

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Secondary Trauma | Vicarious Trauma

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Prevention through self-care:

- ✦ Reduce stressful workloads and/or change schedules for certain types of cases or client appointments
- ✦ Take a lunch break and breaks throughout the day
- ✦ Have a debriefing plan to talk through traumatic events
- ✦ Cultivate friendships outside of work
- ✦ Set emotional boundaries
- ✦ Monitor sleep patterns and get adequate sleep
- ✦ Take regular vacations and time away from work
- ✦ Practice mindfulness techniques, including meditation
- ✦ Journal
- ✦ Practice gratitude
- ✦ Exercise
- ✦ Develop hobbies that are unrelated to work

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion fatigue, also called secondary trauma, is the cumulative effect of continual exposure to traumatic or distressing stories and events when working in a helping capacity over a long period of time.

Symptoms can include:

- ❖ elevated anxiety, such as being hyper-vigilant, jumpy, easily startled, or being constantly on guard and alert to possible threats to self, family, or loved ones,
- ❖ feeling depressed,
- ❖ difficulty concentrating and being indecisive,
- ❖ difficulty sleeping and fatigue,
- ❖ loss of appetite,
- ❖ anger and/or irritability,
- ❖ having images from cases intruding into thoughts and dreams,
- ❖ dreading working with certain types of cases or clients,
- ❖ avoiding or becoming less responsive to clients, cases, colleagues, family members, or social networks,
- ❖ avoiding people, places, or events connected with the trauma,
- ❖ starting to become numb.

Tests for compassion fatigue and stress:

ProQOL self-test for burnout and compassion fatigue
(http://www.proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html)

Life stress self-test
(<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/pages/lifestress.html>)

Online Videos

- ☼ Keeping Legal Minds Intact: Mitigating Compassion Fatigue Among Legal Professionals (Oct. 2014) (https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/events_cle/compassion_fatigue_webinar.html)
- ☼ Drowning in Empathy: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma (TEDx Talk) (YouTube)

Apps

- Provider Resilience App by the National Center for Telehealth & Technology
- Virtual Hope Box by the Defense Health Agency
- T2 Mood Tracker by the National Center for Telehealth & Technology
- Way of Life — track habits and routines
- Uplifter

Books

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma, Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.

Compassion Fatigue Treatment Suggestions:

- ~ Start with the basics — focus on getting regular, adequate sleep, physical activity, and nutrition.
- ~ Spend time with family and friends whom you enjoy and who give your life meaning.
- ~ Seek support by debriefing with other attorneys or judicial officers and/or a mental health professional, especially during high-stress cases. Contact the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP), if you need help with a referral.
- ~ Participate in non-work activities that are satisfying, bring you joy, and/or give you a sense of accomplishment.
- ~ Set boundaries between your work day and the rest of your life. Take a vacation, or at least start planning one. Plan three-day weekends or other time away from the office. Take a lunch break, and consider getting out of the office for some fresh air. Take a few, brief mini-breaks during the day to focus on your breathing. Perhaps limit your cellphone usage.
- ~ Evaluate your practice. What drew you to that area of the law and type of practice? Do you still love it? Do you want to explore other practice areas or roles within your current practice area? How does your job fit within your community and the larger world? Do you want to pursue new career development training?
- ~ Identify factors that are causing stress and what may cause stress during future cases. Establish a realistic plan to limit the factors that are causing the stress and a plan for dealing with future stressful cases.

Sources:

American Bar Association, compassion fatigue resources (https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/compassion_fatigue.html)

Anne Chambers, LCSW, *Judges and Compassion Fatigue: What Is it and What to Do about it?*, Missouri Lawyers' Assistance Program.

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project (compassionfatigue.org)

