

What is Compassion Fatigue?

There is a cost to caring.

Professionals who listen to the stories of fear, pain and suffering of others may feel similar fear, pain and suffering because they care. Professionals especially vulnerable to Compassion Fatigue (CF) include emergency care workers, counsellors, mental health professionals, medical professionals, clergy, advocate volunteers, and human service workers. If you ever feel as though you are losing your sense of self to the clients you serve, you may be suffering from CF.

The concept of Compassion Fatigue emerged only in the last several years in the professional literature. It represents the cost of caring about and for traumatised people. Compassion Fatigue is the emotional residue of exposure to working with the suffering, particularly those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events. Professionals who work with people, particularly people who are suffering, must contend with not only the normal stress or dissatisfaction of work, but also with the emotional and personal feelings for the suffering.

Compassion Fatigue is NOT “burnout”. Burnout is associated with stress and hassles involved in your work; it is very cumulative, is relatively predictable and frequently a vacation or change of job helps a great deal. Compassion Fatigue is very different. Compassion Fatigue is a state of tension and preoccupation with the individual or cumulative trauma of clients as manifested in one or more ways including re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance/numbing of reminders of the event, and persistent arousal. Although similar to critical incident stress (being traumatised by something you actually experience or see), with CF you are absorbing the trauma through the eyes and ears of your clients. It can be thought of as secondary post-traumatic stress.

There are human costs associated with CF. Job performance goes down, mistakes go up. Morale drops and personal relationships are affected, people’s home lives start to deteriorate, personality deteriorates and eventually it can lead to overall decline in general health.

Compassion Fatigue/Satisfaction Self-Test (CFS)

Stamm, B.H. (in press). Measuring Compassion Satisfaction as well as Fatigue: Development History of the Compassion Fatigue and Satisfaction Test. In C.R. Figley (Ed.). *Treating Compassion Fatigue*. New York: Brunner/Mazel. O.B. Hudnall Stamm, Traumatic Stress Research Group, 1995-1999.

Compassion Fatigue and Satisfaction Self-Test for Helpers

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Helping others puts you in direct contact with other people's lives. As you probably have experienced, your compassion for those you help has both positive and negative aspects. This self-test helps you estimate your compassion status: How much at risk you are of burnout and compassion fatigue and also the degree of satisfaction with your helping others. Consider each of the following characteristics about you and your current situation. Print a copy of this test so that you can fill out the numbers and keep them for your use. Using a pen or pencil, write in the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these characteristics in the last week. Then follow the scoring directions at the end of the self-test.

0=Never	1=Rarely	2=A Few Times	3=Somewhat Often	4=Often	5=Very Often
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Items About You

- _____ 1. I am happy.
- _____ 2. I find my life satisfying.
- _____ 3. I have beliefs that sustain me.
- _____ 4. I feel estranged from others.
- _____ 5. I find that I learn new things from those I care for.
- _____ 6. I force myself avoiding certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
- _____ 7. I find myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
- _____ 8. I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
- _____ 9. I feel connected to others.
- _____ 10. I feel calm.
- _____ 11. I believe that I have a good balance between my work and my free time.

- _____ 12. *I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.*
- _____ 13. *I have outburst of anger or irritability with little provocation.*
- _____ 14. *I am the person I always wanted to be.*
- _____ 15. *I startle easily.*
- _____ 16. *While working with a victim, I thought about violence against the perpetrator.*
- _____ 17. *I am a sensitive person.*
- _____ 18. *I have flashbacks connected to those I help.*
- _____ 19. *I have good peer support when I need to work through a highly stressful experience.*
- _____ 20. *I have had first hand experience with traumatic events in my adult life.*
- _____ 21. *I have had first hand experience with traumatic events in my childhood.*
- _____ 22. *I think that I need to "work through" a traumatic experience in my life.*
- _____ 23. *I think that I need more close friends.*
- _____ 24. *I think that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.*
- _____ 25. *I have concluded that I work too hard for my own good.*
- _____ 26. *Working with those I help brings me a great deal of satisfaction.*
- _____ 27. *I feel invigorated after working with those I help.*
- _____ 28. *I am frightened of things a person I helped has said or done to me.*
- _____ 29. *I experience troubling dreams similar to those I help.*
- _____ 30. *I have happy thoughts about those I help and how I could help them.*
- _____ 31. *I have experienced intrusive thoughts of times with especially difficult people I helped.*
- _____ 32. *I have suddenly and involuntarily recalled a frightening experience while working with a person I helped.*
- _____ 33. *I am pre-occupied with more than one person I help.*
- _____ 34. *I am losing sleep over a person I help's traumatic experiences.*

- _____ 35. *I have joyful feelings about how I can help the victims I work with.*
- _____ 36. *I think that I might have been “infected” by the traumatic stress of those I help.*
- _____ 37. *I think that I might be positively “inoculated” by the traumatic stress of those I help.*
- _____ 38. *I remind myself to be less concerned about the well being of those I help.*
- _____ 39. *I have felt trapped by my work as a helper.*
- _____ 40. *I have a sense of hopelessness associated with working with those I help.*
- _____ 41. *I have felt “on edge” about various things and I attribute this to working with certain people I help.*
- _____ 42. *I wish that I could avoid working with some people I help.*
- _____ 43. *Some people I help are particularly enjoyable to work with.*
- _____ 44. *I have been in danger working with people I help.*
- _____ 45. *I feel that some people I help dislike me personally.*

