

## First Self Assessment Exercise

### **Observe the work that you do. Does it have:**

- A large volume of demand (and often increasing demands, such as more and more clients to see or more and more paperwork to do)?
- Continually dwindling resources?
- Exposure to difficult stories of loss, pain, death and suffering?
- Do you work with clients who face seemingly insurmountable obstacles, have chronic needs or even clients who get worse rather than get better?

All of these elements can contribute to compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

### **Ask yourself the four following questions:**

#### **1) Where do the stories go?**

What do you do at the end of a work day to put difficult client stories away and go home to your friends and family?

#### **2) Were you trained for this?**

Did your training offer you an education on self care, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or burnout? If it did, how up to date are you on those strategies? If it didn't, which is still true for the majority of us over a certain age, how much do you know about these concepts?

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### **3) What are your particular vulnerabilities?**

Two things we know for sure about the field of helping: one, that a large percentage of helpers have experienced primary trauma at some point in their past, which may have led them to being attracted to the field in the first place. Two, that personality types who are attracted to the field of helping (rather than, say, mechanical engineering) are more likely to feel highly attuned and empathy towards others, which makes them good at their job and also more vulnerable to developing CF, VT and Burnout.

### **4) How do you protect yourself while doing this very challenging work?**

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## Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma – Signs and Symptoms

### Physical Signs and Symptoms

- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Somatization and hypochondria

### Behavioral Signs and Symptoms

- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Absenteeism
- Anger and Irritability
- Avoidance of clients
- Impaired ability to make decisions
- Problems in personal relationships
- Attrition
- Compromised care for clients
- The Silencing Response
- Depleted parenting

### Psychological signs and symptoms

- Emotional exhaustion
- Distancing
- Negative self image
- Depression
- Sadness, Loss of hope
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism
- Resentment
- Dread of working with certain clients
- Feeling professional helplessness
- Diminished sense of enjoyment/career
- Depersonalization/numbness
- Disruption of world view/ heightened anxiety or irrational fears
- Inability to tolerate strong feelings
- Problems with Intimacy
- Intrusive imagery – preoccupation with trauma
- Hypersensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli
- Insensitivity to emotional material
- Difficulty separating personal and professional lives
- Failure to nurture and develop non work related aspects of life

Sources: Saakvitne (1995), Figley (1995), Gentry, Baranowsky & Dunning (1997), Yassen (1995)

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## EVALUATING YOUR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

**Assess the following elements with this continuum in mind:**

### **Annoying → Distressing → Traumatic**

**Nature of the work, the cases and the workplace; in your role:**

- what events, incidents, cases, stories are the most difficult? Why?
- how much control do you have over your schedule?
- does this schedule work for you; can you adequately negotiate your workload?
- how has the workload changed over the years?
- do your work tasks vary from day to day; do you like the work you do;
- are you sufficiently trained to do the work you do?
- how much support do you have; is supervision adequate; helpful; supportive?

**Nature of the clientele; in your role:**

- how many clients do you have contact with each day?
- do you have variety with the types of clients you work with?
- what types of clients are the most difficult for you and why?
- how do your clients treat you?
- are you ever afraid of your clients? -ever been harmed by a client?
- how do you treat your clients?

