



Overcoming Compassion Fatigue In Your Family

September 13th, 2011

by Laurie Wallin
5 Minutes For Special Needs.com Contributor

Web: www.compassionfatigue.org
www.facebook.com/compassionfatigue

Media Contact for www.compassionfatigue.org:
Dell Richards Publicity
916-455-4790
dell@dellrichards.com

There's a new diagnosis on the block. This time, it's for us – the parents.

A few months ago, I wrote about a must-watch stress documentary for special needs parents. Yesterday, while visiting my daughter at her residential treatment facility, I discovered a term that *explains what we face even better than stress*.

Compassion fatigue.

You know all that time we spend listening, lifting, caring, watching, hoping, helping, worrying, planning, advocating and giving? It has a price. Emotional fatigue, depression, weight gain/loss, irritability, forgetfulness, resentment, physical pain, and many other stress-based symptoms. Beyond that, however, is the effect it has on families. At The Compassion Fatigue

Awareness Project's site, here's what's listed for a caregiving organization (which, we can argue, all special needs families are):

Organizational symptoms of Compassion Fatigue include:*

- High absenteeism
- Constant changes in co-workers relationships
- Inability for teams to work well together
- Desire among staff members to break company rules
- Outbreaks of aggressive behaviors among staff
- Inability of staff to complete assignments and tasks
- Inability of staff to respect and meet deadlines
- Lack of flexibility among staff members
- Negativism towards management
- Strong reluctance toward change
- Inability of staff to believe improvement is possible
- Lack of a vision for the future
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The individual battles: lack of vision, hope and willingness to connect with friends and family. **The marriage battles:** the discouragement, social interaction problems, aggression, and lack of flexibility. **The battles with people in authority in our kids' treatment teams:** negativism toward doctors and other professionals, lack of hope for treatment options and therapies, mistrust for their insights and information.

Like the treatment of any condition, it begins with recognizing there's a problem. If you see some of the symptoms in yourself and your family, here are some relaxation tools to build in daily to overcome it:

- Deep breathing
- Listen or dance to music

- Massage – your own hands, neck, or feet – or go for a full-body massage.
- Exercise at a mild-moderate cardiovascular rate
- Laugh, listen to comedy or read humor authors like Dave Barry
- Stretching and yoga
- Prayer

Do you see any of the symptoms above in your own family these days?

*Patricia Smith is a certified Compassion Fatigue Specialist with 20 years of training experience. As founder of the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project© (www.compassionfatigue.org), the outreach division of Healthy Caregiving, LLC, she writes, speaks and facilitates workshops nationwide in service of those who care for others. She has authored several books including *To Weep for a Stranger: Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving*, which is available at www.healthycaregiving.com or Amazon.com.*