

# The **SOLUTION** *source*

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter  
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

*For You & Your Family*

Spring 2010



## Compassion: Opportunities & Challenges!

Our Spring 2010 edition of Solution Source will focus on compassion. Where does it fit in your life? Have you ever found yourself in a place when caring too much has hurt you? When we find ourselves being compassionate with others without being compassionate with ourselves, troublesome experiences can surface that we might describe as Compassion Fatigue.

### IN THIS ISSUE:

What is Compassion Fatigue  
Addressing Compassion Fatigue  
The Caregiver's Bill of Rights

### PLUS:

Caregiver's share their stories.

*"If we can find ourselves in the midst of suffering and acknowledge the depth of our struggle, [our] heart begins to soften. Rather than amplify our pain with destructive thoughts and emotions, with self-compassion we soothe and contain it, by reacting with loving-kindness toward our agonized selves."*

Christopher K. Germer PhD

*“What helped me when I experienced Compassion Fatigue was counselling. It helped to talk to someone about what I have been through. When I was able to say it out loud it helped me to work out what was real and what I had built in my mind. It was good to have someone to talk to.”*

## Caregivers Who Have Experienced Compassion Fatigue



### What is Compassion Fatigue

To start, perhaps we need to understand just what compassion is. It is often mistaken for sympathy but is quite different. Compassion is an emotion that is a sense of shared suffering, most often combined with a desire to alleviate or reduce the suffering of another; to show special kindness to those who suffer. Compassion essentially arises through empathy, and is often characterized through actions, wherein a person acting with compassion will seek to aid those for whom they feel compassionate. Webster's Dictionary describes compassion as “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause.”

### Understanding Compassion Fatigue

What then does Compassion Fatigue look like? Feel like? Compassion Fatigue is a consequence of stress resulting from caring for and helping others who have suffered. It can be a set of symptoms, feelings and behaviours. These outward and inward signs inform us that we are experiencing Compassion Fatigue. Once we recognize that this is what is happening, then we can take action to manage our own suffering. Sometimes the only way we, as helpers, survive the pain of other people's feelings is to stifle our own. Dr. A. Baranowsky.

According to the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, “sometimes it is the only way we can continue to do the care giving work that we want to do. Once we are open to accepting the fact that Compassion Fatigue is creating our emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms, we can look at our pain and learn new ways in which to react to them and channel them into positive, healthy actions.”

### Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

According to Dawn Blessing, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre, in her presentation Compassion Fatigue: The Side Effects of Caring, “it can impact all aspects of our being, including physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and behavioural.”

#### Physical Effects

- fatigue and exhaustion
- frequent headaches
- hypertension
- frequent indigestion

#### Cognitive Effects

- difficulty focusing
- spaced out
- cranky
- pessimistic thinking

#### Emotional Effects

- detached
- sarcastic
- angry
- feeling hopeless
- feeling helpless

#### Spiritual Effects

- Questioning your purpose
- having a sense of disbelief
- a sense of aimlessness

#### Behavioural Effects

- feeling bored
- restless
- blaming
- inappropriate humour
- minimizing
- faking interest
- wishing people would just get over it
- avoiding
- workaholism

FAMILY  
SERVICES



EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAMS

#### Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

We offer custom designed counselling solutions for business and employees. Contact us: 807-684-1880

*"I am a resource to my client, not a rescuer. The time I have with my client is right now, I do what I can with the now. Spiritually I've found it helpful to pause, visualize God's hands...big, huge, gentle hands, and see my client in those hands. This helps to remind me and comfort me that the person I care about is in someone else's hands...hands that have an energy and love more than I know."*

### Caregivers Who Have Experienced Compassion Fatigue



## Addressing Compassion Fatigue

Anna Baranowsky, J. Eric Gentry and D. Franklin Schultz, leaders in their field, identify what they suggest for the care of Compassion Fatigue. They state that, "we have identified some enduring principles, techniques, and ingredients that seem to consistently lead to positive outcomes and enhanced resiliency." Here are a few of them.

### Intentionality

The caregiver intentionally acknowledges and addresses rather than avoids symptoms and their causes.

### Connection

Many caregivers often find themselves isolating themselves, especially as their symptoms worsen. Surrounding that is a fear of being 'found out' or a fear that they might be seen as being 'less than' or weak or somehow 'lacking'. The anecdote for this, of course, is connection, a connection to a group of peers in a safe environment who will listen with understanding, compassion and without judgment. Having a warm and supportive environment to depend upon is one of the most important safety nets for caregivers.

