



# COMPASSION FATIGUE - THE COST OF CARING

## what is compassion fatigue?

"Compassion fatigue is a condition characterised by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathise or feel compassion for others, often described as the negative cost of caring." (Oxford Languages - <https://languages.oup.com/>)

"It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it."  
- Lou Holtz

## what can we do about it?

- Learn about compassion fatigue – its nature, signs and symptoms and what we can do about it. Awareness is the first step to taking control.
- Know your own "triggers" and vulnerable areas and learn to defuse or avoid them, or have support when they are touched. Work on resolving your own personal issues and continue to monitor your own reactions to another's pain.
- Know that your feelings are normal. Our emotions are mixed and can change regularly. We can be up one minute and down the next, and our emotions can vary in intensity – this is normal. The important thing is not to judge or be hard on ourselves for our feelings; rather, find a safe place to talk or write about them.
- It is important to acknowledge that we are as important as the people who we care for or someone who has died. We do not dishonour them or their memory by taking care of ourselves. On the contrary, they would want us to care for ourselves.
- Recharge your batteries daily. Take time to be kind to yourself and do things that give you energy and a sense of peace and wellbeing. Examples could be, walking in nature, soaking in a bubble bath, listening to music, getting a massage, going shopping, watching a funny movie, go out for a meal, read a good book, enjoying hobbies. Do what it takes to revitalise yourself.
- Have at least one meaningful conversation daily.
- Allow yourself to cry and grieve when you need to. When something bad happens to you or someone you care about, don't shut them off or block them, or apologise for crying; tears are nature's release mechanism and we can experience side effects such as getting sick or depressed if we don't.
- Have realistic expectations of yourself, and of the rewards as well as the limitations of being a helper. Set boundaries for yourself and for work. Ask yourself "Would the world fall apart if I step away from my work for a day, a week?". When we are under pressure at work, it's okay to say no to others' demands on us. You matter too.
- Make sure you eat well; a balanced healthy diet really helps the body and mind to cope with the demands placed upon it. It may also help to take a vitamin supplement to support your physical and emotional resiliency.



- Balance the most stressful aspects of your work with more routine ones and with things that offer personal and/or professional growth.
- Develop a healthy support system, in work and out of work. Colleagues with experience can be a great help, use your company's EAP (employee assistance programme), talk to your manager, a friend or counsellor.
- Surround yourself with beautiful aesthetic things - to remind yourself that life is balanced and there are good things and people in the world.
- Spend time with positive nurturing people.
- Use positive self talk by focusing on your strengths, and remembering your resources and learnings from past and others' experiences.
- Find ways to provide yourself with strength and meaning from your emotional and spiritual beliefs.