

A stylized, colorful illustration of a landscape. The foreground features rolling green hills with dark brown soil. On the left, there is a green tree, a purple flower, and an orange flower. A small red bird is flying in the sky. The background consists of layered blue and white waves, suggesting a sky or water. The overall style is clean and modern.

Self-care for Helping Professionals

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Learning Objectives

1. Define the stress response
2. Understand the body-brain concepts related to stress
3. Recognize compassion fatigue triggers and early warning signs

Why Is It Important?

- **Stressors and crisis continue to rise**
 - The helping professions work with the most vulnerable
 - Roles and responsibilities, expectations and demands of clients, administration, society continue to rise
 - Needs continue to increase as resources decrease; overworked; increase caseloads, etc.

Exercise: Silent Witness*

- Write down three (3) negative effects from your work as a caregiver on an index card.
- For two minutes circulate about the group allowing others to see your card.

*Adapted from Saakvitne, Gamble, Pearlman & Lev (2000). *Risking Connection: A Training Curriculum for Working with Survivors of Childhood Abuse*. Sidran Press.



What is to give light must endure burning.
- Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl

Man's Search for Meaning, 1946

Exercise

- Write down your response to the following questions:
 - “Is your job stressful?”
 - “What are the causes?”
 - “What are the effects (upon our co-workers)?”
 - “What are you doing that is helping?”

Stress Defined

- In survey after survey, Americans today identify stress as their number one health concern.
- More than 50% of adults in the U.S. report high stress on a daily basis.
- Untreated, stress can seriously affect health, work performance, relationships, and general well-being.
- Stress is the term used to define the body's automatic physiologic reaction to circumstances that require behavioral adjustments.
- *Stress* refers to the *response* you have when facing circumstances that force you to act, change, or adjust in some way to maintain or to keep things balanced
- Stress becomes a problem only when an individual believes control is lost over the identifying stressor(s)
 - Stress may be created through positive events
 - Environmental situations
 - Perception of individual
 - Personal characteristics

Stress Response

- Also called the fight-or-flight response, as identified by Dr. Walter B. Cannon of the Harvard Medical School almost one hundred years ago.
- Is a profound set of involuntary physiological changes that occur whenever we are faced with a changing situation.
- Prepares the body for a physical reaction to a threat - to fight or flee.
- Confronted by this threat - physical or emotional, real or imagined - the hypothalamus causes the sympathetic nervous system to release epinephrine and norepinephrine (also known as adrenaline and noradrenaline) and other related hormones.
- When released into the body, these messengers propel you into a state of arousal.

How does stress affect the nervous system?

- The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for stress responses
- The parasympathetic nervous system readies the body for rest and relaxation.

Perceived Threat:

Internal appraisal of danger



Sympathetic Nervous System

Perceived Threat



Physiological	Brain Mechanics	Other Effects
▲ Heart Rate	▲ Basal Ganglia & Thalamic Fx	▲ Obsession
▲ Breathing Rate	▼ Neo-cortical Fx	▲ Compulsion
▼ Breathing Volume	▼ Frontal Lobe Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Executive Fx ▼ Fine Motor Control ▼ Emotional Regulation 	▼ Speed & Agility
Centralized Circulation	▼ Temporal Lobe Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Language (Wernicke's) ▼ Speech (Broca's) 	▼ Strength
▲ Energy	▼ Anterior Cingulate	Constricted Thoughts & Behaviors
▲ DIS-EASE		Fatigue
▲ Muscle Tension		



Fight or Flight

Cause and Effect

Causes:

Paperwork

Demands

Lack of resources

Negative environment

Constant changes

Resistant clients

Past
learning

Perceived
threat

Sympathetic
dominance

Effects:

