



Rediscovering Joy and Purpose in Your Work

Dr. Kate Watson

Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious trauma, burnout

- These three terms are complementary and yet different from one another.

Compassion Fatigue

- Struggle to find compassion and empathy for others
- Refers to the profound emotional and physical erosion that takes place when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate

Vicarious Trauma

- The profound shift in world view that occurs in helping professionals when they work with clients who have experienced trauma.

Burnout

- Feeling worn out or powerless at work; low job satisfaction
- Not necessarily feeling a lack of compassion or a changed worldview
- May be more easily resolved than the other concepts on this list

Can a person experience all three?

Traditional Way of Thinking About Compassion Fatigue

"You can't pour from an empty cup"

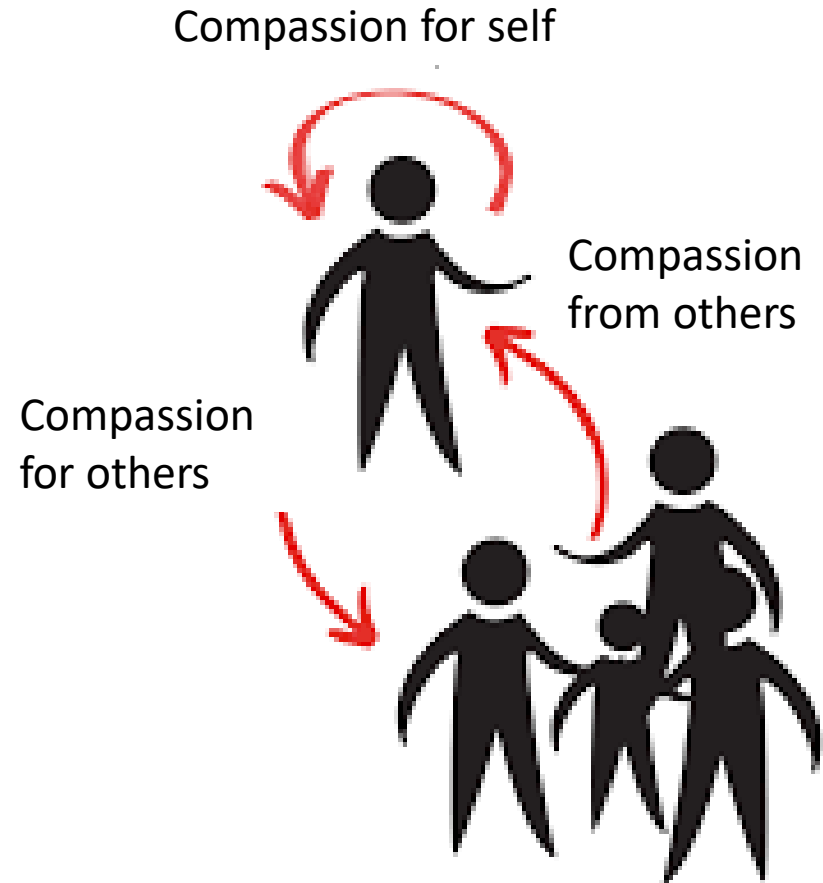
So, if you're feeling empty, it's best to:

- Take time off/ Go on vacation
- Practice some self-care
- Set better boundaries
- Reconsider your longevity in the field
- We hear things like: "Pull away", "Keep your distance", "Care less," or "Do less"

A scenic view of a valley seen through an open window. The window frames the view on the left and right sides. The landscape is a lush green valley with rolling hills, dense forests, and a winding road. The sun is low in the sky, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows across the landscape. The text "Let's Challenge the Traditional View." is overlaid in the center of the image.

Let's Challenge the Traditional View.

Three directions in which compassion MOVES



From the field of Compassion Focused Therapy

Three Flows of Compassion

1. Compassion for others
2. Compassion for myself
3. Compassion from others

Whether I'm caring for others or
caring for myself, I'm still the
CARETAKER.

We, too often, neglect the third direction of compassion— which is the only one
that allows us a real break.

The colander analogy

Ever feel like you're refilling your cup, but it's not sticking?

Sometimes we have problem areas that turn our cups into colanders.



What creates the holes?

- Chronic understaffing (or high staff turnover)
- Unrealistic caseloads
- Unclear boundaries
- Poor supervision
- Exposure to repeated trauma
- Personal financial stress
- Systemic injustice



Key Message:
When the cup
becomes a
colander, you
won't fix it by
pouring more
water. You
must patch
the holes.

Let's Make a Shift

- We should not use self-care to help people tolerate conditions that need to change.
- At the same time, we do not have to wait for every system to improve before we begin protecting one another, reclaiming parts of the work that matter to us, and creating healthier ways of working together.

Hope does not require us to deny the reality

- Hope is the belief that our actions still matter, that we can protect one another, and that harmful conditions do not have to remain normal simply because they are common.
- You may not be able to change the entire system today. But you can stop blaming yourself for the impact it has had on you.
- You can tell the truth about what the work requires. You can ask for support, strengthen a boundary, stand beside a colleague, and help create one corner of the system that is more humane than it was before.

Discussion Questions

- What part of yourself do you want to protect so this work does not consume it?
- What have you learned about your own strength, wisdom, or limits?
- What is something that you're thinking about in a new way now?
- What can you do differently immediately?
- What questions do you have for me?

Rediscovering Joy: Let's Do Some Quiet Reflection

- A time a client trusted you.
- A time you saw someone reclaim a little power.
- A time a colleague showed up for you.
- A time you handled something with more skill or compassion than you would have in the past.
- A moment that was not “happy,” but still felt meaningful.
- A small win that might not look impressive to anyone else, but mattered deeply.

In small groups, discuss what KIND of joy you may have felt in those moments.

- **Connection:** “I was reminded that people do not have to go through this alone.”
- **Purpose:** “I remembered that this work matters.”
- **Growth:** “I noticed that I am becoming more skilled, grounded, or brave.”
- **Relief:** “Something was a little less heavy than it could have been.”
- **Witnessing courage:** “I saw someone survive, choose, speak, rest, return, or try again.”
- **Shared humanity:** “I remembered that beneath the roles and systems, we are all human.”

Mission Statement

- It can be helpful to have a guiding statement. What is yours?
- Some tips for mission statements:
 - Make it 15 words or less (shorter is better)
 - Make it memorable
 - Try to include who, what, and where, if possible
- Examples:
 - “My mission is to build a skilled workforce of advocates to reduce violence around the world.”
 - “My mission is to spread compassion for children and families in Michigan.”
 - “My mission is to reduce violence against women in the United States.”
 - “My mission is to create inclusive spaces for students in New York.”
 - “My mission is to make a safer world for the next generation to inherit.”

Stay in touch!

- Advocacy Academy:
 - Email: Kate@AdvocacyAcademy.org
 - Visit website: www.AdvocacyAcademy.org for downloadable guides, articles, podcasts, and the book “Motivational Interviewing for Victim Advocates”
 - @AdvoKateW on IG and YouTube (training videos available)