

JUNE 2021

Is There Really Enough of Me to go Around? Caregiver/Compassion Fatigue

Being a caregiver can come in many different forms and sometimes we plan to be in this role. We may plan to have children, buy a pet, or plan to take care of our parents when they are older. Other times it may be unexpected, such as, an unplanned pregnancy, having a child with special needs, taking care of our parents when we didn't plan to, or taking care of someone with mental or physical challenges. We may even slip into this role when we are in a relationship with someone who has extra physical or emotional needs. Many people gain this role in addition to their regular daily lives and responsibilities. No matter how someone comes into the role of a caregiver, it is still a tough job and you may find yourself feeling drained, burnt out, or fatigued. This month, we are focusing on the phenomena called: Caregiver and Compassion Fatigue.



What Does it Mean? Burnout vs. Fatigue

Burnout: According to *Psychology Today*, burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress. Though it's most often caused by problems at work, it can also appear in other areas such as; parenting, caretaking, or romantic relationships.

Caring for a child with special needs and/or an aging parent may trigger burnout. Signs include persistent fatigue, frequent crying spells, and feelings of helplessness, anger, or frustration toward the person in your care.

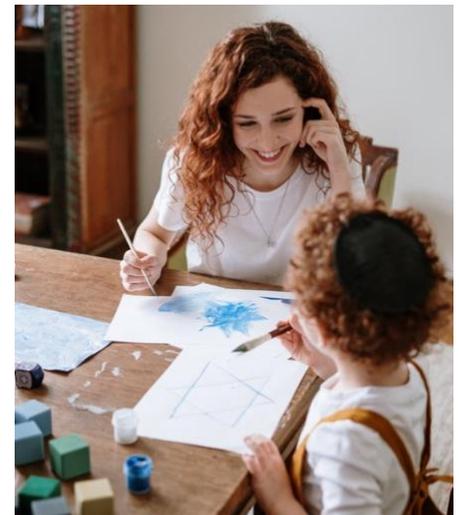
Compassion Fatigue: This is also called "vicarious traumatization" or secondary traumatization. It is a broadly defined concept that can include emotional, physical, and spiritual distress in those providing care to another. It is associated with caregiving where people or animals are experiencing significant emotional or physical pain and suffering. It differs from burnout but can co-exist.



What Compassion Fatigue Can Look Like:

Chronic physical and emotional exhaustion	Headaches
Depersonalization	Poor job satisfaction
Difficulty sleeping	Feeling overwhelmed by obligations
Irritability	Intrusive thoughts
Feelings of inequity toward the therapeutic or caregiver relationship	Feelings of failure, guilt, self-doubt, sadness, and powerlessness
Isolation and withdrawal	

How To Recharge



It's important to take time to restore your energy after a difficult day (week, year or more). Everyone is different – so, while you may feel rejuvenated after some spa time, another person may enjoy planning a vacation, tinkering in the garage, or watercolor painting. The key is to find an activity you enjoy and *be as present as possible while you do it*. No worrying about the “to-do” list during this time (it could be five-minutes or multiple hours – whatever works for you). Something to watch out for is the “enjoyable activity” feeling like it is another chore on your list. Then don't do it! Pick something else you know you like or try something new. Another common issue is feeling like these activities are a waste of time, especially if there is no finished product at the end (or if you feel like the finished product isn't “good enough”). Remember, this is time you are spending to recharge your batteries and feel better – this is not a waste of time.

Can't think of what to do? Here is a list of possible activities to help you recharge from EYMTHERAPY.COM:
<https://eymtherapy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/pleasant-events-list.pdf>