Items About Being a Helper and Your Helping Environment

- _____ 46. *I like my work as a helper.*
- _____ 47. *I feel like I have the tools and resources that I need to do my work as a helper.*
- _____ 48. *I have felt weak, tired, run down as a result of my work as a helper.*
- _____ 49. *I have felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.*
- _____ 50. *I have thoughts that I am a “success” as a helper.*
- _____ 51. *I am unsuccessful at separating helping from personal life.*
- _____ 52. *I enjoy my co-workers.*
- _____ 53. *I depend on my co-workers to help me when I need it.*
- _____ 54. *My co-workers can depend on me for help when they need it.*
- _____ 55. *I trust my co-workers.*
- _____ 56. *I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers.*

- ___ 57. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping technology.
- ___ 58. I feel I am working more for the money/prestige than for personal fulfillment.
- ___ 59. Although I have to do paperwork that I don't like, I still have time to work with those I help.
- ___ 60. I find it difficult separating my personal life from my helper life.
- ___ 61. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping techniques and protocols.
- ___ 62. I have a sense of worthlessness/disillusionment/resentment associated with my role as a helper.
- ___ 63. I have thoughts that I am a "failure" as a helper.
- ___ 64. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
- ___ 65. I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work as a helper.
- ___ 66. I plan to be a helper for a long time.
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Scoring Instructions

Please note that research is ongoing on this scale and the following scores should be used as a guide, not confirmatory information. Cut points are theoretically derived and should be used with caution and only for educational purposes.

- 1. Be certain you respond to all items.
- 2. Mark items for scoring:
 - a. Circle the following 23 items: 4,6-8, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20-22, 28, 29, 31-34, 36, 38-40, 44.
 - b. Put a check by the following 16 items: 17, 23-25, 41, 42, 45, 48, 49, 51, 56, 58, 60, 62-65.
 - c. Put an x by the following 26 items: 1-3, 5, 9-11, 14, 19, 26-27, 30, 35, 37, 43, 46-47, 50, 52-55, 57, 59, 61, 66.
- 3. Add the numbers you wrote next to the items for each set of items and note:
 - a. Your potential for Compassion Satisfaction (x) 118 and above=extremely high potential; 100-117=high potential;82-99=good potential; 64-81=modest potential; below 63=low potential.
 - b. Your risk for Burnout (check): 36 or less=extremely low risk; 37-50=moderate risk; 51-75 high risk; 76-85=extremely high risk.
 - c. Your risk for Compassion Fatigue (circle): 26 or less = extremely low risk, 27-30 = low risk, 31-35=moderate risk; 36-40 = high risk, 41 or more = extremely high risk.

Adapted with permission from Figley, C.R. (1995). Compassion Fatigue, New York: Brunner/Mazel. O B. Hudnall Stamm, Traumatic Stress Research Group, 1995-1999 <http://www.isu.edu/~bhstamm/rural-care.htm>

Professional Resource Information

NOTE: URLs are given beside references rather than linked to the document name so that they can be read from print copy. While online, if you would like to link to a particular resource, click on the URL.

The Compassion Fatigue Scale has been established, presented, and published in several articles/chapters including, among others, the following:

Figley, C.R. (1999). Compassion Fatigue. In B.H. Stamm, (Ed.) Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers and educators, 2nd Ed. Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press. <http://www.sidran.org/digicart/products/stss.html>. (note, this chapter contains a copy of the updated Compassion Fatigue & Satisfaction Scale that appears above)

Figley, C.R. (1995). Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized. New York: Brunner Mazel. <http://www.opengroup.com/open/dfbooks087/0876307594.shtml>.

Figley, C.R. (1995). Compassion Fatigue. In B.H.Stamm, (Ed) Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers and educators. Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press. <http://www.sidran.org/digicart/products/stss.html>. (note, this chapter contains a copy of the earlier version of the Compassion Fatigue scale).

Stamm, B.H. (in press). Measuring Compassion Satisfaction as Well as Fatigue: Developmental History of the Compassion Fatigue and Satisfaction Test In C.R. Figley (Ed.) Treating Compassion Fatigue New York: Brunner/Mazel. (NOTE: this paper is not yet available).

Stamm, B.H. (April 1997). Mental Health Research in Telehealth. Invited address at From Research to Practice: A Conference on Rural Mental Health Research, National Institute of Mental Health. Oxford MS.

Rudolph, J.M. Stamm, B.H. & Stamm, H.E. (November, 1997). Compassion Fatigue: A Concern for Mental Health Policy, Providers and Administration. Poster presented at the 13th Annual Conference of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, Montreal, ON, CA. <http://www.isu.edu/~bhstamm/ISTSS97ef.PDF>

There is a psychometric review in:

Figley, C.R. & Stamm, B.H. (1996). Psychometric Review of Compassion Fatigue Self Test. In B.H. Stamm (Ed), Measurement of Stress, Trauma and Adaptation. Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press
<http://www.sidran.org/digicart/products/stms.html>.

For general information on Secondary Traumatic Stress/Vicarious Traumatization/Compassion Fatigue:

<http://mailer.fsu.edu/~cfigley/satfat.htm>