

# Compassion Fatigue

SupportLinc Employee Assistance  
Program (EAP)

Penn State Health



# Disclaimer

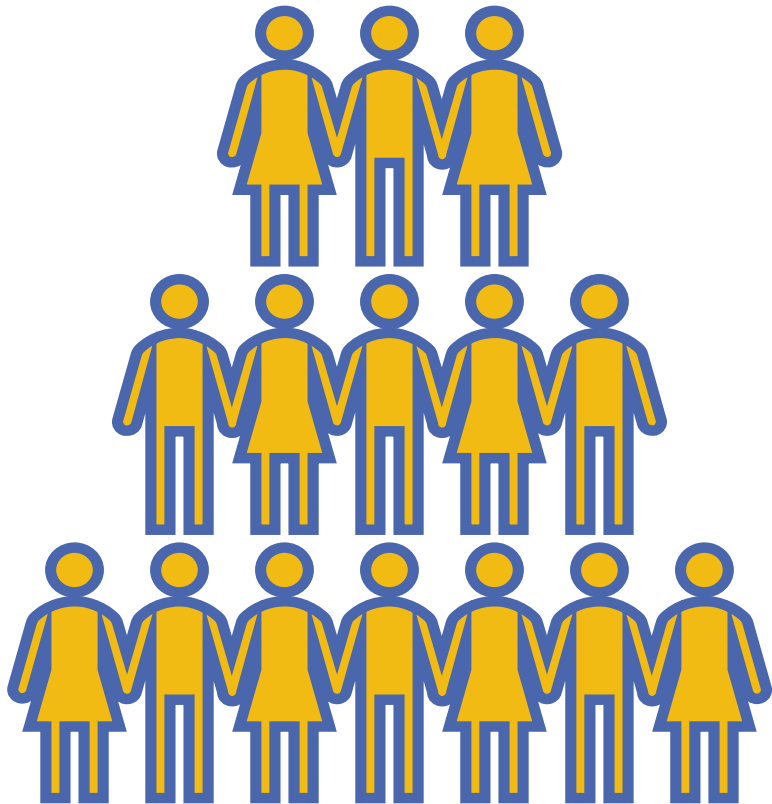
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# Objectives

## This training is designed to help you:

- Understand who is at risk
- Define compassion fatigue
- Recognize the signs and symptoms
- Difference between compassion fatigue and burnout
- Learn your level of caregiver fatigue
- Understand how to get better

# Who is at risk?



Any individual who provides empathetic care to another human being who is struggling, either physically or emotionally, or has experienced some sort of traumatic event.

# What is compassion fatigue?

- The result of extreme state of tension from secondary/vicarious traumatic stress for the one helping the person or animal in distress or trauma
- First defined in the 1950's
- Compassion fatigue affects individuals personally or professionally – sometimes both!



