

# FOCUS | Healing Compassion Fatigue (60-90 minutes)



## OBJECTIVE |

Explore **compassion fatigue**, the stressors that contribute to it, and how to heal and protect against it. See Module 6 | The Gentle Power of the Wounded Healer for more detailed information about compassion fatigue.

## OVERVIEW |

**Compassion fatigue** is the emotional and physical strain that occurs when caring for others who are experiencing distress, trauma, or hardship **begins to overwhelm one's own capacity to absorb and process it**. It develops when empathy is continually extended outward without sufficient restoration, support, or boundaries. Without intentional restoration and support, sustained exposure to others' distress can gradually erode emotional reserves and relational capacity.

- Sounds Like - *"I care, but I just don't have anything left to give."*
- Feels Like - *Emotional heaviness, overwhelm, numbness, or chronic empathy depletion.*
- Looks Like - *Reduced empathy, irritability, difficulty staying present with others' pain, withdrawal from meaningful connection.*

## HEALING |

We heal and protect against compassion fatigue by restoring balance between empathy and renewal. Healing happens through intentional recalibration, reconnection, and relief.

- REST | **Recalibrate** the nervous system so empathy can flow without overwhelming the body.

## OPENING | Grounding the Circle (20-30 minutes)

### 1. Come into Circle (Introductions) (5-7 minutes)

Invite a brief round of introductions. Prompt:

- Name
- One word (or short phrase) for how you're arriving today

### 2. Share Circle Focus & Objectives (3-4 minutes)

Frame the session:

- This is a space for connection, reflection, and restoration
- Today's focus: grounding in core values and beginning to notice internal states
- Briefly introduce the role of somatic practice as a way to support nervous system regulation

### 3. Review Core Values & Core Commitments (3-5 minutes)

- Briefly walk through the Core Values and Core Commitments
- Emphasize values as anchors during stress and decision-making.

### Somatic Practices (8-10 minutes)

To recalibrate the nervous system and release stored physical and emotional stress

(See Guide Resource Portal for modeled practices in the REST Resources page)

#### Breathe & Tap

Combine slow, intentional breathing with gentle tapping to support regulation and release tension

#### Full-Body Hug & Hold

Cross arms around the body and apply gentle pressure to create a sense of containment, safety, and calm



REST

Regulate Nervous System

Gather in circle, check-in, engage simple somatic (body) movement practices designed to soothe the nervous system, alleviate tension, and create community connection.



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## HEALING |

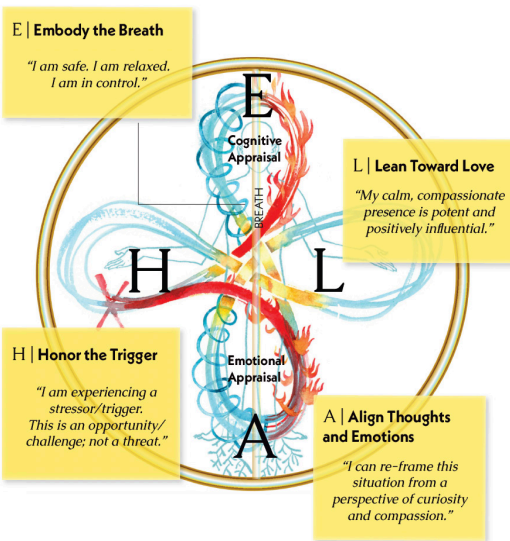
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- RESTORATION | **Repair** through reconnecting with meaning, purpose, and the values that first called us to care for others.



**RESTORATION**  
Process & Make Meaning

Discuss a foundational concept of the core curriculum, share personal experiences, and engage our signature HEAL strategy to create meaning, gain insight, and generate wisdom.



## TRANSITION | Rose, Thorn, Bud + H.E.A.L. (40–45 minutes)

### Set-Up & Framing (3–4 minutes)

Introduce the purpose: This reflection is an opportunity to explore both what is sustaining you and what may be depleting you, especially in relation to compassion fatigue—and to begin shifting toward sustainable, values-aligned care.

### ROSE | What's Nourishing You (8–10 minutes)

Individual Reflection (1–2 minutes)

Prompt:

- What is a highlight or "glimmer" in your life right now that allows you to express your core value—in your work or personal life?

### Small Group or Pair Share (6–8 minutes)

### THORN | Compassion Fatigue (15–18 minutes)

- This is the experience of absorbing the emotional experiences of others in ways that become difficult to release, often leading to overwhelm, heaviness, or emotional residue.

### Whole Circle Share (8–10 minutes)

Go around the circle: Each participant shares briefly (45–60 seconds)

- How does compassion fatigue impact your ability to stay present, connected, and grounded with the people you serve?

### H.E.A.L. | Repair + Re-Align (15–18 minutes) Guided Reflection + Pair Share

#### H | Honor the Trigger (3–4 minutes)

- What might this moment of compassion fatigue be revealing about the limits of your emotional energy?
- How might this be an invitation to shift from absorbing others' pain to recognizing what is yours to hold—and what is not?

#### E | Embody Regulation (3–4 minutes)

- What physical cues—breath, posture, grounding—help you return to a regulated state where empathy can flow without overwhelm?

#### A | Align Thoughts and Emotions with Values (3–4 minutes)

- As you reconnect with your core value, what does compassionate care look like when it is rooted in sustainability rather than self-sacrifice?

#### L | Lean Toward Love (4–5 minutes)

- What is one small, value-aligned action you can take in these moments that allows you to care deeply while also protecting your energy?

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- REVITALIZATION | Create healthy boundaries and supportive practices that **relieve** the constant emotional absorption of others' pain.

## **BOUNDARIES | Boundaries are not barriers to compassion; they are protection for it. To heal and prevent compassion fatigue, we must remember:**

- Boundaries are necessary
- Caring deeply does not require carrying everything.
- Our emotional capacity is finite.
- Empathy is most sustainable when it is supported by regulation, renewal, and shared responsibility.
- Releasing what is not ours to hold is an act of care.
- Healthy caregivers allow compassion to flow through them—without absorbing it beyond their capacity.
- Rest from emotional labor is not a reward; it is a requirement in relationship-centered work.



### REVITALIZATION

Renew Energy & Reinforce Boundaries

Close the circle by sharing **boundary setting practices** that protect against chronic stress fatigue and nurture mental health and well-being.



## **CLOSURE | Bud Reflection (12–15 minutes)**

### **1. Frame (3–4 minutes)**

Creating boundaries that protect against compassion fatigue is not about caring less or becoming distant—it's about protecting your capacity to care in ways that remain sustainable over time.

Common energy leaks may include:

- Absorbing the emotional pain or stress of others
- Feeling responsible for fixing or resolving others' struggles
- Over-identifying with the experiences of those you support
- Remaining emotionally "on" without opportunities to release or reset
- Carrying stories or stress from work into personal time

Protective boundaries might look like:

- Listening with empathy without taking ownership of the outcome
- Allowing others to experience their feelings without rescuing or fixing
- Taking intentional pauses to release emotional residue between interactions
- Recognizing what is yours to care about—and what is not yours to carry.
- Creating small moments of recovery after emotionally demanding work

### **2. Individual Reflection (3–4 minutes)**

Bud Prompt:

- What is one predictable compassion fatigue trigger or emotional energy leak for you, and what is one boundary you can practice the next time it arises?

### **3. Whole Group Close (2–3 minutes)**

Go around the circle and invite participants to share a takeaway or intention.

- What is one boundary you want to carry forward this week?