Alleviating Compassion Fatigue When Caring Becomes Difficult

Federico A. Borroel, MS, LPC-S
Carlynne Sutterfield, MA, LPC
Everyone except the panelist is muted during the webinar.
Your camera is also off and no one else can see you.

The webinar will be recorded. It and all accompanying materials will be emailed to you.
It will also be available at aee.org.

Type questions into the chat window and we will try to get to them as we go.
We will also have time for Q & A at the end.

There will be a short evaluation after the webinar is over.
Please fill this out as we appreciate your feedback.
Questions? – Three ways to ask

Chat Box
Type your question into the chat box.
We will try to get to as many as possible.

Q & A
Add your question to the Q & A. These can be answered now or later (via email) by the presenter.

Raise Hand
If you want to share or ask audibly, click the raise your hand icon and we will unmute you so you can be heard by everyone.
“We are pretty good at dealing with spikes in stress levels as long as we get back to a relaxed state. Unfortunately, many people are consistently living with higher levels of chronic stress and their bodies are simply unable to experience any respite from the pressure. This has consequences.”

Dr. Patricia Fisher
Resilience, Balance and Meaning
Senior Advisor &
Co-Founder of TEND
Take care of yourself
Use fidget tools
Know your exits
Be Present
Practice Low Impact
Disclosure

While We’re Together...
Defining/Exploring Concepts of Compassion Fatigue & Empathic Strain

Tools for Self-Assessment & Creating A Personal Window of Tolerance

Strategies to Remain Connected With Others & Our Own Capacity for Compassion

Our Goals For Being Together...
Carlynne Sutterfield, MA, LPC

- National Certified Trauma therapist in San Antonio, TX
- Experience includes working with populations at risk for trauma, abuse and neglect
- Experience includes Adventure Therapy with children and their families using outdoor interventions
- Developed compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress trainings for trauma serving organizations, helping professionals, and other health serving organizations
- As a Wellness Counselor created and developed organizational health and wellness curriculum to content moderators

Federico A. Borroel, MS, LPC-S

- Owner of RelateAbility, PLLC, a limited liability company that provides counseling and consulting services through Adventure Therapy and Experience-Based Training & Development.
- After years of providing direct counseling services to trauma survivors, created training experiences to help managers and front-line workers of trauma serving organizations reduce the effects of secondary trauma
- Has served as a counselor, clinical supervisor, author, program developer, trainer, and grant writer
- Sits on the Advisory Council of AEE’s Therapeutic Adventure Professional Group (TAPG) after serving as the TAPG Leadership Council Chair
Who’s With Us Today
AEE Poll
Spectrum Of Our Current Experiences & Knowledge

Know A Lot

Could Be Demonstrating Improved Compassion Towards Others

Know A Little

Very Satisfied With My Level of Compassion Towards Others
Key Words in the Compassion Fatigue Literature

- Secondary Trauma
- Burnout
- Compassion Fatigue/Empathic Strain
- Moral Distress
- Vicarious Traumatization
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

• **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)**
  • Primary trauma vs. Secondary trauma

  • Primary trauma is caused by a traumatic event that happens to you-direct exposure
  • Secondary trauma is caused by the indirect exposure to trauma

Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

• **Burnout**
  • Develops as a result of general occupational stress
  • Characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced feeling of personal accomplishment
  • Does not necessarily mean that our view of the world has been damaged, or that we have lost the ability to feel compassion for others
  • Can be fairly easily resolved (e.g., changing jobs)
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

• Compassion Fatigue (CF)
  • Buddhists framed CF as "Empathic Strain" because of the belief people cannot run out of compassion, just as they cannot run out of love

• CF is not a diagnosis nor related to any specific psychological disorder

• Gradual erosion of things that keep us connected to our caregiving role such as empathy and hope (for self & others)
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

• Compassion Fatigue (CF)
  • Been compared to helping a good friend through the world's longest break-up
    • Feeling as though you're chronically helping someone with the same problem over and over or help many, many people with the same problem

• Signs can be seen in our personal and professional lives:
  • Dispirited and increasingly bitter, contribute to a toxic work environment, more prone to work errors, lose a respectful stance towards our those for whom we care, become short-tempered with our loved ones and feel constant guilt or resentment at the never-ending demands on our personal time
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

• Moral Distress
  • "When policies or routines conflict with...beliefs about...patient care."
  • Occurs when we are told to do things that we fundamentally disagree with or to which we are morally opposed
• People in CACs not working right now even though they know abuse is happening, even with fewer reports
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

