

Practical Self-Care for Managing Stress and Compassion Fatigue

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What is Stress?

“The **non-specific** response of the body to any demand for change.”

-Hans Selye, MD, founder of the stress theory

He first called his theory “general adaptation syndrome” and named two different kinds of stress: distress and eustress.



Stress Is a Natural Part of Life

- A situation or condition that impacts an individual's harmonious state
- Emotional and physical adjustments the body makes in response to pressures, change, and the demands of life
- Increases your level of awareness
- Can have positive or negative effects



Burnout vs. Stress

Stress:

- A normal reaction to common pressures
- A state of worry or tension caused by a difficult situation
- Your body's natural response to prompt you to act or make a change
- Caused by external factors
- Can lead to irritability, anger, fatigue, muscle pain, digestive distress, and difficulty sleeping

Burnout:

- Described as an “occupational phenomenon” in the 11th International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)
- Results from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed
- Characterized by:
 - Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
 - Increased mental distance from, or feeling negative or cynical about, one's job
 - Reduced professional efficacy



Symptoms of Burnout

- Loss of motivation and productivity
- Dreading going to work or calling out more frequently
- Irritability, cynicism, impatience
- Low energy, fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of satisfaction in work and accomplishments
- Changes in sleep and/or eating habits
- Somatic complaints such as headaches, stomach pains, or digestive problems
- Using substances to cope



Other Terms to Know

- **Burnout** describes the physical and emotional fatigue workers in any field can experience as a result of low job satisfaction, powerlessness, and feeling overwhelmed. **Caregiver burnout** is used to describe similar feelings related to caring for another person.
- **Compassion fatigue** is a form of burnout that helping professionals can be susceptible to resulting from feeling unable to help “enough” or being unable to rest and recharge while doing difficult work.
- **Vicarious Trauma** describes a shift in worldview that occurs in helping professionals when they work with clients who have experienced trauma. Fundamental beliefs about the world and people in general may be altered as a result of repeated exposure to the trauma of others.



Some Causes of Compassion Fatigue



- Repeated exposure to others' trauma
- Increasing demands on helpers
- Few resources available
- Unclear boundaries
- Putting your own needs aside to focus on others



Belief Systems That Contribute to Compassion Fatigue

I have to be perfect

I have to make other people happy to be happy myself

If I don't care deeply, I am not doing my job correctly

Taking care of myself or putting my needs first is selfish

I know all about stress management, it can't happen to me

If it's going to be done right, I have to do it myself



What can be done?



“The best time to
plant a tree was 20
years ago.
The second-best time
is now.”



Strategies to Address Workplace Stress & Burnout

For supervisors

- Set clear expectations and deadlines
- Give employees control, choice, and flexibility where possible
- Recognize accomplishments
- Check in regularly and offer support
- Provide needed resources
- Avoid excessive or unbalanced workloads
- Encourage employees to use time off

For employees

- Talk with your supervisor
- Utilize social support
- Set clear boundaries between work and personal life
- Get enough sleep
- Make time for fun & relaxation
- Get regular exercise
- Structure your workday & include breaks (Pomodoro method)
- Use your time off



Improve your Resilience



- Focus on what you can control
- Learn from the past
- Remember your values – what is your “why”?
- Challenge yourself
- Ask for help
- Practice gratitude
- Practice mindfulness



What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judgment. This involves observing our inner thoughts, feelings, and sensations without trying to change them.

Many people associate mindfulness with meditation, which is a common way to practice, but anything can be done mindfully.

Regularly practicing mindfulness is associated with decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety, improved relationships, better sleep, and even lower blood pressure.



Meditation Apps

- **Calm:** calm.com
- **Headspace:** headspace.com
- **Insight Timer:** insighttimer.com
- **The Mindfulness App:** themindfulnessapp.com
- **Ten Percent Happier:** tenpercent.com
- **Smiling Mind:** smilingmind.com.au





https://youtu.be/ssss7V1_eyA?si=qPIngIMI_KHayvUF



Other Resources – for you or your clients

- [Call 211](#) or go to [211CT.org](#) to be connected to various health & human services in CT
- [Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services \(DMHAS\)](#)
[Regional Listing](#) to find Local Mental Health Authorities and other local resources
- [Call or text 988](#) for the national Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- The CT Clearinghouse



Takeaways

What is one change you can implement to reduce stress?



Questions?

Thank You!