# Compassion fatigue vs. burnout

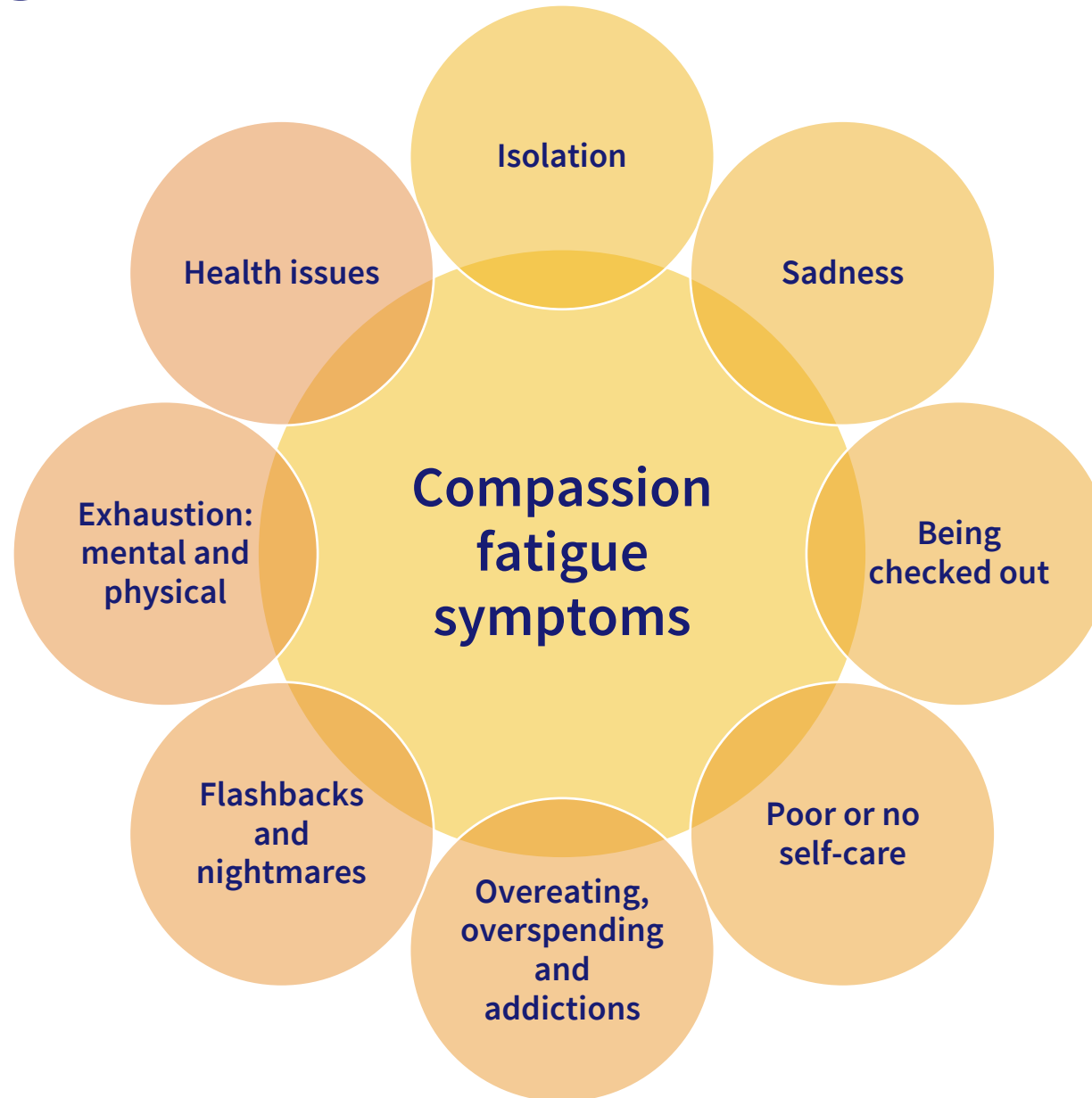
## Compassion fatigue

- Onset can be sudden
- Happens due to the cost of caring for others
- Emotional and physical pain from the trauma of others that affects us
- Thoughts of the trauma or experience that last a long time and flashbacks

## Burnout

- Can build over time
- Physical and emotional exhaustion
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Hopelessness/helplessness
- Does not mean our view of the world is bad or damaged
- Can be easier to fix by a change of environment

# How to recognize it



# Signs and symptoms at work

Absenteeism

Inability to work well with others

Difficulty getting along with the team

Aggressive behaviors at work and towards co-workers

Difficulty completing assignments or a hard time meeting deadlines

Negative attitude

Laziness

Not willing or open to change



# Life stress test

## Life stress scores

- 0 - 149: Low susceptibility to stress-related illness.
- 150 - 299: Medium susceptibility to stress-related illness: learn and practice relaxation and stress management skills and a healthy well lifestyle.
- 300 and over: High susceptibility to stress-related illness: daily practice of relaxation skills is very important for your wellness. Take care of it.

