



Caring For Ourselves When We Care for Others

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There is much grief added to the stresses we have experienced throughout the pandemic. Working through grief and other difficult emotions can include:

- Acknowledging our feelings/emotions; feelings are not good or bad – they just are!
- Sharing the stories and stresses; helps to process them
- Grief is a lifelong process – not experienced in linear stages
- Letting go of the things we cannot control – focus on what we can control; be able to rest in not knowing
- Transforming the energy found in our anger
- Caring for oneself – being gentle; having manageable expectations
- Rituals can help

Strategies for Addressing All Challenges include: **Support, Knowledge and Perspective**

Support:

- In both personal and professional circles; be creative with how to connect; seek professional help when you need to – a sign of health, not weakness

Knowledge:

- Becoming more aware about workplace stresses and issues, and how to mitigate them
 - Compassion Fatigue** - Profound emotional and physical erosion that takes place when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate
 - Vicarious Trauma** - : Listening to the stories of the suffering of others - we too become traumatized by the images and stories though we did not experience them ourselves.
 - Moral Distress**: when we are told to do things that we fundamentally disagree with or to which we are morally opposed; working in systems and cultures that aren't always in line with our beliefs about how to provide care
 - Burnout**: many non-helping professions suffer burnout; physical and emotional exhaustion experienced along with low job satisfaction, feeling powerless and overwhelmed at work. Does not necessarily mean we have lost the ability to feel compassion for others and can usually be resolved by changing jobs. Not the case with Compassion Fatigue or Vicarious Trauma, which affects our ability to care.



Compassion Satisfaction: the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well and reconnecting with the rewards of your work – meaning and purpose. What made me choose this line of work? What keeps me going? How have I made a difference to others?

Experiencing the pandemic has most likely caused trauma, especially to front-line workers.

Psychologist Jennifer Yaeger explains a few things which are helpful to know about trauma:

- Parts of our brains shut down in order for us to survive. As a result, we are not able to fully process a lot of what is going on around us
- Feeling somewhat numb and out of touch with our emotions is normal, especially if you have lived through trauma before
- Some people are more apt to feel hypervigilant or anxious, and others hypoactive or depressed. Neither means anything other than your predisposition for dealing with extreme stress.
- In-depth processing of trauma happens years later, when we feel emotionally safe to deal with it.
- When in the midst of trauma, just getting by emotionally and functionally is okay. Lowering expectations and being kind to yourself and others is vital

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a treatable condition. If you are having symptoms such as recurrent nightmares, difficulties with memory, depression or suicidal thoughts please reach out for professional support.

Building Resilience:

1. Self-care
2. Improved Self-Awareness/Self-Compassion
3. Reducing chronic stress; mindfulness

Self-care is an attitude and intentional way of living to make sure you are providing yourself with what you need to refuel and regenerate daily. Only you know what that is, and only you can make it happen. Includes a number of ways to focus on Body, Mind and Spirit.

Self-Awareness – includes self-reflection, asking yourself the hard questions, and having self-compassion.

Mindfulness – an awareness of the present moment without judgement; many mindfulness exercises can help to provide more focus, decrease stress, and improve personal and professional wellbeing. Find what works for you and learn more.

Perspective:

- Distinguish between solvable and unsolvable worries
- Keep your expectations (for yourself and for others) realistic





- One day/one decision at a time – focus on the present
- Remain hopeful
- Read/watch something that is inspiring/uplifting; titrate the news
- Balance between looking inward and looking outward; Focus on care and compassion - for ourselves, but also for our families, friends, colleagues and clients
- Practice gratitude

Strategies for Staff:

- being committed to caring for self
- debriefing with colleagues; ongoing conversations - staff meetings; shift change; regular gatherings; formal debriefing, especially after a difficult situation
- watching out for each other; challenging each other to self-care; supporting each other; affirming each other; avoiding gossip and negative talk
- enjoying some social time together (virtually for now); support groups; staying connected through social media; newsletters
- Taking days off and vacation – keeping boundaries around work time
- ways of sharing memories; rituals; celebrating lives

Strategies for Organizations:

- Naming and discussing issues such as Grief and Compassion Fatigue in the work place; availability of EAP/Support or access to professionals in the organization for support
- Supportive work environment; proper opportunities for debriefing; wellness; ongoing education
- Professional development; peer support/mentoring; building leadership
- Arrange for adequate resources; develop strong, compassionate teams
- Adapting workloads when necessary; ensuring days off/vacations
- Staff appreciation events; team building exercises/events
- Ways of sharing memories; rituals; celebrating lives

Wellness Work Plan – consider sharing with a colleague or friend to keep you accountable!

1. One Change I could make in the next WEEK –
- what do I need to put in place to make that happen?
2. One Change I could make in the next MONTH
- what do I need to put in place to make that happen?
3. One Change I could make in the next YEAR
- what do I need to put in place to make that happen?

Resources:

- **Compassion Fatigue** – www.compassionfatigue.org and www.tendacademy.ca
- **Mindfulness** – www.mindful.org
- **Self-Compassion** – www.self-compassion.org – great site with lots of resources



Life & Death
Matters

- Canadian Virtual Hospice – www.virtualhospice.ca – professional resources and articles, including grief module for health care workers working during COVID
- Mental Health Commission of Canada - www.mentalhealthcommission.ca
- Mindful Medics - <https://drreenakotecha.com/mindful-medics> - can search for the 'PACE' meditation and they will email it to you free of charge
- *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*; Francoise Mathieu; Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012
- *Healthy Caregiving: Perspectives for Caring Professionals*, Michelle O'Rourke, 2020, also *Embracing the End of Life*, (2012) with Eugene Dufour - available through Amazon or on www.selahresources.ca
- *Essentials in Hospice and Palliative Care: A Practical Resource for Every Nurse*, Kath Murray, Life and Death Matters, 2017, revised edition; see www.lifeanddeathmatters.ca
- *Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers, 2nd ed*, Kath Murray, Life and Death Matters, 2020, see www.lifeanddeathmatters.ca