FOCUS | Compassion Fatigue

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.
- RESTORATION | **Repair** through reconnecting with meaning, purpose, and the values that first called us to care for others.
- REVITALIZATION | Create healthy boundaries and supportive practices that **relieve** the constant emotional absorption of others' pain.

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.

OPENING

- Prepare circle space (arrange center items; display values/commitments handouts)
- Come into circle - introductions
- Share circle focus, objective, overview, and healing practice
- Review the Core Values and Core Commitments.

- Have each individual choose (1) CORE VALUE that grounds them and they resonate with. Share in circle.
  - (Invite participants to remember their value because it will be used during the HEAL practice.)

- Engage your chosen REST RECALIBRATION somatic practice(s) that guide the nervous system out of an over or under-active state and into flow, safety, and relaxation.

SUGGESTED SOMATIC PRACTICES

for recalibrating the nervous system so to release stored/stuck physical and emotional stress. (*See Guide Resource Portal below to watch Kathy model these in the REST Resources page)

Breathe & Tap
Full-Body Hug & Hold

GUIDE RESOURCES PORTAL | https://www.drjenclifden.com/sppsguidetraining

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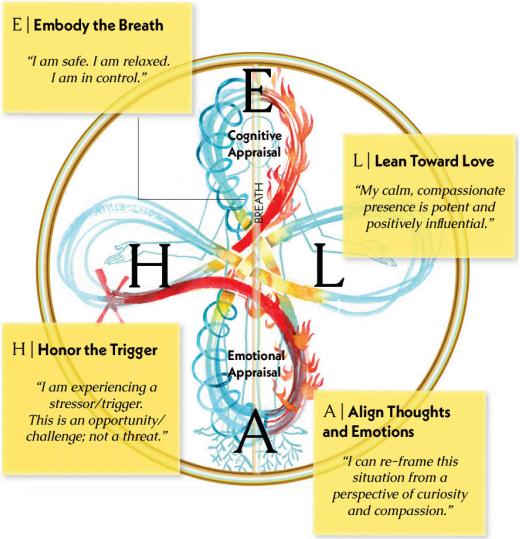
RESTORATION
Process & Make Meaning

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



TRANSITION

Rose, Thorn, Bud Activity:

ROSE

- Ask individuals to share their response to this prompt -- "What is something that is a highlight or a 'glimmer' that is going well for you that allows you the opportunity to express your CORE VALUE in your work or personal life?

THORN

- Share the focus of the lesson-- **compassion fatigue.**
- Invite participants to consider a current situation—or a common scenario in their work—where they notice themselves absorbing the emotional experiences of others in a way that begins to feel overwhelming or difficult to release.
- Go around the circle and invite individuals to share their stressor/scenario or reflect on moments when they leave an interaction still carrying the emotional residue of someone else's pain, struggle, or stress.
- After everyone has shared, ask individuals to consider the ways compassion fatigue affects their ability to stay present, connected, and grounded with the people they serve?

H.E.A.L PRACTICE

Briefly share/overview the H.E.A.L process.

- Guide the group through the HEAL Model through a collective conversation about these prompts:

H | What might this moment of compassion fatigue be revealing about the limits of your emotional energy right now? How could this situation mark a shift from absorbing others' pain to recognizing what is yours to hold—and what is not?

E | What physical cues—breath, posture, or grounding—might help you return to a regulated state where empathy can flow without overwhelming you?

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

L | What is one small, value-aligned action you could take in situations like this that allows you to care deeply while also protecting your energy?

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BOUNDARIES |

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

- 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.

CLOSE

Rose, Thorn, Bud Activity:
Bud

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

Here are common energy leaks that contribute to compassion fatigue:

- 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

Here are common boundary ideas to consider to protect compassionate care::

- 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

BUD

"What is one predictable compassion fatigue trigger or emotional energy leak for you, and what is one protective boundary you could practice the next time you encounter this situation?"

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