**Nature of the worker; for you personally:**

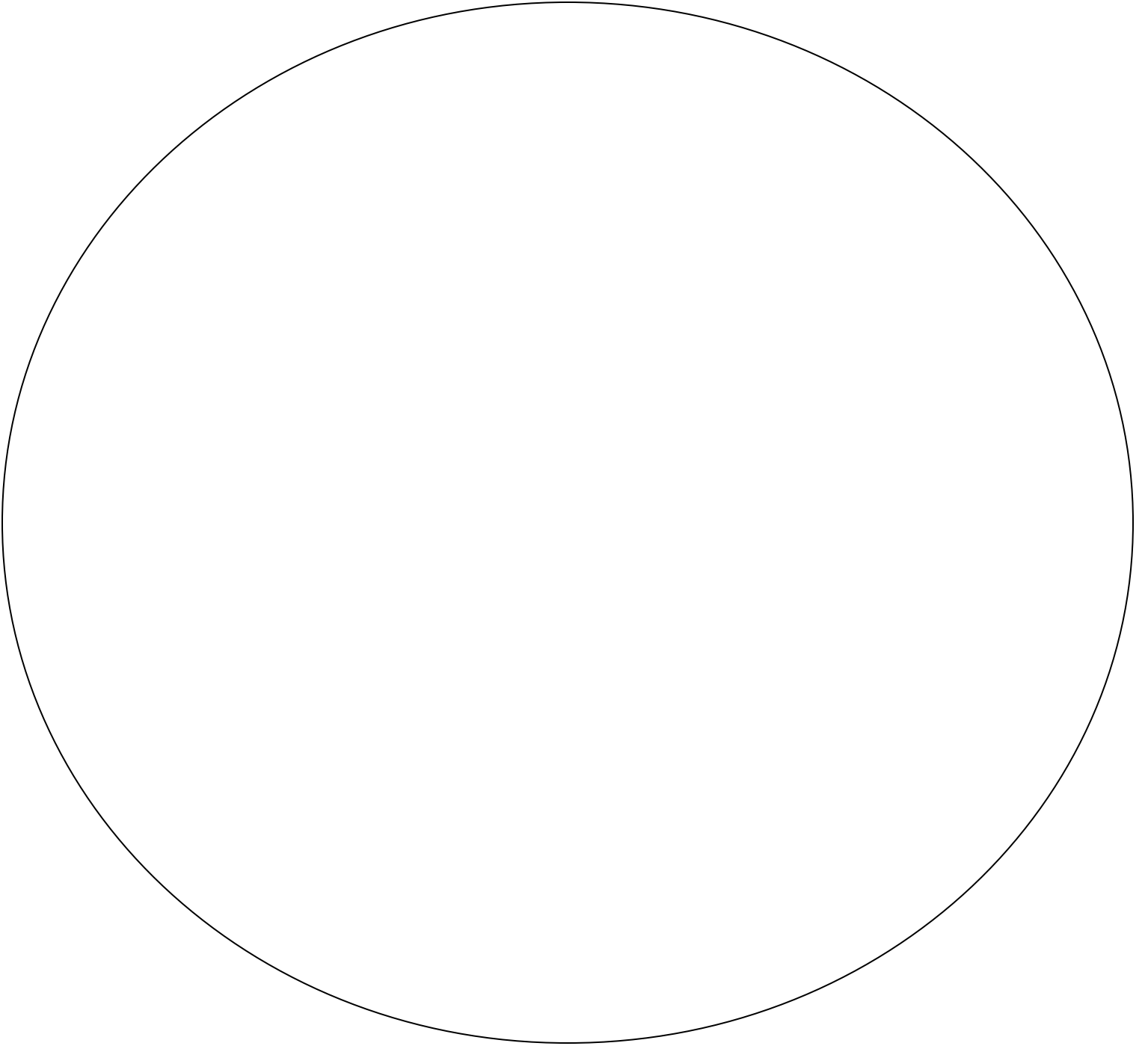
- how well suited are you personally for the work you do?
- how well does the work you do match your values and beliefs?
- what does your current stress index look like on a scale of 1(no stress) to 10 (extreme stress)?
- can you identify the factors in your life that produce the most stress?
- what coping mechanisms do you use to manage or decrease stress?
- do you have supportive interpersonal relationships?
- do you engage in a hobby or leisure activity every week?

**Nature of the social/cultural context: in your role:**

- what are the social obstacles to doing your work? (funding cuts, furlough days etc)
- how are you received within the community based on the work that you do and the work of your organization; do you feel respected?
- what does the community say about the clientele you serve?
- what effect, if any, does the above have upon you personally?

Excerpted from *Transforming the Pain* (1996) pp 53-55 and *Compassion Fatigue Train the Trainer Workbook* (2008) pp 42-43.

