Compassion Fatigue – Increasing Resiliency

USAID Staff Care
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Date: July 22, 2014
Compassion Fatigue

• Consider these scenarios…

  – Single/only child caring for elderly parents
  – Parent caring for a child with special needs
  – Global Health Officer working directly on AIDS/PEPFAR programming in South Africa
  – FSO responding to Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan or Turkey
Agenda

• What is Compassion Fatigue?

• Explore the effects and symptoms of compassion fatigue and stress

• Identify contributing factors leading to compassion fatigue and stress

• Explore resilience building strategies and practical techniques to maintain balance and to enhance a sense of well-being
Stress is ...

any demand or change the human system (mind, body, spirit) is required to meet and respond to.
What is Compassion Fatigue?

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  – Stress can become Distress due to:
    ...Frequency / Intensity / Duration / Perception
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  - Stress can become Distress due to:
    ...Frequency / Intensity / Perception
- Extreme/Acute Stress
- Trauma and Traumatic Stress
  “...a normal response to an abnormal incident”
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Vicarious Trauma and Secondary Stress
  - a result of seeing or hearing about trauma and stress
- Cumulative Stress
Three Types Of Stress

- Trauma
- Vicarious trauma
- Cumulative Stress
What is Compassion Fatigue?

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- **Burnout**
- **Compassion Fatigue**
What is Compassion Fatigue?

• A unique form of burnout that affects individuals in ‘caregiving’ roles. It is a physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with trying to help or care for people in significant pain, distress, or need. Over time, caregivers with inadequate support, resources, or restoration in their lives can begin to notice a blunting of their compassion and ability to empathize.

• (The term has also been used to describe the widespread public desensitization that can occur after incessant media coverage of violence and suffering.)
Who is at risk?

• People taught early in life to put the needs of others above their own.
• Quickly form a sympathetic response to hurting people.
• Vulnerable to internalizing the pain and suffering of those they intend to help, sometimes feel like they are losing their very sense of self.
• Unresolved personal trauma may be activated by reports of similar trauma in those they are helping.
• Eventually, a debilitating weariness, a deep sense of physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion.
Who is at risk?

- Humanitarian workers often assist people who have been victimized. They work in and with communities that have been devastated by natural forces or conflict. They themselves are sometimes the targets of violence. As a result of all these things, humanitarian workers are likely to experience lasting psychological and spiritual changes in the way that they see themselves and the world.

- Some of these changes can be positive. However, some of the changes that can come from witnessing and experiencing suffering can be more problematic, leaving potentially permanent scars.

- Can Compassion Fatigue include Vicarious Trauma? Yes, BUT it can also come about without any ‘trauma’
Is This You?

I'm a little stressed right now...
(just turn around and leave quietly and no one gets hurt.)
Effects/symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- **Emotional changes** - increased anger, a sense of powerlessness and helplessness, a sense of being overwhelmed and fearful.
- **Cognitive changes** - decreased self-confidence and ability to concentrate, increased confusion and forgetfulness, intrusive traumatic images, apathy.
- **Behavioral changes** - irritability, withdrawal, changes in sleep patterns, nightmares, increased use of destructive self-soothing methods.
- **Interpersonal/relational changes** - increased conflict with others, withdrawal and isolation, loneliness.
- **Work performance** - decreased sense of personal accomplishment and morale, increased negativity and missed days of work, low productivity, inability to focus.
- **Spiritual changes** - loss of purpose and joy, questioning the meaning of life and previous spiritual beliefs, anger toward God.
- **Physical changes** due to an increase of chronic ailments and difficulty sleeping.
Recognizing Fatigue/ Why it happens…

First step to moving forward is developing awareness of the following:

- High-risk occupation/activities
- Triggers
- Examining the role of emotional contagions
Triggers

How do these triggers affect YOU?

- Limited resources and growing demands
- Unrealistic expectations of self and others
- Unexpected detours and challenges – CHANGE!
- Major life changes
Emotional Contagion

• A process of taking on another individual’s emotions…even a tendency to mimic another’s vocalizations and nonverbal expressions
• Moves beyond empathy in that we actually experience the emotion rather than simply offering support
• Continued exposure to individuals expressing anger, dissatisfaction, and sadness increase the likelihood of experiencing an emotional contagion
• May apply to relationships with co-workers as well as clients

In what ways have emotional contagions affected you and your work?
What Can Help?

