

# Compassion Fatigue

A “notebook” presentation for pastors, elders, deacons and others who are “called” by God to give of themselves to those who have experienced disasters in their lives.

A gift from the Presbytery of Southern Kansas'  
Disaster Assistance Team

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# What Is Stress?

- A physical, mental, or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension. Simply put, stress is any outside force or event that has an effect on our body or mind.
- When you sense danger – whether it's real or imagined – the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction, or the *stress response*.

# What Does Stress Affect?

- Physiological/Biological responses
- Emotional state
- Psychological functioning
- Cognitive functioning

# Physiological/Biological Responses

- Appetite disturbance
- Sleep disturbance
- Diarrhea, stomach pains, nausea
- Headaches
- Increased heart rate
- Nightmares

# Emotions

- Mood swings
- Withdrawl
- Depression
- Sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness

# Psychological

- Irritability
- Anger
- Denial
- Helplessness - Fear of recurrence of event

# Cognitive

- Concentration
- Judgment
- Reasoning
- Memory

# Traumatic Stress Definitions

- Acute Stress Disorder
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Secondary Traumatic Stress (Compassion Fatigue)
- Burnout

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,  
American Psychiatric Association: DSM III, 1980; DSM IV,  
1994; DSM V TR, 2000

# Acute Stress Disorder Symptoms

- Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts or perceptions.
- Recurrent distressing dreams of the event.
- Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring, a sense of reliving the experience.
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma.
- Persistent symptoms of increases arousal.
- A.S.D lasts for a minimum of 2 days, a maximum of 4 weeks, and occurs within 4 weeks of the traumatic event.
- A.S.D. is often viewed as a normal, short term reaction to exposure to a traumatic events, a maximum of 4 weeks, and occurs within 4 weeks of the traumatic event.

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

## Symptoms

### PTSD

- Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions.
- Recurrent distressing dreams of the event.
- Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring, a sense of reliving the experience.
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma.
- Persistent symptoms of increased arousal.

# Secondary Traumatic Stress Compassion Fatigue

- Is not defined as a disorder in the D.S.M.
- First recognized by researchers in the 1980s.
- *Symptoms virtually identical to those experiencing PTSD. See previous slide.*
- Primary difference is that *exposure to the traumatic experience is indirect, through the person (or animal) that directly experienced the event.*
- Figley, 1982, coined the term “Compassion Fatigue” to describe what he called “the cost of caring.”

# Traumatic Stress vs. Burnout

- A process that begins gradually.
- Becomes progressively worse.
- Includes gradual exposure to job strain.
- Includes a loss of a sense of idealism.
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment.
- Symptoms include fatigue, anxiety of depression, cynicism, poor work performance, absenteeism, withdrawal, inability to concentrate.

# Who May Experience Compassion Fatigue

- Immediate/first responders (fire and law enforcement).
- Later responders (medical, paramedic, ambulance personnel.
- Emergency room personnel.
- Body recovery, identification, and burial personnel.
- Crisis interveners (*clergy*, medical, mental health professionals).
- *Voluntary Personnel (Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc.)*
- Remote responders (equipment maintenance personnel.
- Emergency support personnel (dispatchers).

# Others Who May Experience Compassion Fatigue

- Family members and friends.
- Co-workers.
- Animal shelter workers.
- Basically, anyone who works with those who have experienced a traumatic event.

# Contributing Factors

- Suddenness of the event.
- Duration
- Intensity
- Controllability
- Extent of damage/destruction
- Number of injuries/deaths
- Man made or nature
- Inability to carry out tasks

# Why are some people less likely to experience compassion fatigue than others?

## Personal Resiliency Factors

- Life experience
- Preexisting life stresses
- Previous exposure to similar events
- Social support systems
- Personality characteristics
- Cultural norms
- Adaptability/flexibility

# Why are.....? (continued)

## Professional Resiliency Factors

- Culture of the profession
- Rescuer mentality
- Professional support systems
- Supervision
- Experience in profession
- Training

# Preventing Compassion Fatigue

- Davis and Brody (1979) describes three levels of prevention at the systems level.
  - Primary: deals with the underlying social causes of a problem.
  - Secondary: emphasizes activities to reduce risk or provide preparation to reduce impact.
  - Tertiary: focuses on intervention in the aftermath of the event.

# Primary Prevention Strategies

- Violence reduction initiatives
- Mitigation efforts
- Laws and regulations
- Community involvement
- Coalition building

# Secondary Prevention Strategies

- Community education
- Individual, family, and business activities to prepare and plan for disaster responses
- Training and education
  - First Aid and CPR
  - Community Emergency Response Team
  - Medical Reserve Corp

# Tertiary Prevention Strategies

- Crisis counseling
- Psychological first aid
- Critical incident stress management (C.I.S.M.)
- Critical incident stress debriefings
- Identification and referral of individuals wh need additional support to alleviate emotional distress

# Personal Prevention Strategies

## Physical

- Regular, vigorous exercise
- Adequate sleep
- Good nutrition practices
- Self-nurturance:
  - Massages
  - Warm Baths
  - Pleasant surroundings
  - Comfortable clothing

# Psychological

- Balanced lifestyle
- Relaxation
- Contact with nature
- Creative expression/hobbies
- Skill development
  - Assertiveness training: Saying **NO!**
  - Interpersonal communication
  - Cognitive restructuring: one's world view
  - Community organizing and involvement
  - Time management

# Meditation/Spiritual Practice

- Note: this may or may not have to do with organized religion.
  - Deep breathing
  - Approaching life with a “mindful awareness”
  - Self-awareness
    - Knowing when outside help is needed
  - Humor

# Social/Interpersonal

- Participate in family activities and play
- Develop a quality social network
- Get help when help is needed
- Social activism
- Community involvement

# Professional Life

- Balance work and non-work activities
- Balance multiple work roles
- Boundaries and limit setting
- Time management
- Avoid overworking
- Know your limits
- Develop a professional support network
- Seek supervision and consultation
- Find role models or mentors
- Seek ongoing training/professional development

# Prevention Strategies During a Disaster or Traumatic Event

## Organizational/Team

- Plan, prepare, and practice
- Brief responders prior to deployment
- Provide updates when available
- Pair responders
- Provide for breaks, meals, rest
- Informal and formal debriefings

# Individual

- Don't overwork
- Eat, take breaks, and rest regularly
- Watch out for your buddy
- Be aware of yourself
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- Avoid over exposure to event (i.e., media)
- Peer support

# Compassion Fatigue/Secondary Traumatic Stress

## resources

There is a confidential test to evaluate your level of stress which you can take on the following link:

<http://4therapy.com/consumer/assessment/taketest.php?&uniqueid=22&>

Other links:

[http://www.stressdoc.com/four\\_states\\_burnout.htm](http://www.stressdoc.com/four_states_burnout.htm)

<http://www.compassionfatigue.org>

Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized: Figley, Charles R., PhD. 1995

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, American Psychiatric Association: DSM III, 1980, DSM IV, 1994; DSM IV TR, 2000

Healthy Caregiving. A Guide to Recognizing and Managing Compassion Fatigue: Patricia Smith, Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, 2008-2009

Google: Compassion Fatigue, Caregiver Burnout, Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Psychological First Aid, Critical Incident Stress Management