Taking Care of Yourself

by Dr. A. Panos

Let anyone or anything stress you to the point that you stop taking care of yourself!
Objectives

- Identify 3 essential things (ABC’s) to remember to take good care of yourself
- Describe your personal warning signs of distress
- Determine how to set boundaries for yourself within your organization
Case Study

Discuss the handout and determine:
- What are some risk factors for Sam?
- What are some resiliency factors for Sam?
- What recommendations would you make for him to have more effective coping?
- What could his family and friends do to better support him?
The ABC’s of Taking Good Care of Yourself

A = Awareness

NO SELF-CARE LEAVES YOU GRUMPY
Terms and Definitions

- Compassion Fatigue
- Vicarious Traumatization
- Secondary Traumatization
- Burn-out
- Compassion Stress

(defined in Figley, 1995)
A=Awareness

- When do you know you haven’t taken care of yourself?
- What are your warning signs?
- How would you know if you had compassion fatigue?
Compassion Fatigue
Signs and Symptoms

- Affects many dimensions of your well-being
- Nervous system arousal (Sleep disturbance)
- Emotional intensity increases
- Cognitive ability decreases
- Behavior and judgment impaired
- Isolation and loss of morale
Signs and Symptoms, continued

- Depression and PTSD (potentiate both)
- Loss of self-worth and ability to modulate emotions
- Identity, worldview, and spirituality impacted
- Psychological needs not met—safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control
- Loss of hope and meaning—existential despair
- Anger—toward perpetrators or causal events
Small Group Exercise

- Discuss a case/situation that caused you to take it home with you- or caused some symptoms of compassion fatigue.

- Identify what factors caused you to identify with the person/victim/family/event.
Risk Factors

- Cases which break through your usual “insulation” or boundaries put you at higher risk.
- Can occur due to exposure on one case or can be due to a “cumulative” level of trauma.
What events or cases can cause compassion fatigue?

- Events or situation that causes one to experience an unusually strong reaction
- Often overpowers one’s usual coping mechanisms
What events or cases can cause compassion fatigue? (continued)

Each helper’s empathic engagement with each client’s unique experience;
Helper’s unique personal response based on personal history, style, current life circumstances, as well as proximity and personal connection to the events and people involved in the trauma/tragedy
A= Awareness, continued

- Ability to function is interfered with or altered.
- Situation or incident does not seem “typical or ordinary”, it feels traumatic.
- “Compassion stress” impinges upon or breaks through normal boundaries.
Awareness, continued

- Regularly waking up tired in the morning and struggling to get to work?
- Feeling as if you are working harder but accomplishing less?

- Becoming frustrated/irritated easily?
- Losing compassion for some people while becoming over involved in others?
- Routinely feeling bored or disgusted?
- Experiencing illness, aches and pains?
“The quality of strength lined with tenderness is an unbeatable combination…” - Maya Angelou
Self-Awareness Exercises

Compassion Fatigue Test (see Dr. Beth Hudnall-Stamm’s “Professional Quality of Life Scale”)

Here is a tool you can use to assess the level of your satisfaction with all of the aspects of your life.

Place each aspect of your life in the space in each segment. Some suggestions follow. Modify these to represent those that are meaningful to you.

- Self Care
- Work
- Intimate Partner/Family
- Friends/Social Life
- Financial Aspects
- Health & Wellness/Body Image
- Spiritual Aspects
- Community/Service

Now rate your satisfaction with each aspect, using a scale from zero to ten, with ten being very satisfied and zero being completely unsatisfied. Place a mark indicating your choice in each segment of the circle, with zero at the center and ten at the rim. Connect all of the marks around the circle to see how balanced your wheel is.
B= Balance

Maintaining a good work-life balance involves taking time off to recharge and avoiding working long hours and/or carrying too heavy of a caseload or workload.
B= Balance
Keeping Your Life in Balance

- Practice excellent self-care
- Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion
- Allow yourself to take mini-escapes - these relieve the intensity of your work
- Transform the negative impact of your work (find meaning, challenge negativity, find gratitude)
Small Group Exercise

- List one mini-escape or diversion that worked well to restore and renew you
- List one thing that brings you joy
- Share highlights and unique ideas with each other
B= Balance
Keeping Your Life in Balance, continued

- Get medical treatment if needed to relieve symptoms that interfere with daily functioning- don’t use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate
- Get professional help when needed to get back on track- we all need coaches and consultants at times
"We can be sure that the greatest hope for maintaining equilibrium in the face of any situation rests within ourselves."

Francis J. Braceland
Balance for our Emotional Needs

- Emotions are a signal that tell us when something is wrong or we are out of balance
- We all need meaning and purpose in our life
- We all need autonomy and freedom to make choices that bring us balance and happiness
Find Hidden Passion

- We all have hidden sources of energy and healing power.
- When you identify the things that fuel you, the things that you have true passion for, your fatigue will disappear.
- Balancing your life involves putting the things that we value and have passion for in our schedule.
Patanjali – the author of Yoga Sutra

“When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”
Balance for Your Soul

- Have quiet alone time in a calm, beautiful place - a safe retreat where you feel renewed
- Have an awareness of what restores and replenishes you
- Find ways to acknowledge loss and grief
- Start a meditation or mindfulness practice
B=Balance

- Connect with Mother Nature

- Forest Bathing

Being out in nature is therapeutic, whether you go for a hike in the woods, a walk on the beach, or just do a little gardening.
Perspective and Focus

- Stay clear with commitment to career goals or your personal mission
- Know how to focus on what you can control
- Look at situations as entertaining challenges and opportunities, not problems or stresses
B=Balance

Get involved with activities outside of work

Take your mind off of work by taking a class or engaging in a creative endeavor that relaxes you, such as drawing, painting, crafts, or writing.
"Balance, peace, and joy are the fruit of a successful life. It starts with recognizing your talents and finding ways to serve others by using them."

Thomas Kinkade
Equation for the value of your life
- Your Health = 1
- Everything else in your life = 0
- Put a one first, in front of all the zeros and you will have the value of your life

Without your health, you have nothing.
Keep Yourself Physically Strong

- Exercise
- Relax-Breathe
- Get adequate sleep
- Good nutrition and water
- Good medical and preventative care
Put Joy, Love, Hope, Laughter and Gratitude in Each Day

- Name 3 things you feel grateful for today-

- Think of something that has brought you a sense of joy (Make your top ten list)

- Who do you love that you can reach out to today? (Call them!)

- What made you laugh today? (Share it!)
Use humor to unwind
Humor is good medicine when it comes to relieving stress and improving one’s mood. Watch a comedy, play with a pet, read a funny book—whatever moves you and helps you relax.
Share what made you laugh today
C = Connections

What kind of connections are helpful and meaningful?
– Case Example of Sam?
C= Connections

Talk out your stress-process your thoughts and reactions with someone else (coworker, therapist, clergy, friend, family, supervisor)

Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress
Pet Connections?

- Pets accept whatever affection you are able to give them without asking for more---
- Pets are basically invulnerable to “provider burnout”—
- Blood pressure and heart rate decrease when interacting with animals
Hope does not take away your problems.

*It can lift you above them.*

Maya Angelou
Conclusions

A = Awareness
B = Balance
C = Connections


Birck A. Secondary traumatization and burnout in professionals working with torture survivors. Traumatology. 2001;7:85–90. [Google Scholar]


References, continued

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