• Know the warning signs of compassion fatigue.
• Face your own personal trauma and do your best to find healing.
• Establish a support system of friends and colleagues who are committed to helping you monitor your well-being.
• Evaluate with the help of trusted friends and colleagues your expectations of yourself, clients and coworkers.
• Re-evaluate how you spend your psychological, emotional, social, and physical energies
• Take time for self-reflection. Use prayer, meditation, journal writing.
What Can Help?

• Maintain a healthy lifestyle of good food, plenty of water, exercise and sufficient sleep.
• Learn simple relaxation techniques for calming yourself that you can use throughout the day.
• When surrounded by needy people, focus on the one person in front of you.
• Know what brings you joy. Each day try to treat yourself to something of joy and beauty.
• Remind yourself that there are limits to what you can do. You alone are not responsible for solving the world's problems. Be kind to yourself!
• Know the difference between your roles and your values.
Maintaining Balance Between Roles and Values
- Questions to ask yourself

• What roles do you have in your life?

• What percentage of your time do you give them?

• What would you like the percentages to be?

• What are your values?

• How do they align with your roles?
Response Checklist

✓ How do I adjust to realign expectations?
✓ How do I cope with ambivalent feelings?
✓ What do I have energy for?
✓ Do I see patterns in my reactions to events or people?
✓ How do I maximize my rebound?
✓ What systems do I have in place to receive emotional support?
Getting Back on Track by Emphasizing Self-Care

- Eat a nutritious diet
- Get enough sleep
- Exercise
- Know your limits
- Socializing with friends, family, and pets
- Get support
- Breathing and progressive muscle relaxation exercises
Shifting Gears From Work to Home

• Create a buffer between work and home such as taking a walk or listening to soothing music
• Regularly plan enjoyable activities during your time off
• Read or work on puzzles to stop mind-chatter
• Engage in relaxing visualizations
• Only try to ‘sleep’ when sleepy but go to bed when relaxed
• Make the home environment a relaxation haven
Relaxation Techniques - Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Changing your breathing will allow you to think more clearly.
- Changing your thinking will allow your breathing to slow and become deeper.
  - Sit back in your seat.
  - Place your hands comfortably and close your eyes.
  - Take a deep breath by slowly inhaling through your nose to a count of four. Hold for a count of four and slowly exhale through your mouth to a count of five.
  - Repeat until you feel calm and settled.
Relaxation Techniques - Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- A two-step process to relax your muscles
  - Find a quiet place.
  - Find a comfortable position that supports your head and neck.
  - Close your eyes and take deep breaths.
  - Tighten the muscles in your hands (clench your fists) for four seconds and then release.
  - Repeat this process with other muscles in your body.
  - Focus on letting go of the tension in that muscle area.
  - Finish with slow and even breathing.
Relaxation Techniques - Guided Imagery

You will need:
- Quiet time
- Privacy
- An alarm clock (maybe)

Steps:
- Get into a comfortable position
- Start using diaphragmatic breathing
- Begin to envision yourself in a relaxing environment
- Involve all of your senses in this imagery
- Stay in this place for as long as you need
Resilience is ... 

the ability to successfully navigate high levels of challenge and change and bounce back from traumatic events

Sustainability & Recovery

“Bouncing back from problems and stuff with more power and more smarts” (a teen’s take on resilience)
Your Personal Resilience Action Plan

A  
Awareness

B  
Balance

C  
Choice
Change Begins With You

- Changing yourself is **hard**
- Changing others is **difficult**
- Changing a system is almost **impossible**
- Focus on personal change for maximum results
- Only spend energy on the areas that you can change
Evaluating Your Life

What areas of your life need the greatest change?

__Physical self-care including diet, proper rest and exercise
__Addressing chronic physical ailments
__Family and social relationships
__Work and client relationships
__Setting boundaries with others
__Accessing emotional support
__Dealing with emotions
__Overcoming apathy and emotional numbness
Action Plan

What are three things that you can do immediately to increase your personal resilience?

- Escape
- Rest
- Play
- Transform
Staff Care Contact Information

**FREEPHONE:** 877-988-7243 (877-98USAID)
**DIRECT DIAL:** 919-645-4960
**REVERSE CHARGE CALLING:** Call your international operator to be connected to +44-0-208-987-6200. This is not a direct dial number.
**TTY:** 866-228-2809
**SMS TEXTING:** 919-324-5523
**EMAIL:** support@usaidstaffcarecenter.net

http://www.staffcare.usaid.gov
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