Combating Compassion Fatigue
Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri

Our Mission:
To promote mental health and to improve the care and treatment of persons with mental illness through advocacy, education, and service.
Compassion Fatigue
Compassion Fatigue

- When someone who regularly hears or witnesses very difficult and traumatic stories begins to lose their ability to feel empathy.

- A feeling of “having nothing left to give”.

- Sometimes misdiagnosed as depression.

- The most caring individuals are most likely to develop compassion fatigue.
Prescription for Self Care

Self Care = Wellness + Resilience
Self Care Is An Ethical Mandate
Self Care

**What We Know**

- Being in the helping profession is stressful
- A Balanced life enhances our personal and professional lives
- It’s beneficial to begin our careers with self care

**What We Do**

- Put our clients needs before our own
- Overextend ourselves
- Take our work home
- View sleep as expendable
- Plan to start exercising tomorrow
- Engage in unhealthy coping strategies
Optimal Wellness

• It is a sign of wisdom, not weakness, to do self assessments, access assistance, use coping strategies, sustain wellness and to know our needs change throughout our lives and careers.
• Integrating self care should not be one more stressor.
• Achieving optimal wellness/functioning is not just avoiding burnout.
• “The goal is not just to survive, but to thrive in practice…” (Pope & Vasques, 2005)
Optimal Wellness

Promotes Flourishing Personally and Professionally

• Builds resilience
• Protects our quality of caring
• Promotes psychological & physical health
• Increases capacity for empathy
• Improves our immune system
• Reduces potential for burnout
• Models healthy behavior for clients
• Self esteem grows our of self care process
Myths of Invincibility

• Stress is viewed as something to be overcome rather than reduce.
• Impose unrealistic expectations on ourselves
• Work harder and longer hours to offset guilt and shame
• Push ourselves to the limit without knowing or clearly identifying the nature of our limitations
• Avoid asking for help
• Perfectionism
Warning Signs of Distress

- Perfectionism
- Excessive ruminations
- Emotional/physical exhaustion (50 + work hours)
- Sleep disturbance (both cause & symptom)
- Anxiety/depression/anger directed toward self
- Irritability
- Feeling guilty when taking time off
- Financial pressure
- Inability to take additional tasks
- Feelings of loss and helplessness
- Professional disillusionment/cynicism
Warning Signs of Distress

- Chronic partner/clinic conflict
- Having to address & resolve ethical dilemmas
- Malpractice litigation/legal difficulties
- Separation or divorce
- Dysfunction Junction: the intersection of our vulnerabilities with a dysfunctional environmental or interpersonal context
Stages of Compassion Fatigue

1. **Zealot Phase**- Committed, enthusiastic, work extra hours, excited
2. **Irritability Phase**- cutting corners, avoid patient/client contact, mocking, daydreaming
3. **Withdrawal Phase**- Exhausted, clients become irritants, neglect-family, co-workers, clients, ourselves
4. **Zombie Phase**- automatic pilot, disdain for clients, no compassion, no patience, no empathy
TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF
Why take care of yourself?

Emotional Bank Account:

Deposits and Withdrawals
Deposits and Withdrawals

**Deposits** are anything that gives you energy.

**Withdrawals** are anything that takes away energy.
Physical Self-Care

- Take breaks
- Listen to your body
- Plan your schedule and use energy management skills
- Keep up with dentist and Dr. appointments
- Take restroom breaks
- Sleep and eat right
- Exercise
- Learn relaxation techniques
Emotional/Psychological Self-Care

- Advocate for your rights
- Say “No” to prevent over-committing
- Stop “all or nothing” thinking - be more flexible
- Quit blaming and shaming self and others
- Stop taking things personally
- Let go of the illusion of control
- Learn from and forgive your mistakes
Spiritual Self-Care

- Do simple things – read, meditate, affirmations
- Take advantage of what’s in your neighborhood (e.g. parks, shopping, church, library)
- Establish a daily routine
- Use humor
- Journal
- Ask for help
- Develop a ritual to leave work at the door when you leave (Own your life)
Relational Self Care

- Re-evaluating unhealthy relationships
- Not assuming responsibility for others & their problems
- Stay socially involved (friends & family)
- Re-think trying to please others - explore being satisfied with self
- Stop anticipating the needs of others
- Stop tolerating behaviors that you don’t want to tolerate
- Trust yourself
- Understand that you cannot fix another’s problem
- Join a support group
“It’s not selfish to love yourself, take care of yourself, and to make your happiness a priority. It’s necessary.”
Contact Information

For more information:
Visit our website!
www.mha-em.org
Give us a call!
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To stay connected:
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United Way
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