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?



**SELF CARE INVENTORY** (Reprinted with permission)

Mark "X" for what you already do. Mark "O" for what you wish you did more often.

<p><b>Physical Self-Care</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Eat Regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Eat healthily</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Exercise</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Get regular medical care for prevention</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Get medical care when needed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take time off when sick</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Get massages</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other physical activity that is fun</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take time to be sexual – with yourself, with a partner</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Get enough sleep</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Wear clothes you like</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take vacations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take day trips or mini-vacations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Make time away from telephones</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p> <p><b>Psychological Self-Care</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Make time for self-reflection</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Have your own personal psychotherapy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Write in a journal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Read literature that is unrelated to work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Do something at which you are not expert or in charge of</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Decrease stress in your life</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Notice your inner experience – listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes and feelings</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Let others know different aspects of you</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Engage your intelligence in a new area (e.g. go to an art museum, history exhibit, sports event, auction, theater performance)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Practice receiving from others</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Be curious</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p> <p><b>Emotional Self-Care</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with others whose company you enjoy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Stay in contact with important people in your life</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Love yourself</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reread favorite books, re-view favorite movies</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places, and seek them out</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Allow yourself to cry</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Find things that make you laugh</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Express your outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Play with children</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>
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<p><b>Spiritual Self-Care</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Make time for reflection</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with nature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Find a spiritual connection or community</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Be open to inspiration</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cherish your optimism and hope</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Be aware of non-material aspects of life</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Try at times not to be in charge or the expert</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Be open to not knowing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Identify what you is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meditate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pray</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with children</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Have experiences of awe</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to causes in which you believe</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Read inspirational literature (e.g. talks, music)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>	<p><b>Workplace or Professional Self-Care</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take a break during the work day (e.g. lunch)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take time to chat with co-workers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Make quiet time to complete tasks</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Set limits with clients and colleagues</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Balance your caseload so no one day or part of a day is “too much.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Arrange your work space so it is comfortable and comforting</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Get regular supervision or consultation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Negotiate for your needs (benefits, pay raise)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Have a peer support group</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p> <p><b>Balance:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strive for balance with your work life and work day</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play and rest</p>
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## Developing a Compassion Fatigue Protection Plan

What components will go into my plan?

What are my warning signs and symptoms?

Who will I check in with to hold me accountable or to cue me?

What things do I have control over in my life?

How will I relieve stress in a way that works for me?  
(Intervention)

What stress prevention/reduction strategies will I use?  
(Prevention)

Adapted from Francoise Mathieu: Compassion Fatigue Train the Trainer Workbook (2008)



**IDEA FACTORY**

Commitment to Changes I could make in the next...

Week:

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Month:

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Year:

# Mitigating Compassion Fatigue

## EVALUATION FORM

Date of Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Support/Clerical    Investigator    CSS    Attorney    Other: \_\_\_\_\_    Manager

**Directions:** Read each of the statements and rank your understanding of the issue before and after you participated in the Mitigating Compassion Fatigue program. Circle the appropriate number using the following range:

1 = no understanding

4 = little understanding

6 = moderate understanding

8 = quite a bit of understanding

10 = almost complete understanding

How would you describe your understanding of the following?	My understanding before the program.	My understanding after the program.
1. The definition of compassion fatigue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. The brain's role in compassion fatigue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. Your own personal level of compassion fatigue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. What factors contribute to your compassion fatigue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. Actions we can take as an office to decrease compassion fatigue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6. Actions you can take individually to decrease your compassion fatigue	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What overall rating would you give the Mitigating Compassion Fatigue program?

Excellent      Very Good      Good      Fair      Poor

Explain Briefly:

What do you think was the most successful part of the experience?

What do you think was the least successful part of the experience?

Are there any compassion fatigue questions or related topics you would like to learn more about?

Do you have suggestions we can take as an agency to reduce the risks of compassion fatigue?

***Thank you for taking the time to evaluate this program.***