## Which have taken place in the past 12 – 14 months?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| _____ 1) Death of spouse (100 points)                                | _____ 22) Change in work responsibilities (29 points)       |
| _____ 2) Divorce (73 points)   | _____ 23) Trouble with in-laws (29 points)                  |
| _____ 3) Marital separation or from relationship partner (65 points) | _____ 24) Outstanding personal achievement (28 points)      |
| _____ 4) Jail term (63 points)                                       | _____ 25) Spouse begins or stops work (26 points)           |
| _____ 5) Death of close family member (63 points)                    | _____ 26) Starting or finishing school (26 points)          |
| _____ 6) Personal injury or illness (53 points)                      | _____ 27) Change in living conditions (25 points)           |
| _____ 7) Marriage (50 points)  | _____ 28) Revision of personal habits (24 points)           |
| _____ 8) Fired from work (47 points)                                 | _____ 29) Trouble with boss (23 points)                     |
| _____ 9) Marital reconciliation (45 points)                          | _____ 30) Change in work hours, conditions etc. (20 points) |
| _____ 10) Retirement (45 points)                                     | _____ 31) Change in residence (20 points)                   |
| _____ 11) Change in family member's health (44 points)               | _____ 32) Change in schools (20 points)                     |
| _____ 12) Pregnancy (40 points)                                      | _____ 33) Change in recreational habits (19 points)         |
| _____ 13) Sex difficulties (39 points)                               | _____ 34) Change in church activities (19 points)           |
| _____ 14) Addition to family (39 points)                             | _____ 35) Change in social activities (18 points)           |
| _____ 15) Business readjustment (39 points)                          | _____ 36) Mortgage or loan under \$20,000 (17 points)       |
| _____ 16) Change in financial status (38 points)                     | _____ 37) Change in sleeping habits (16 points)             |
| _____ 17) Death of close friend (37 points)                          | _____ 38) Change in number of family gatherings (15 points) |
| _____ 18) Change to a different line of work (36 points)             | _____ 39) Change in eating habits (15 points)               |
| _____ 19) Change in number of marital arguments (35 points)          | _____ 40) Vacation (13 points)                              |
| _____ 20) Mortgage or loan over \$30,000 (31 points)                 | _____ 41) Holiday season (12 points)                        |
| _____ 21) Foreclosure of mortgage or loan (30 points)                | _____ 42) Minor violations of the law (11 points)           |

# Professional quality of life scale (PROQOL)

## Compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue

	1=Never	2=Rarely	3=Sometimes	4=Often	5=Very Often
_____	1.	I am happy.			
_____	2.	I am preoccupied with more than one person I [help].			
_____	3.	I get satisfaction from being able to [help] people.			
_____	4.	I feel connected to others.			
_____	5.	I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.			
_____	6.	I feel invigorated after working with those I [help].			
_____	7.	I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a [helper].			
_____	8.	I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a person I [help].			
_____	9.	I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I [help].			
_____	10.	I feel trapped by my job as a [helper].			
_____	11.	Because of my [helping], I have felt "on edge" about various things.			
_____	12.	I like my work as a [helper].			
_____	13.	I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the people I [help].			
_____	14.	I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have [helped].			
_____	15.	I have beliefs that sustain me.			
_____	16.	I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with [helping] techniques and protocols.			
_____	17.	I am the person I always wanted to be.			
_____	18.	My work makes me feel satisfied.			
_____	19.	I feel worn out because of my work as a [helper].			
_____	20.	I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I [help] and how I could help them.			
_____	21.	I feel overwhelmed because my case [work] load seems endless.			
_____	22.	I believe I can make a difference through my work.			
_____	23.	I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of frightening experiences of the people I [help].			
_____	24.	I am proud of what I can do to [help].			
_____	25.	As a result of my [helping], I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.			
_____	26.	I feel "bogged down" by the system.			
_____	27.	I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a [helper].			
_____	28.	I can't recall important parts of my work with trauma victims.			
_____	29.	I am a very caring person.			
_____	30.	I am happy that I chose to do this work.			



