

## Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma - Signs and Symptoms

### Physical Signs and Symptoms

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

### Behavioral 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 employment/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

# Compassion Fatigue Handout

## Definitions

Compassion fatigue - compassion fatigue is the natural emotional and physical response to discussing someone else's trauma. Thus, compassion fatigue can come from daily work, especially if it relates to trauma (Figley, 1995).

Burnout- a long-term stress reaction of helping professionals who work with people that is usually attributed to organizational work-related factors (Noushadd, 2008; Stamm, 2010).

Secondary traumatic stress - the physical and emotional stress of knowing about another's trauma (Figley, 1999). The signs of secondary traumatic stress are often considered to be somewhat similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder with avoidance, arousal and intrusion symptoms (Figley, 1999).

Vicarious trauma - covert cognitive changes as a result of hearing about another's trauma (Dane & Chachkes, 2003).

Compassion satisfaction - the enjoyment that comes from being a helping professional and helping people. It is often defined as a positive aspect of helping, and like compassion fatigue, can be related to helping people in the system, positive relationships, work with colleagues and positive beliefs about the self.

Professional Quality of Life - the combined feelings of helping are known as professional quality of life, and are a balance of compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction (ProQOL.org; Stamm, 2010). In general, the more compassion satisfaction a person has, the less compassion fatigue they have, and vice versa.

Self-Compassion - having compassion for yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself in the same way you would have compassion for others (Neff, 2009).

Mindfulness - concentrated awareness of one's thoughts, actions or motivations (Think Mindfully, 2012).

## Website Resources

Self-Compassion exercises on Dr. Kristin Neff's website  
<http://www.self-compassion.org/self-compassion-exercises.html>

Self-Compassion meditation on Dr. Kristin Neff's website  
<http://www.self-compassion.org/guided-self-compassion-meditations-mp3.html>

List of other self-compassion website resources  
<http://www.self-compassion.org/links-to-other-websites.html>

UNR Counseling Center Virtual Relaxation room  
<http://www.unr.edu/counseling/virtual-relaxation-room>

Mindfulness Website  
<http://www.thinkmindfully.com>

Mindfulness Website - leaf on the stream exercise  
<http://thinkmindfully.com/try-it>

Provider Resilience Phone App  
<http://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/provider-resilience/id5599806962?mt=8>

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