



The Edge of Compassion

Staying Well while Working in High Stress Environments

The Edge of Compassion: Staying Well while Working in High Stress Environments webinar presented by Françoise Mathieu, M.Ed., RP, CCC gives the Community of Practice Addressing Youth Dating Violence an evidence-based approach to compassion fatigue and strategies for self-care. Learn more francoisemathieu.com | Webinar | Slides

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion Fatigue is defined as deep emotional and physical exhaustion leading to an decrease of empathy or compassion for others. While having a lot of experience in a field can be protective, facing a large volume of similar cases comes with a risk of developing a level of desensitization or numbness.

Example: Compassion fatigue can happen when you're continually there for a friend who doesn't seem to be getting better. How many times can you be there - emotionally and physically - until you feel depleted?

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress is the emotional pressure that occurs when someone hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. This can be a result of the accumulation of all the indirect trauma you're exposed to in your day-to-day at your job.

Factors That Increase Risk of Burnout

- 1 Personal Vulnerabilities
- 2 Direct Exposure
- 3 Work-related Traumatic Grief/Loss
- 4 Indirect Trauma
- 5 Compassion Fatigue
- 6 Systems Failure
- 7 Working Conditions
- 8 Socio-Cultural Context



“What is the sweet spot between caring too much and not caring at all?”

Exquisite Empathy refers to the idea of finding internal balance, even in the midst of emotionally difficult situations. This can also be called “finding equanimity.” The goal is to to continue to feel things, whether good or bad or overwhelming, but learn to return to our healthy baseline quickly.

How to Find Balance and Practice Self-Care

At a Glance:

- Know your warning signs
- Be sure to take meaningful breaks, from mindfulness to exercise
- Get enough sleep
- Understand your window of tolerance
- Learn how to quickly return to your healthy baseline

Know your Warning Signs

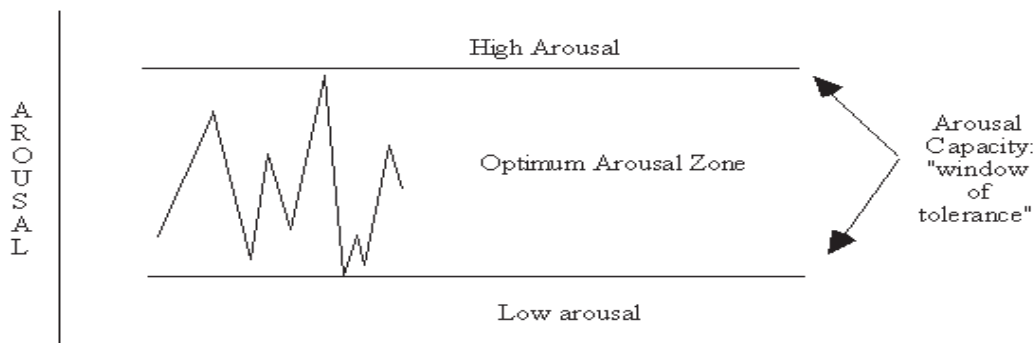
Compassion fatigue may look different to everyone and may change at work and at home. Be aware of the warning signs that you may be switching from healthy baseline to burn out. These warning signs may be physical, behavioural, emotional, or all three, and could include:

- Increased negativity
- Feeling frustrated or angry with others
- Social withdrawal
- Lack of energy

Don't Ignore the Basics

- **Practice mindfulness:** Having a 3-5 minute process of daily meditation can be protective in preventing compassion fatigue initially, as well as being very helpful in resetting to baseline when needed.
- **Get enough rest:** Eating well and getting enough sleep will increase reaction time, problem-solving skills.
- **Maximize leisure time:** Ensure your leisure activities are mindful and relaxing (i.e. not watching traumatic TV) to give your nervous systems a chance to reset and refuel
- **Reset yourself:** Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we are flooded with stress hormones. In these cases, a *Hot Walk and Talk* is recommended. Drink some water, find a colleague, and go for a walk to talk it out. This is a great way to quickly reset.
- **Create a Community of Social Support:** "There is no more neurobiological intervention than a safe relationship" - Bruce Perry

Widen your Window of Tolerance



All of the tips listed above work to widen your window of tolerance so you have a wider ability to deal with what comes at you.