



Compassion Fatigue: Caregivers and Essential Workers



Compassion is an essential component to working in any essential health related field or being a caregiver; it is often the best way to build and maintain rapport with individuals, families and clients (Radey & Figely, 2007). It is also a natural gift that many of us have and we strive to apply it daily. This gift can also be the culprit of our undoing. We apply so much of ourselves to our love ones and clients that we so desperately forget to apply that same compassion to ourselves. We do not recognize our increased stress levels, lack of sleep, sensory overload, until we are burned out.

Compassion fatigue is defined as a form of burnout, which caregivers and essential workers often experience (Negash & Sahin, 2011). As a clinician, who is trained in trauma informed care, compassion fatigue is extremely high but not easily recognized. Kanter (2007) and Bride and Figley (2007) identified compassion fatigue as another form of secondary traumatization. Over the years emphasizing self-care for clinicians due to compassion fatigue was not always stressed, until now, with impact of COVID-19.

One of the most common challenges faced when dealing with compassion fatigue is minimal support. However, due to COVID-19 there seems to be a collective shift in our individual lives and others a wait to recognize compassion fatigue. For example, my friend's employer had to implement a policy to include COVID-19 Flex Time to reduce compassion fatigue and burnout. It most certainly was not a concern previously. My friend reports that he was always directed to use his PTO or sick time to deal with anything personal. Although there is ample evidence based literature regarding the role of self-care in behavioral health clinicians, compassion fatigue was rarely supported. It often was prompted by an employer when the employee was acting out of character or missing important deadlines. In some cases, it took the employee asking for time off or requesting FMLA themselves which in my opinion should never had been the case especially in mental health. COVID-19 has now changed the perceptions and views of burnout for many due to those same employers being affected personally by the pandemic and experiencing first-hand how overwhelming things can become. It is the idea that in order to help others, we must first be able to help ourselves and show to ourselves compassion.

9 Steps to Reduce Compassion Fatigue

1. Have a designated wellness spaces or areas, and take breaks
2. Spend at least 10 minutes meditating/praying
3. Create a journal and write daily
4. Practice Yoga/Qi Gong/ Movement Exercises
5. Implement healthy nutritional intake and try to get at least 6-8 hours of sleep
6. **Set Boundaries between work and personal life**
7. Physical activity for at least 30 minutes a day
8. Give yourself permission to unplug from social media, phones and television
9. Build and maintain healthy social relationships by maintaining 6 feet distancing and use of face mask when required. Avoid people who are complaining and using you to unload.

#COVID19 #Coronavirus #Compassionfatigue #mentalhealthmatters

WRITTEN BY

Nicole Bailey, LCSW, PhD

Raquel Johnson, Psychiatric Rehab Coach