• Vicarious Traumatization (VT)
  • Profound shift in our worldview after prolonged exposure to secondary traumatic events
    • World isn’t safe anymore
    • Make life decisions based on new perception of the world
  • Symptoms of VT tend to mimic symptoms of PTSD
Contextualizing Compassion Fatigue

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Naomi Rachel Remen
Kitchen Table Wisdom, p. 52
EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

EMOTIONAL—Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships

FINANCIAL—Satisfaction with current and future financial situations

SOCIAL—Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system

SPIRITUAL—Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life

OCCUPATIONAL—Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one’s work

PHYSICAL—Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition

INTELLECTUAL—Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills

ENVIRONMENTAL—Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being
These are all pretty much being affected by current pandemic.

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One Tool For Assessing Your Personal Wellness

How many of these common stress reactions might you be demonstrating?

**Cognitive**
- Memory problems/forgetfulness
- Disorientation
- Self-doubt
- Difficulty calculating, setting priorities or making decisions
- Minimization
- Thoughts of self-harm or harm toward others
- Confusion
- Loss of objectivity
- Limited attention span
- Rigidity
- Perfectionism
- Spaciness

**Behavioral**
- Change in activity level
- Decreased efficiency or effectiveness
- Inability to rest or relax
- Hyper vigilance about safety or the surrounding environment
- Accident prone
- Periods of crying
- Increased use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sugar or caffeine
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Change in eating habits, sleep patterns, or job performance
- Gollers humor

**Emotional**
- Powerlessness
- Helplessness
- Anxiety
- Guilt or “survivor guilt”
- Apathy
- Over identification with survivors
- Feeling misunderstood or underappreciated
- Depleted

**Spiritual**
- Loss of purpose
- Lack of self-satisfaction
- Anger at God
- Questioning of prior religious beliefs
- Questioning the meaning of life
- Emri

**Interpersonal**
- Isolation from friends
- Decreased interest or intimacy or sex
- Loneliness
- Intolerance
- Projection of anger or blame
- Difficulty listening
- Difficulty sharing ideas
- Blaming
- Concerning
- Intolerance of Group Process

**Physical**
- Rapid heartbeat
- Increased blood pressure
- Sweating or chills
- Tunnel vision
- Headaches
- Easily startled
- Fatigue that does not improve with sleep
- Decreased resistance to cold, flu, or infections
- Arches and pains
- Tremor or muscle twitching
- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea

This chart was adapted from CMHS, Rev. Ed., 2002 and Figley, Trauma, 2008.
We’re going to concentrate on one in particular.

**EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS**

**EMOTIONAL**—Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships

**FINANCIAL**—Satisfaction with current and future financial situations

**SOCIAL**—Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system

**SPIRITUAL**—Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life

**OCCUPATIONAL**—Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one’s work

**PHYSICAL**—Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition

**INTELLECTUAL**—Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills

**ENVIRONMENTAL**—Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being
“The niche [human beings] evolved into was such that the only way that we survived in the natural world was by forming relationships, by collaboratively working as a group. Human beings are neurologically meant to be connected to others.”

Dr. Bruce Perry
Senior Fellow at ChildTrauma Academy

**SOCIAL**—Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system
Common Stress Reactions Threatening Our Social/Interpersonal Wellness

Interpersonal

- Isolation from friends
- Decreased interest in intimacy or sex
- Loneliness
- Intolerance
- Projection of anger or blame
- Difficulty listening
- Difficulty sharing ideas
- Blaming
- Criticizing
- Intolerance of Group Process
A Window of Tolerance Framework

• Bringing Awareness to our Physical, Behavioral, & Emotional Responses when we’re headed for trouble
• Three Zones:
  • **Green**- Optimal Zone: I’m grooving and managing stress reactions in healthy ways
  • **Yellow**- Warning Zone: Things could be going better but I’m managing better than in my...
  • **Red**- Danger Zone: Where I’m at the greatest risk of an unhealthy lifestyle and stress response

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<th>Hyper-arousal or High Activation Arousal</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
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### Hyper-arousal or High Activation Arousal Interpersonal

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<td>Warning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimal</td>
<td>• Spending Quality time with Friends &amp; Family</td>
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<td>• Saying “Hi” to others in public</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Effectively Communicating</td>
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<td>• Healthy Boundaries Established</td>
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### Hypo-arousal or Low Activation Arousal Interpersonal
A Window of Tolerance Framework

- People with lots of trauma or stress may have a smaller window of tolerance

Hyper-arousal or High Activation Arousal

| Danger     |       |
| Warning    |       |
| Optimal    |       |
| Warning    |       |
| Danger     |       |

Hypo-arousal or Low Activation Arousal
A Window of Tolerance Framework

- People with lots of trauma or stress may have a smaller window of tolerance
- When we’re doing well, we may have a wider window of tolerance
- Goal is equanimity, or the return to baseline (i.e., optimal zone in this framework) more quickly
A Window of Tolerance Framework

- People with lots of trauma or stress may have a smaller window of tolerance
- When we’re doing well, we may have a wider window of tolerance
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There are things we can do to help us create and sustain a wider window of tolerance.

