

# Compassion Fatigue



# What is Compassion Fatigue?

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**Physical**

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**Emotional**

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**Psychological**

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***Also known as:***

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- Vicarious Trauma
  - Secondary Traumatic Stress
  - Secondhand Shock
  - Secondary Stress Reaction
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# Who does it affect & is it treatable?

Those in the helping professions

- Including the legal profession

It is treatable

- Treatment of compassion fatigue may prevent the development of a more serious disorder

# Symptoms

Perceiving the resources and support available for work as chronically outweighed by the demands

Having client/work demands regularly encroach on personal time

Feeling overwhelmed and physically and emotionally exhausted

Having disturbing images from cases intrude into thoughts and dreams

Becoming pessimistic, cynical, irritable, and prone to anger

Viewing the world as inherently dangerous, and becoming increasingly vigilant about personal and family safety

Becoming emotionally detached and numb in professional and personal life; experiencing increased problems in personal relationships

Withdrawing socially and becoming emotionally disconnected from others

Becoming demoralized and questioning one's professional competence and effectiveness

Secretive self-medication/addiction (alcohol, drugs, work, sex, food, gambling, etc.)

Becoming less productive and effective professionally and personally

# Treatment

- **Awareness.** Understand what compassion fatigue is and periodically self-assess for it.
- **Debriefing.** Talk regularly with another practitioner who understands and is supportive. This involves talking about the traumatic material, how you think and feel about it, and how you are personally affected by it.
- **Self-care.** Proactively develop a program of self-care that is effective for you. This includes healthy eating, exercising regularly, getting adequate rest, and learning how to turn off the “fight-or-flight response” of your sympathetic nervous system and turn on the “relaxation response” of your parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Balance and Relationships.** Take steps to simplify, do less, ask for help, and stop trying to be all things to all people, including your clients. Start thinking about how you can work on balance rather than the reasons you can't. Working to develop and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships will also increase your resilience.
- **Professional Assistance.** Treatment from a licensed provider specializing in trauma may be beneficial.
- **Being Intentional.** If you are overwhelmed and struggling with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or compassion fatigue, put a plan for change in place. Recognize that the attributes that contribute to your professional success (e.g., motivated, perfectionistic, achievement-oriented, driven, fixer) and your work environment may be contributing to an imbalance in your life. Monitor your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Seek assistance to help you implement change and redirect the thoughts that tell you, “I should be able to do this by myself.” Your new mantra can become, “I don't have to do it all by myself.”

# TED Talk Video by Juliette Watt

- ▶ [https://www.ted.com/talks/juliette\\_watt\\_compassion\\_fatigue\\_what\\_is\\_it\\_and\\_do\\_you\\_have\\_it?subtitle=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/juliette_watt_compassion_fatigue_what_is_it_and_do_you_have_it?subtitle=en)

# Resources

- ▶ [Compassion Fatigue: The Toll of Being a Care Provider | AAMC](#)
- ▶ [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer\\_assistance/resources/compassion\\_fatigue/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/compassion_fatigue/)
- ▶ <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/signs-compassion-fatigue>
- ▶ Suicide & Crisis Lifeline <https://988lifeline.org/>
- ▶ Mental and/or Substance Use Disorders <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>



**THANK YOU**