



Compassion Fatigue in the Workplace

Compassion fatigue is the physical, emotional and psychological distress caused by the impact of being regularly exposed to other people's emotional pain (Macnamara, 2020). Although more common in caring professions, the evidence is clear that any person can be affected, in particular, people who work in remote communities with limited support services. Compassion Fatigue shares some features of burnout, but onset can be quicker with some different symptoms (Delligatti, 2022).

Why Remote Workplaces?



Isolation from **support networks**, limited access to services



Developing **close relations** with staff members is more common in regional and remote areas.



Prioritising employee wellbeing. **Listening** to employees problems or distress



Work/life balance. Long hours, **limited time** for family and friends



Emotional investment in the business and staff, high levels of **empathy**

Protecting emotional health and identifying problems early is a priority. If symptoms go unrecognised or ignored, it can negatively affect relationships, health and work. Early identification is key to recovery and helps prevent recurrence.



“My empathy glass is full”

Empathy is our ability to understand and share another person's feelings



Compassion Fatigue

Symptoms can vary as we are all unique individuals.

1. Early signs of Compassion Fatigue	2. Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling helpless and powerless to help others Reduced empathy and sensitivity Detached, numb and emotionally disconnected 	All of column 1, and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced interest in activities or hobbies Increased anxiety, sadness, anger and irritability Struggling to concentrate and make decisions Sleeping problems such as waking through the night, waking up early, finding it hard to go to sleep, nightmares Headaches, nausea, upset stomach and dizziness Increased conflict in personal relationships Reduced self-care Withdrawal from friends/family Self-medicating with alcohol and/or other drugs
<p>If are experiencing symptoms from column 2 for more than two weeks, it is important to seek professional help</p>	

Self-help

You can still care for staff members and protect yourself. Early signs of Compassion Fatigue can be helped.

Time for self	Take a couple of hours out per week doing something you enjoy, make a self-care plan and stick to it! Finding the time may reduce the risk of developing Compassion Fatigue.
Support	Talk to trusted friend or family member can bring comfort and clarity to how you feel.
Set boundaries	Communicate your capacity with staff members. Example: “I want to hear about your problem and have time at 2:30 for a half-hour chat”.
Offer other supports	Suggest staff members talk with their GP, a professional counsellor or employee Assistance Program if available. “I’m here for you but I don’t have the counselling skills to support you through this”. Know your limitations and communicate that to staff members.
Self-compassion	Having the same compassion for ourselves as we do for others is imperative our well-being. Be kind to yourself when you make mistakes, forgive yourself if you don’t have time/capacity for staff, stick to a self-care plan.
Be well	Exercise regularly, eat healthily, make sure you get enough sleep and drink alcohol in moderation.

Professional help

Compassion fatigue is recoverable and putting in steps to prevent it happening again is imperative to our overall health. If you think you may be experiencing Compassion Fatigue, there is help available:

- Speak to a GP, Psychologist or other available counsellor
- Access online counselling
- Learn about Compassion Fatigue

References

Delligatti, A. M. (2022). *Compassion fatigue is not limited to healthcare workers*. <https://amdphd.com/resource-center/compassion-fatigue-is-not-limited-to-healthcare-workers>

Macnamara, N. (2020). *Understanding vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue*. Australian Childhood Foundation. CETC. <https://www.cetc.org.au/understanding-vicarious-trauma-and-compassion-fatigue/#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20set%20of,physical%20ailments%2C%20and%20sleep%20disturbances.>

Smith, D. D. (2022). *Compassion fatigue is real and it may be weighing you down*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/03/compassion-fatigue-is-real-and-it-may-be-weighing-you-down>