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You Can't Serve From An Empty Vessel So Begin With Self-Compassion

- Take time to check in with yourself
  - Movement & mindful nutrition
  - Breathe intentionally
  - Integrate gratitude with a daily ritual

- Limit Media & Trauma Inputs
You Can't Serve From An Empty Vessel So Begin With Self-Compassion

- Be Careful With:
  - Rumination- Coulda, shoulda, woulda
  - Fortune telling- thinking in the future about worst case scenarios

- Scrub In/Scrub Out:
  - Create transition rituals
  - Respect your own time

- Connect With Others
RelateAbility, PLLC presents...

Teammate Check-Ins

- Give A Tour Of Your Current Workspace
- Share A Favorite Work Story
- Tell A Joke
- Surprise A Teammate
- Share A Favorite Website

Introduce A Pet (Past or Current)

Play A Game With A Teammate

Create A Secret Virtual Handshake

Get Permission To Share A Frustration

Tell Someone What You're Looking Forward To

Share An Odd Object You Have At Home

Share A Recent Success Story

Share A Way You'd Like To Remain Connected

Win A Game Against A Teammate

Share Why Your Work Is Important To You

Share A Favorite Picture of the Outdoors

Listen To How A Teammate Is Doing

Sing A Verse To A Meaningful Song

Introduce A Friend or Family Member

Help With Something

Tell A Teammate What You Value In Them

Lose A Game Against A Teammate

Ask For Help With Something

Tell A Bad Joke

Share Something Powerful About You

Physical distancing and your team's empowerment can co-exist.

RelateAbility, PLLC can offer your team opportunities to grow and connect virtually.

Reach out for a free consultation.

Many ways to play:

• Choose a color to complete or choose them all. (You may also find certain colors are geared for those of us who are more introverted or extroverted)...

• Partner up with a Teammate or two and try to get them all done as a group...

• Next time your team is on a conference call and using "grid view" see if your teammates can answer or perform what's in the box as it correlates to their position on the grid...

• Create your own way to play.
Physical Distancing & Interpersonal Connections Can and Should Co-Exist

• Honor adventure beliefs- Safety, Trust, Belonging, Challenge, Enjoyment, Effective Communication, Empowerment

• Be vulnerable with someone

• Tell others what you need

• Use this opportunity to connect with others in new ways

• Help someone recognize their own value
RelateAbility, PLLC presents...

Recently, Who In My Life...

- Has become a friend or healthy acquaintance?
- Has taught me something valuable about myself and how have I grown from it?
- Has helped me put and keep physical distancing into perspective?
- Has come to mind that I should contact?
- Has shown me a different, but appealing, side of themselves?
- Has received a "thank you" for showing me love or consideration?

Consider how life has recently facilitated types of connections you hadn’t realized you were missing. Physical distancing springs opportunities for new relationships and new types of relationships.

RelateAbility, PLLC can offer you or your family opportunities to grow and connect. Telehealth services are now available. Reach out for a free consultation.

Practicing Mindful Connections & Embracing Life’s Complexities

- Grounding ourselves in Goodness, especially when it's Grounded In Connection To Others
- Intentionally focus on the positive and "put money in the bank": Celebrating what's right with the world
- Put things into perspective
- Spread gratitude
- Recognizing personal growth
Where Next?

Post Traumatic Growth

Vicarious Resiliency

Exquisite Empathy
Resources

TEND Academy: www.tendacademy.ca

PsychHub: https://psychhub.com/covid-19/

Facebook Groups: TAPG-Therapeutic Adventure Professional Group, Adventure Therapists In Private Practice, Compassion Fatigue & Resiliency In Professionals

U.S. Based Hotlines:
• National Alliance on Mental Illness HelpLine: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
• Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
• National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
• Crisis Text Line: Text HOME or MHA to 741741.

International Resources:
• Suicide Stop - International Help Center: https://www.suicidestop.com/call_a_hotline.html
• https://checkpointorg.com/global/
• https://www.who.int/mental_health/en/
Thank You

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