

PREVENTING COMPASSION FATIGUE

Self Awareness and Self Care Practices

Action Steps

At work:

If we notice that we feel caught on a “burnout train” that can carry us towards compassion fatigue, we can make a decision to engage in one of the following activities with the help of intentional mindfulness.

1. **We can set an intention to notice what the body is telling us it needs in our daily activities.**
2. **We can set an intention to incorporate self-care breaks.**
3. **We can set an intention to be fully present to the people we are caring for *and* to ourselves.**
4. **We can set an intention to be fully supportive of self-care actions for the whole team-keeping each other in empathic company.**

With kind and friendly interest ask yourself: What action could be helpful to me in this present moment?

1. Can I notice and pay careful attention to what my body tells me it needs in the present moment?

Being mindful of what’s happening in the present moment in relationship to movement can be helpful as we train ourselves to notice the 1st signals of compassion fatigue. How can I best learn to focus my attention on the mind/body connection? When can we check in with what the body is telling us in our daily activities, i.e. walking to the work, preparing to sit down, sitting down, standing up, can offer us information about what’s actually happening internally right now. As we talk on the phone or travel homeward what does our body posture tell us is going on internally? How can we best respond to what the body tells me it needs?

2. Can I take a self-care break? Can I incorporate the question, “is it time for a break”?

Hmmm.- can I take a few minutes to have a cuppa or take a slow walk outdoors, or do some stretches in between patients. Being kind to ourselves is a novel idea for some of us. Being kind and present to ourselves trains us and provides us more energy towards our being kind and present to others. Can I set an alarm to remind me to do this? Can I train myself to do a self-care activity after an “emotional flooding event” with a person?

Can I schedule a 5-minute appointment with myself, actually writing it down in my daily calendar, to sit and notice, “What’s happening now, and now, and now.... “ This activity can help us notice if most or all of our empathy is other-directed. Can we spend 5 minutes offering ourselves empathy for how difficult our work is sometimes? Simply sitting for 5 minutes, or even 3 minutes, offers us the opportunity to step off of a “burnout train”.

3. Can I be fully present to the person I’m caring for and myself at the same time

Yup! You might want to experiment a few times with taking a pause before meeting the next person. Being curious, as if you’re your own research subject, as to what happens when you set an intention to notice the sensations of breath, as breath is received and released, for a few breaths just before meeting the next person. A few breath pause in the present moment influences what happens in the moments that follow. Check it out!

4. Can I engage with and enhance self-care practices with my team.

How can I contribute to enhancing peer-support? Do I spend enough time empathizing with myself and my team, as I do with the people I see? How can I bring humor to our work, to our team meetings?

Remember

Setting intentions means simply carrying out what you have planned as best you can.

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Action Steps At Home:

If we notice that we feel caught on a “burnout train” that can carry us towards compassion fatigue, we can make a decision to engage in one of the following activities with the help of intentional mindfulness.

- 1. We can set an intention to keep a self reflective journal.**
- 2. We can set an intention to do something pleasurable.**
- 3. We can set an intention to relax and replenish by opening up to available resources that can help us do so.**
- 4. We can set an intention to take actions that give us a sense of satisfaction and achievement.**

With kind and friendly interest ask yourself: What action could be helpful to me in this present moment?

1. Keep a self reflective journal

It can be helpful to check in with yourself at least once a day. We can simply note what activities incline towards “being” in a state of ease and self-nurturance. Writing to ourselves with an attitude of self-reflection offers us opportunity to let ourselves know and express our emotions more fully. We don’t have to be perfect in our notes, after all this is about keeping ourselves in kind and self-accepting company.

2. Do something pleasurable.

Be kind to your body. Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favorite food without feeling guilty. Engage in enjoyable activities: Go for a walk, a hike, visit a friend; do your favorite hobby; do some gardening; take some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good. You might want to experiment with a new activity or temporarily let go of a familiar activity once a week with curiosity about how these actions influence burnout that may lead to compassion fatigue. Shall I buy myself flowers, get a massage?

3. Relax/replenish ourselves by accepting the help offered with the company of audio and visual resources

There are many mindfulness-based audiotapes, videotapes and DVDs. You’ll find them available at many medical centers, local libraries, and some are available online at mindfulness based centers. Many are available free online.

4. Do something that gives you a sense of personal satisfaction or achievement.

Sometimes our work with people doesn’t lead to feelings of achievement or personal satisfaction. These are times for engaging with activities that offer us the opportunity to pat ourselves on the back with a resounding “Good Job”! Clear out a cupboard or drawer; catch up with your letter writing; do one step to clear up the personal paperwork stack; It’s especially important to congratulate yourself after completing a task – after all, how often we do so when we work with people that we are caring for.

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