Anxiety

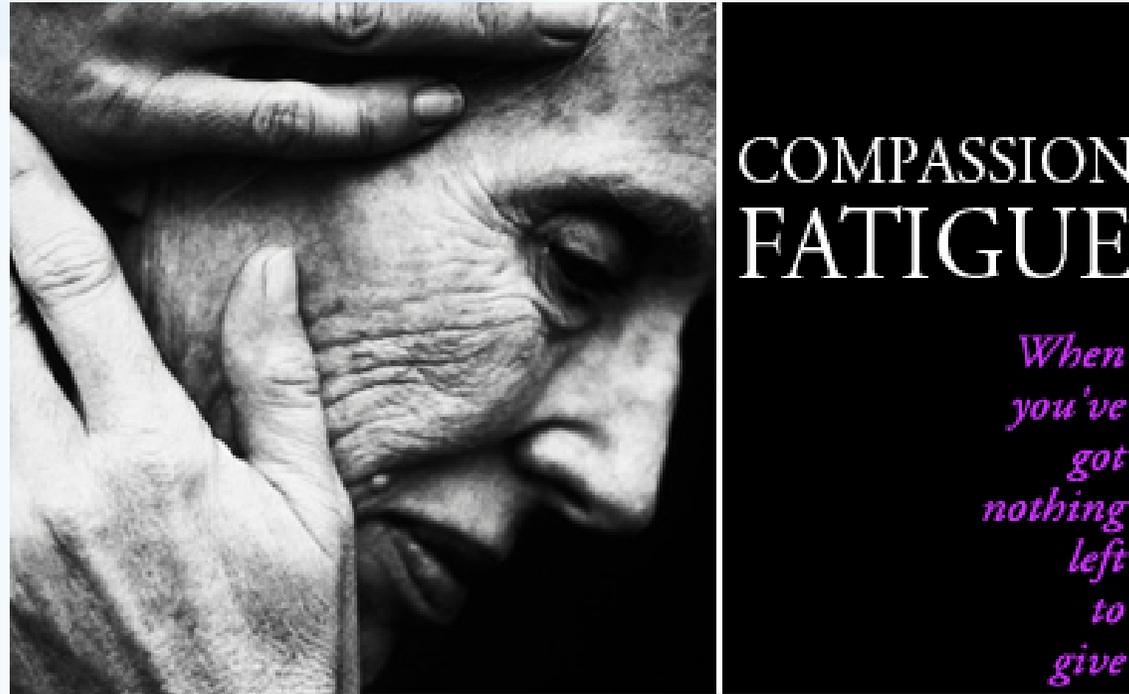
Fatigue

Depression

Somatization

Self Rx

Isolation



Compassion Fatigue = Secondary Traumatization + Burnout

(Figley, 1995)

Compassion Fatigue

- According to Zimering (2003) *compassion fatigue* is indirect exposure to a trauma through a firsthand account or narrative of a traumatic event. The survivor's account and the clinician's subsequent cognitive or emotional representation of the event may result in symptoms and reactions that parallel PTSD.

Secondary Traumatic Stress Symptoms

Arousal (Criterion D)		Avoidance (Criterion C)	
Fear/Anxiety	Compulsive Behavior	Procrastination	Dread
Obsessive Thoughts	Poor Concentration	Depression	Hopeless
Sleep Problems	Weight +/-	Self Rx	Constriction
Irritability/Easily angered	Somatization (Digestive; Hypertension)	Relational Problems	Diminishing Self-Care Activities
Impulsive	Immune Problems	Isolation	Rumination
Dis-ease		Blame	Entitlement
Increased Perceived Threats		Chronic Fatigue	

Burnout

- **Burnout** is often defined as a response to prolonged exposure to demanding interpersonal situations and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).
- High emotional involvement without adequate social support or feelings of personal work accomplishments (i.e., job satisfaction) may leave the helping professional vulnerable to burnout

Healing Compassion Fatigue

1. Relaxation- PERCEIVED THREAT; when listening to clients; when remembering experiences
2. Building & Maintaining Relationships – getting support; allowing others to confront when symptomatic; telling on ourselves when we breach integrity; accountability
3. Sharing Narratives – painful work experiences



Part Two

Learning Objectives

1. Identify three (3) stress management techniques
2. Recognize the effects of stress among helping professionals
3. Identify seven (7) essential mental activities for optimum mental health

Seven Essential Activities for Optimum Mental Health



Relaxation Response

- A state of relaxed, passive attention to a repetitive or absorbing stimulus that turns off the “inner dialogue” thereby decreasing arousal of the sympathetic nervous system.
- When eliciting the relaxation response:
 - Your metabolism decreases
 - Your heart beats slower and your muscles relax
 - Your breathing becomes slower
 - Your blood pressure decreases
 - Your levels of nitric oxide are increased
- If practiced regularly, it can have lasting effects

Techniques Used to Elicit the Relaxation Response

- Meditation
- Diaphragmatic Breathing
- Imagery/Visualization
- Yoga Stretching
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Mindfulness
- Prayer
- Repetitive Movement



Relaxation through Meditation

- Four (4) key elements common to meditative approaches that help people to relax:
 1. Being in a quiet place
 2. Getting in a comfortable position
 3. Having an object to dwell on, such as your breathing or a phrase that you continually repeat silently to yourself
 4. Having a passive attitude in which you let go of your day-to-day concerns by no longer thinking about them

Meditation



Thank You

