Understanding Burnout, Compassion Fatigue & Vicarious Trauma

Exploring Creative Solutions

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Signs and Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma

Physical
- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Increased susceptibility to illness

Behavioral
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Anger and irritability
- Absenteeism

Psychological
- Emotional exhaustion
- Distancing from clients and colleagues
- Depression
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism
- Low job satisfaction
- Disruption to world view
- Inability to tolerate strong feelings
- Heightened anxiety or irrational fears
- Insensitivity to emotional material
- Increased sense of personal vulnerability
- Loss of hope
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Dread of working with certain clients
- Feeling therapeutic impotence or de skilled
- Diminished sense of enjoyment of career
- Failure to nurture and develop non work related aspects of life

Write down 3 warning signs that you are getting overloaded with stress (could be physical, emotional or behavioural):

1.

2.

3.
Life/work balance self-test
What’s Draining You?

Excerpted from Cheryl Richardson “Take time for your life” (1999)

Check all that apply to you

**Relationships**

☐ There are people in my life who continuously drain energy

☐ I have unreturned phone calls, e-mails, or letters that need to be handled

☐ I have an unresolved conflict with a family member

☐ I lack quality friendships in my life

☐ I feel a void in my life created by the lack of a romantic partner

☐ There is someone I need to forgive

☐ There is a relationship I need to end

☐ There is a phone call I dread making, and it causes me stress and anxiety

☐ I’m currently involved in a relationship that compromises my values

☐ I miss being a part of a loving and supportive community

Add your check marks: ______

**Environment**

☐ My car is in need of cleaning and/or repair

☐ My wardrobe needs updating and/or alterations

☐ I’d like to live in a different geographic location

☐ I have appliances that need repair or upgrading
__My home is not decorated in a way that nurtures me
__My closets and/or basement are cluttered and need to be cleaned
__Repairs need to be done around my home or apartment
__My home is cluttered and disorganized
__I miss having more beauty reflected in my environment
__I watch too much television
Add your check marks: ______

**Body, mind and spirit**

__I eat food that’s not good for me
__Something about my physical appearance bothers me
__It’s been too long since I’ve been to the dentist
__I do not get the sleep I need to feel fully rested
__I’d like to exercise regularly but never seem to find the time
__I have a health concern for which I’ve avoided getting help
__I have emotional needs that consistently go unmet
__There are books that I’d love to read but never seem to find the time for
__I lack personal interests that are intellectually stimulating
__I lack a spiritual or religious practice in my life
Add your check marks: ______

**Work**

__I no longer enjoy my job and have a hard time showing up each day
__My work is stressful and leaves me exhausted at the end of the day
My office is disorganized, my desk is a mess, and I have trouble finding what I need

I’m avoiding a confrontation or conflict at work

I tolerate bad behaviour from a boss or coworker

I am not computer literate, and it gets in the way of my productivity

I lack the proper office equipment that I need to do my job well

My work does not allow me to express my creativity

I know I need to delegate specific tasks but am unable to let go of control

I feel overwhelmed with the amount of information that enters my life in the form of email, books, magazines, and mail

Add your check marks: ______

Money

I have tax returns that are not filed or taxes that are not paid

I pay my bills late

I spend more money than I earn

I don’t have a plan for my financial future

My credit rating is not what I’d like it to be

I do not have a regular savings plan

I do not have adequate insurance coverage

My mortgage rate is too high, and I need to refinance

I have debt that needs to be paid off

My will is not up to date

Add your check marks: ______
Add score from each category

Relationships: __________

Environment: __________

Body mind and spirit: __________

Work: __________

Money: __________

Are there areas that cause more energy drains than others?
MAKING CHANGES
Commitment to changes I could make in the next…

**Immediate plan:** Can you think of one small step you could take in the very near future to move you closer to this goal? *(you could consult a friend/coach/counsellor for additional ideas if you feel stuck here)*

**Change I could make in the next Week:**

What do you need to get in place to make this happen?

**Change I could make in the next Month:**

What do you need to get in place to make this happen?

**Change I could make in the next Year:**

What do you need to get in place to make this happen?
**Recommended Resources**

**Compassion Fatigue/Vicarious Trauma**

*Trauma Stewardship* by Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky  
*The Compassion Fatigue Workbook* by Françoise Mathieu (available online at Amazon)

**Secondary Traumatic Stress**

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Resources: [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org)  
Secondary Traumatic Stress Fact Sheet  
Secondary Traumatic Stress Speakers Series Webinars on:  
STS and organizations, Culture (in English and Spanish), Schools, Terrorism and Disaster, STS for Judges, and Early Childhood providers

**Resources for Child Welfare Workers**


**Stress/Immune System**

*When the Body Says No* by Gabor Maté

**Relaxation/Meditation CDs**

*Mindfulness Meditation* CDs by Jon Kabat-Zinn: [www.mindfulnesstapes.com](http://www.mindfulnesstapes.com)

**Work/Life Balance**

Take *Time for Your Life: a 7 Step Program for Creating the Life you Want* by Cheryl Richardson (1999).

**Self Care/Stress Reduction**
Do One Thing Different: 10 simple ways to change your life by Bill O'Hanlon
Little book of stress relief by David Posen

Simplifying

Simplify Your Life: 100 Ways to Slow Down and Enjoy the Things That Really Matter
by Elaine St James

Selected Journal articles on Compassion Fatigue/Vicarious Trauma and Child Protection:

For an extensive bibliography, please visit the Child Welfare Information gateway:
Secondary Trauma in the Child Welfare Workforce 2000-present. Compiled bibliography:

http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/5-12-10/secondary%20trauma.pdf


Compassion Fatigue Bibliography