# Coping with compassion fatigue

- Check in with yourself daily:
  - How am I doing?
  - How is my emotional wellbeing?
  - How is my energy level?
- Look for the signs and symptoms that impact you
- Acknowledge what you have control over and what you don't





# Combating it

- Validate your feelings
- Listen to your body - impact of anxiety on body and your mind
- Remember caring too much hurts in the long run
- Balance between caring for yourself and others
- Be kind to yourself

A photograph of a white sign with a black border and horizontal lines, tilted at an angle. The sign has the text "SELF CARE ISN'T SELFISH" written on it in bold, black, uppercase letters. The background of the sign is white with thin black horizontal lines. The sign is set against a background of a light-colored, possibly pink or peach, fabric with a subtle pattern of shadows.

**SELF  
CARE  
ISN'T  
SELFISH**

# Combating it continued

Cut back on things that are stressful

Activities and people that rejuvenate you

Relaxation practices

Exercise and nutrition

Counseling support

Take time off

# Interactive toolkits

## Mindfulness

[www.mindfulness.tools](http://www.mindfulness.tools)

Practical tools and exercises for incorporating mindfulness into everyday life.

## Meditation

[www.meditate.tools](http://www.meditate.tools)

Easy-to-use collection of resources that includes guided meditations, tip sheets and more.

## Resiliency

[www.resiliency.tools](http://www.resiliency.tools)

Skill development resources to help you 'bounce back' from challenging situations.

## Sleep fitness

[www.sleepfitness.tools](http://www.sleepfitness.tools)

Information and resources to help you learn good sleep habits and achieve healthy sleep.

# What is SupportLinc?

The SupportLinc Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a health benefit, separate from your medical insurance, offered by your employer to help you manage life's daily challenges.

SupportLinc can refer you to professional counselors, services and resources that will help you and your eligible family members resolve a broad range of personal and work-related concerns.

# What services are included?

## Work-life benefits



### Legal consultation

Free in-person or telephonic consultation with a licensed attorney

No employment law



### Dependent care referrals

Expert referrals to child and adult/elder care providers, facilities and other resources



### Financial consultation

Expert guidance and consultation from financial professionals



### “Convenience” referrals

Guidance and referrals to a variety of daily living resources: home improvement, entertainment services, pet care, auto repair, wellness, travel, handymen, volunteer opportunities etc.



### Identity theft consultation

Free consultation with an identity theft recovery professionals

Tailored recovery action plan



# Getting started



**Call:** 1-888-881-LINC (5462)



**QR Code:**



**Visit:** [www.supportlinc.com](http://www.supportlinc.com)



**Log in or create account**  
(code: psh)

## SupportLinc

Support for everyday issues. Every day.

# Case study

As an ER nurse, you're in the first hour of your shift and a patient is brought in that has been in a car accident. The patient is 5-years-old and in horrible shape and distress. Everyone rushes to prepare the trauma room. As the child is being rushed in and lifted onto the table, he is pronounced dead by the lead doctor. Now, the rest of your shift will be spent helping to console and assist the family members as they file into the waiting area one by one. It's all hands on deck to help the family get through this night.

## Additional resources

Here is the link for the PROQOL scoring key: <https://proqol.org/proqol-measure> Select the “ProQOL 5 Self-Score” option.

Providing care for an ill, injured or disabled loved one, while also juggling your other responsibilities at home and work, is a challenging balancing act. The constant demands on your time and attention can be mentally and physically draining. The lack of boundaries between your roles as a caregiver and a partner, child or other loved one may become blurred. You may feel as though you shouldn't burden anyone else, resulting in unrealistic expectations that you need to do it all without help.

Not surprisingly, finding time to focus on yourself can seem like a low priority. However, you cannot give to others what you don't have yourself. The investment you make in your emotional wellbeing is truly part of the caregiving you provide. Everyone in your life, and in particular the loved one for whom you provide care, will benefit from your sustained or renewed energy, focus and mindset.

