



NAEMT Mental Health Resilience Officer Course

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue (CF) is a very real problem for Emergency Responders. When the calls for help and assistance become so frequent that responders begin to lose empathy and become numb to the suffering of others, CF has set in. It is important to separate compassion fatigue from burnout. Burnout is related to stress brought on by factors within the workplace, whereas compassion fatigue is brought on by the stress of helping others. While helping others is a core part of the professional role for Emergency Responders and Healthcare Workers, when that role is the primary stressor, compassion fatigue is likely the critical issue. When individuals have more stress about the conditions in which they work than they do about the role of responding to calls for assistance, burnout is likely the key issue. While there is considerable overlap, and an individual may experience both issues simultaneously, differentiating these two matters is important when determining what resources may be most beneficial for a colleague who needs assistance.

Preventing compassion fatigue is difficult. The following strategies may be helpful:

- As always, practice self-care when able (refer to handout on self-care)
- Maintain appropriate emotional boundaries
 - Empathy and understanding are important when caring for others
 - It is ok to not have all the answers – even helping a little is something.
 - Sometimes the help someone asks for is not the help they need.
 - Try to understand where individuals are coming from, appreciate what it means for their care, and realize that we must “meet people where they are.”
- Seek support from others – and support those around you
 - Identify relationships that are supportive and lean into them.
 - Make attempts to be supportive to those around you.
 - Empathize with those who are venting frustrations but work hard not to get pulled into a “negativity spiral” where complaints and frustrations compound one another to the point the topic is unrecoverable.
- Identify stressors that can be resolved
 - Even though this is cliché and “easier said than done,” we should always seek to improve the conditions in which we work.
 - While workplace stressors are primarily related to burnout prevention, removing identifiable stressors from the work environment can aid in coping with and prevention of compassion fatigue.



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- Identify stressful elements of the work you do that are controllable and seek out ways to resolve the stressor.
 - Engage leadership about stressful elements at work and try to bring a workable solution to the table.
 - If you are in a leadership position, listen for solutions. Encourage co-workers to identify solutions to workplace stressors and when possible, incorporate those solutions.
- Develop self-awareness
 - Journal when possible
 - Explore feelings of frustration and try to identify why they triggered frustration
 - Seek out professional counseling
- Maintain balance
 - Leave work at work
 - During your time off, make sure to be intentional in planning activities that reduce stress. This can help maintain a "light at the end of the tunnel"
 - Remember and celebrate success