

Mitigating Compassion Fatigue: A Mindfulness Approach

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OpenSpace Mindfulness

for

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”Just for now, lay down the weight you so patiently bear upon your shoulders.”

- Danna Faulds

Overview

- Unpack the framework of mindfulness.
- Establish a common understanding of compassion fatigue.
- Explore tools that can alleviate compassion fatigue, and promote “compassion satisfaction.”
- Reflect on a personal compassionate care plan.

Engaging a Mindfulness Approach

“Oh my heart.
You don't have to go it alone.

Train yourself
to train
just
a little
more gently.”

- Jenta

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is bringing caring, contactful and present moment awareness, to inner and outer experience, in order to respond to life with wisdom.

Reflections

1. What's your experience with, or exposure to, compassion fatigue?
2. What does compassion fatigue sound, look or feel like to you?
3. How does compassion fatigue show up in your work? Life? Relationships? Body?

Understanding Compassion Fatigue

Three Understandings {1}

“...an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.”

– Dr. Charles Figley, Tulane Traumatology Institute

Three Understandings {2}

“...a type of exhaustion and burnout experienced as a result of continually dealing with traumatized patients.”

- Kristin Neff, PhD, Self-Compassion Researcher

Three Understandings {3}

Sometimes referred to as “secondary traumatic stress” (or STS), “vicarious traumatization”, and “the cost of caring.”

Underlying Theory

- We're built to connect through our mirror neurons.
- Feelings of empathy arise in the midst of suffering.
- It becomes problematic when we have empathy without compassion.
- Compassion is actually a resource.

Risk Factors

- Individual
- Workplace
- Life
- Skills

Symptoms and Signs

- Emotions
- Behaviors
- Communication
- Health
- Life

Including Oneself in the Circle of Care

”If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.”

- Jack Kornfield

Resourcing with Self-Care

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes... including you.”

- Anne Lammott

Examples of Self-Care

- Levity
- Physical
- Contemplative & Spiritual
- Social
- Nature

Benefits & Limitations

- Self-care has the ability to build and replenish reserves, as well as foster conditions for compassion satisfaction.

However...

- Self-care takes you out of the caregiving relationship, it usually doesn't work in the moment.

Benefits of Self-Compassion

- Self-compassion also has the ability to build and replenish reserves, as well as foster conditions for compassion satisfaction.

And...

- It can be done in and out of caregiving relationships.
- It can reduce build-up of untended stressors that lead to compassion fatigue.

Self-Compassion Definition*

{Part I}

Mindfulness

Self-compassion allows us to “be with” painful feelings as they arise. It involves noticing. It is a form of “balanced” awareness where we neither over identify with a feeling, nor run away.

* Adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff, PhD

Self-Compassion Definition* {Part II}

Shared Humanity

Self-compassion involves seeing ourselves as part of a larger human experience (vs. isolated), it helps us to feel connected (vs. “there’s something wrong with me”, “this shouldn’t be happening.”)

* Adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff, PhD

Self-Compassion Definition* {Part III}

Kindness & Care

Self-compassion means treating ourselves with kindness and care in the presence of suffering, it involves the motivation to do something about suffering.

It is a form of active soothing.

* Adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff, PhD

”Compassion is an action word with no boundaries. It is never wasted.”

- Prince

When Compassion Becomes Fierce

- Fierce Compassion
- Fierce Self-Compassion

Making it Personal

”It takes boldness, even audacity, to experiment with a quality like kindness [and] see how it might shift and open up our lives.”

- Sharon Salzberg

Debunking Self-Compassion Myths: What the Research Shows

- Greater coping, mood, health and resiliency
- Increased motivation, creativity and accountability
- Improved communication, quality in relationships
- Healthier habits and body image

Worth Repeating about Self-Compassion

- Decreases likelihood of compassion fatigue.
- Recharges energy.
- Mirror neurons are at play during self-compassion as well.

“A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day. A string of such moments can change the course of your life.”

- Christopher Germer, PhD

Compassion Satisfaction Care Plan

- What will I include in my plan?
- What will I need to let go of, or push pause on, to fulfill this plan?
- What supports or structures will help me to implement this plan?

“When you touch your heart, and let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it’s bottomless, that it doesn’t have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast and limitless.”

- Pema Chödrön

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