### Anxiety Management/ Self-Soothing/Self-Care

"Providing care giving services while experiencing intense anxiety is one of the primary means by which symptoms are contracted and exacerbated." They promote what they define as a non-anxious presence. "This non-anxious presence extends far beyond a calm outward appearance. Instead, it entails the ability to maintain a level of relaxed mindfulness and comfort in one's own body. The opportunity to "monitor and provide oneself with physical, emotional and spiritual needs" and "the ability to give yourself acknowledgment and validation for the work you do" is crucial to addressing anxious thoughts and feelings. Additionally the presence of a self-care plan can be a sanctuary of strength for the caregiver.

## The Caregiver's Bill of Rights (The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)

As a caregiver I have the right...

- To be respected for the work I choose to do.
- To take pride in my work and know that I am making a difference.
- To garner appreciation and validation for the care I give others.
- To receive adequate pay for my job as a professional caregiver.
- To discern my personal boundaries and have others respect my choices.
- To seek assistance from others, if and when it is necessary.
- To take time off to re-energize myself.
- To socialize, maintain my interests, and sustain a balanced lifestyle.
- To my own feelings, including negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration.
- To express my thoughts and feelings to appropriate people at appropriate times.
- To convey hope to those in my care.
- To believe those in my care will prosper in mind, body and spirit as a result of my care giving.

## The Eight Laws Governing Healthy Change (The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)

1. Take frequent breaks from what you are doing.
2. Learn the word "no." Use it whenever necessary.
3. Share the load with others.
4. There is humor in every situation. Find it and laugh.
5. Recognize when you need help. Ask for it.
6. Give yourself credit when credit is due.
7. Give others credit when credit is due.
8. Breathe deeply as often as possible.

*"At the risk of sounding too simplistic, I believe that regular contact with supportive peers is essential. It helps to keep things in perspective and ensures that you do not work in isolation, which is critical. I also think regular exercise is vitally important. You can't keep a healthy mind if you do not also care for and maintain a healthy body"*

### Caregivers Who Have Experienced Compassion Fatigue

#### The Eight Laws Governing Self-Care (The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)

1. By validating ourselves, we promote acceptance.
2. By validating others, we elevate ourselves.
3. By meeting our own mental, physical and emotional needs, we give care from a place of abundance, not scarcity.
4. By practicing self-goodwill, we manifest it throughout our lives.
5. By honoring past traumas and hurts, we allow ourselves freedom from the pain that controls us.
6. By "doing the work," we reclaim the personal power that is rightfully ours.
7. By naming and taking ownership of the core issues that limit our growth, we create authenticity.
8. By managing our self-care, we welcome happiness into our lives.

#### The Eight Laws Governing A Healthy Workplace (The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)

1. Employer provides a respite for staff following any traumatic event.
2. Employer provides continuing education for staff.
3. Employer provides acceptable benefits to aid staff in practicing beneficial self care.
4. Employer provides management and staff with tools to accomplish their tasks.
5. Employers direct management to monitor workloads.
6. Employers provide positive, team-building activities to promote strong social relationships between colleagues.
7. Employers encourage "open door" policies to promote good communication between workers.
8. Employers have grief processes in place when traumatic events occur onsite.

#### The Eight Laws Governing Healthy Care Giving: (The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project)

1. Sustain Your Compassion
2. Retain Healthy Skepticism
3. Learn to Let Go
4. Remain Optimistic
5. Be the Solution
6. Embrace Discernment
7. Practice Sustainable Self Care
8. Acknowledge Your Successes

#### More Quotes from Caregivers Who Have Experienced Compassion Fatigue

*"I found it really hard! Sometimes things are just entirely out of your control in terms of what issues come through your door (the quantity and severity). I really needed a break to ground myself and to also hear that other people whose work I respect have experienced it as well. Only then could I really embrace that it wasn't about me, but it's part of the difficult work that we do."*

*You can not expect to change what you are not aware of -by being aware you can choose whether and how you will express emotions or react giving you the opportunity to catch yourself in that moment. It is through self awareness you can identify change and what you need to support that change.*

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre is hosting a workshop for those who could be impacted by Compassion Fatigue featuring Dr. A. Baranowsky of the Traumatology Institute (Canada) on March 8, 2010.

Registration is open until February 19, 2010.

For more information or to register, visit [www.tbaycounselling.com](http://www.tbaycounselling.com) or call: (807) 684-1880

The  
**SOLUTION source**  
For You & Your Family



THUNDER BAY  
**COUNSELLING CENTRE**  
SOLUTIONS THAT CHANGE LIVES

544 Winnipeg Avenue | Thunder Bay, Ontario | P7B 3S7  
Email: [corporate@tbaycounselling.com](mailto:corporate@tbaycounselling.com)  
Web Site: [www.tbaycounselling.com](http://www.tbaycounselling.com)