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SELF-CARE GO-TOS

Watching your favorite movie or show.

Spending time with friends and family.

Treating yourself - to ice cream, to a new pair of shoes, to a facemask.

Working on a crafting project.

Taking a walk.

Cuddling with a pet.

Taking a dance break.

Engaging in positive self-talk.

Allowing yourself to just be.



About Darcy:

Darcy is graduating from Grand Valley State University with a Bachelor of Social Work and a minor in Psychology in April 2021.

Her undergraduate fieldwork was completed at Safe Haven Ministries.

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Compassion Fatigue in Students Completing Fieldwork



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What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion fatigue is often suffered by those in the helping professions, particularly those that work with trauma survivors. It is a gradual lessening of compassion over time, and can result from a combination of burnout and secondary traumatic stress related to repeated exposure to others' traumatic experiences (Wood et al., 2017)

Its symptoms include both physical and emotional exhaustion, frustration, anger, and depression (Smith, 2014). Those experiencing compassion fatigue can also experience insomnia, decreased enjoyment, irritability, and avoidance. In severe cases, helping professionals can experience a sense of isolation, helplessness, and confusion, and potentially symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Lambert & Lawson, 2013; Tremblay & Messervey, 2011).

Students entering fieldwork are at a similar risk for compassion fatigue and a higher risk for burnout as experienced helping professionals (Smith, 2014), and should therefore be aware of this risk and the factors that can contribute to it.

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS AND BURNOUT

The concepts of secondary traumatic stress (also referred to as vicarious trauma), burnout, and compassion fatigue are interrelated and overlapping.

Secondary traumatic stress consists of the negative effects on helping professionals' thoughts, emotions, self-esteem, and sense of safety due to working with trauma survivors (Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018). These effects can result in either a maladaptive response—burnout and compassion fatigue—or an adaptive response—compassion satisfaction and resilience (Lambert & Lawson, 2013).

Compassion satisfaction results when helping professionals feel fulfilled from their work and may be a protective factor against burnout and compassion fatigue, but more research is needed in this area.

Burnout is similar to compassion fatigue, and is a contributor to it alongside secondary traumatic stress (Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018; Wood et al., 2017). Burnout most often presents as physical and emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a decrease in one's perceived professional efficacy (Lambert & Lawson, 2013; Wood et al., 2017). Symptoms of burnout can also include irritability, sleep problems, impaired physical health, impaired memory, and episodes of depression and anxiety (Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018; Wood et al., 2017). These symptoms can impact clients by affecting the helping professional's empathy and communication, thereby degrading the professional-client relationship.

SELF-CARE AND EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

Self-care, in its many forms, has been shown to combat secondary traumatic stress and help prevent burnout and compassion fatigue (Hernandez-Wolfe, 2018; Lambert & Lawson, 2013) making it a vital tool for students completing fieldwork. The go-to list included in this pamphlet is by no means exhaustive. There are endless forms of self-care, and each individual will prefer different methods. Emotional self-awareness is key for knowing not only what self-care works best for you, but also for recognizing when you need it most.

The self-care items on the go-to list are all things that can be done on the individual level. It is important to note that self-care also includes advocating for yourself within your organization. Students can become more emotionally self-aware through discussing what they are feeling and how they are processing their work with their field supervisors and liaisons. These discussions can also lead to supervisors and liaisons working with students to better address secondary traumatic stress and prevent burnout and compassion fatigue on the organizational level.



One of the best ways to increase your emotional self-awareness is to do your own research! The more you know about compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress, the more prepared you will be to recognize them in yourself.