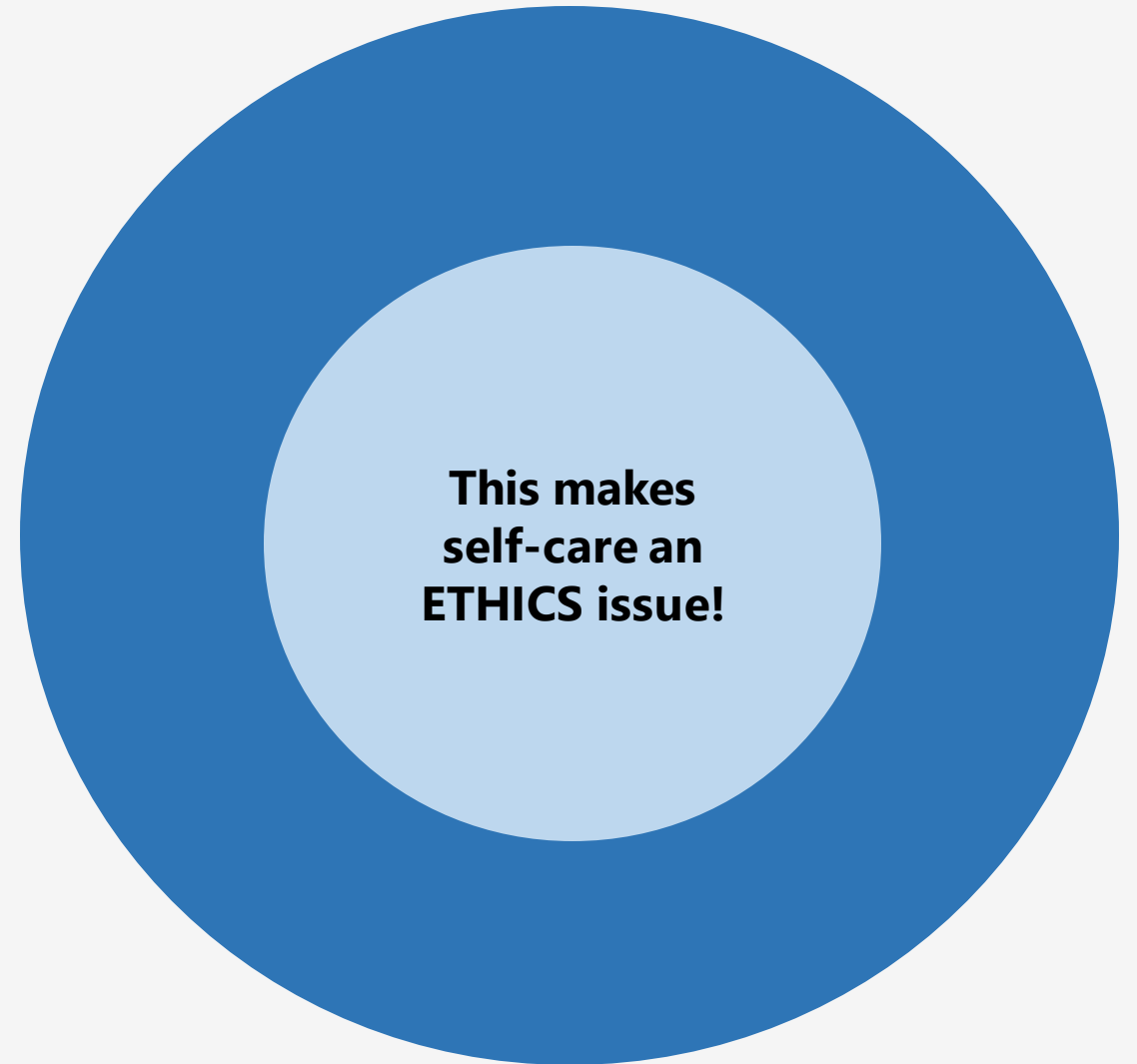
- Somatization
- Change in sleep patterns
- Doubting your competence
- Feeling helpless
- Feeling hopeless/depression
- Avoiding clients
- Diminished satisfaction with career
- Altered sense of self or reality
- Difficulty making simple decisions
- Missing work
- Self-medicating
- Impaired boundaries

Compassion Fatigue- an Ethics Issue

The extreme emotions of compassion fatigue can lead to clouded or biased judgement

Implications of impaired judgement can include:

- Legal issues
- Ethical issues
- Standard of Care for profession
- Compromised care
- Damage to clients



Compassion Fatigue- How can I Avoid it?

Boundaries!!!

- Set healthy boundaries: “I am not your friend; I am your friendly professional.”
- Psychic numbing
- Recognize that you have limited control over people’s pain and suffering.
- Recognize that empathy is both a feeling and a skill.
- Set realistic goals for yourself regarding your work.
- When you are at work, be at work. When you are home, be at home.
- Boundaries for peer support specialists are specialized.

Focus on Client Strengths!!!

- Focus on strengths, not trauma
- Helping clients identify their strengths can help you see them too

Compassion Fatigue

What else can I do?

- ❖ Recognize when you need help and ask for it
- ❖ Accept that it's ok to take a break
- ❖ Understand that the pain you feel is normal
- ❖ Develop positive coping strategies
- ❖ Invest in self-care routines- what works for you?
- ❖ Seek professional help if you feel overwhelmed
- ❖ Create a community with other professionals experiencing the same issues
- ❖ Debrief with your supervisor following any traumatic event

Compassion Fatigue- The Good News!

We don't have to make a choice. It is possible to practice healthy, ongoing self-care while successfully caring for others!

There are resources to help!

Resources for Compassion Fatigue

The Compassion Fatigue Project - compassionfatigue.org

Good Therapy – goodtherapy.org

Employee Assistance Program

ProQOL – self assessment for burnout and compassion fatigue can be accessed at:

<http://transitionalsupport.com.au/transitional-phase/compassion-fatigue-trauma/>

Compassion Fatigue Studies- National Institutes of Health:

<https://search.nih.gov/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&affiliate=nih&query=compassion+fatigue&commit=Search>