Listed below are some techniques that you may find helpful as you practice ways of coping:

**Get support from people you love and trust.** Talking with people you feel safe with can help you process and feel more in control. If you have a supervisor, mentor or trusted colleague, they will be able to remind you of what typical responses are under these circumstances. They may also be able to help you be aware of certain challenges that may lie ahead.

**Try not to compare yourself with others.** Everyone reacts differently to exposure to others' suffering or traumatic experiences. There is no right or wrong way to deal with these events.

**Set more boundaries during this stressful time.** Say no when you can. Setting limits in your personal and professional life can help you conserve your energy and allow you time to regroup. By doing this, you will be able to keep things in better perspective. It is also important to be able to balance your time alone and the time you spend with supportive people.

**Avoid using alcohol or nonprescription drugs to handle your emotions or to relax.** Alcohol is a depressant and can make you feel more lethargic. Sugar, caffeine, and smoking can have an over-stimulating effect.

**Take care of yourself.** Eat well-balanced meals and make a point of getting enough sleep. Keep a bottle of water with you – it is easy to become dehydrated when you are under stress.

**Exercise.** Daily exercise can have tremendous benefits for both the body and mind. Even short walks can help if you take them regularly.

**Practice deep breathing.** Take breaks several times a day to breathe in slowly to a count of five, and out again to a count of five. This can help “unclench” both your body and mind.

## Additional resources

**Try to make your work area as comfortable and soothing as possible.** Surroundings can make a difference in how you feel. If you have a workspace, make sure your chair is comfortable or that you have a soothing photograph or other picture to look at.

**Write down your feelings.** Some people find that it helps to write down their feelings, especially before they go to bed. You can then decide whether or not you want to share these thoughts and feelings with anyone else.

**Consider joining a support group.** Talking with other professionals who are dealing with similar experiences can be helpful, especially if you don't have supportive friends and family nearby.

**Balance objectivity and empathy.** If you become overly objective, you may come across as very detached or feel numb and may not be able to help your patient or client. If you become overly empathetic, you may cry or become outraged, which may lead the patient or client to feel that you are unable to help them. Therefore, maintaining a healthy balance is of the utmost importance.

**Give yourself time.** It's not a sign of personal weakness if you are experiencing compassion fatigue. Be patient with yourself and ask others to be patient with you. Telling people how they can help you will enable them to feel useful and will help you get what you actually need.

**Know and honor your own limitations.** There are moments when everyone needs a break. Take one before you need to. You won't be able to help others if you're too exhausted.

**Remember to focus on the powerful impact you're having on the people you're helping.** You are giving the gift of yourself. Take time for a well-deserved break, if needed. When you return, you may be better able to help others with your refreshed attitude and by having more energy and a different perspective. Treat yourself the way you treat your own patients or clients - with compassion, empathy and understanding, and you and everyone you come in contact with will greatly benefit.

**Seek professional help if you are not yourself.** It's important to seek professional help right away if you are experiencing overwhelming feelings of sadness, anger, or despair, if you feel like quitting your job immediately or if you are having thoughts of suicide. There is treatment for compassion fatigue and talking with a professional can help. Calling your EAP is a great place to start. If you are arguing with people, having trouble getting along with others, or are feeling more aggressive, irritable or frustrated than usual, seek help. Seek help if you are having trouble functioning well at work or at home, or if your personal relationships are suffering. Seek help if you are drinking more, abusing drugs, can't sleep or if you just "don't know what's wrong."

For further resources, please go to your portal and use the search bar to type in "Compassion Fatigue Flash Course" and "Caregiver Stress Flash Course."

# Moving ahead



What did you get out of today's presentation?

Which concepts are working in your life and why?

Who can be a support for you to make change?

Which concepts are *not* working in your life and why?

What 3 ideas are going to be the most helpful for you?

How can you support someone else with change?

What can you do in the next 24 hours to apply these concepts?

What are your biggest barriers for change?