



Compassion Fatigue
Healing the Wounded Healer





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Compassion Fatigue
Sometimes called "Secondary Traumatic Distress"

"Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress. It is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper."
Charles Figley, MD

"The idea that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet."
Rachel Naomi Remen, MD



Compassion Fatigue	Burnout
Work/Life disengagement	Work disengagement
Emotions due to trauma/suffering	Emotions due to overload
Despair (helpless/hopeless)	Feeling overwhelmed
Fatigue	Loss of energy
Anxious/Depressed/PTSD	Depressed
About being fearful	About being worn out
Cynicism	Discontent

Discussion

Within the context of your work, think of a time when you witnessed suffering/trauma in someone and found yourself deeply affected

1. *What impact did it have on you . . . ?*

- *Emotionally?*
- *Spiritually*
- *Behaviorally?*

2. *Did it connect with something you've experienced in your own life? What?*

To the extent you feel comfortable, share your answers with one or two people nearby

Personal Risk Factors

- ❖ Unresolved personal trauma or loss
- ❖ Current life stressors
- ❖ Low levels of social support
- ❖ Lack of intimate personal relationships
- ❖ Highly Sensitive Person (empath)
- ❖ External locus of control
- ❖ Mental complexes that elevate risk

Mental Complexes

- ❖ **Messiah Complex** — I can “fix” the problem and make everything okay
 - ❖ I am responsible for outcomes
 - ❖ If I care enough, long enough, I'll get the outcome I want
 - ❖ The patient/family will appreciate everything I do for them
 - ❖ I will have sufficient resources (time, skills, etc.) to fix things
 - ❖ My family, friends and colleagues will support me in my efforts
- ❖ **Lone Ranger Complex** — I can handle this myself
- ❖ **Saint Complex** — If I have the right values, faith and devotion, I can handle anything

Workplace Risk Factors

- ❖ Insufficient training or experience
- ❖ Frequent exposure to trauma/suffering
- ❖ Insufficient recovery time
- ❖ Lack of autonomy in work processes
- ❖ Lack of systemic resources
- ❖ Lack of supportive supervision/mentoring
- ❖ Task overload

Stages of Compassion Fatigue

- ❖ **Zealotry** — committed, engaged, extra hours
- ❖ **Irritation** — avoid clients, cut corners, daydream, bristle at annoyances
- ❖ **Withdrawal** — exhausted, exasperated, neglectful of family, friends, colleagues, self
- ❖ **Detachment** — auto pilot, disdain for clients, no compassion, no patience
- ❖ **Pathology** — mental and physical disorders, overwhelmed, desperate

What Doesn't Work

- ❖ Blaming others (victim mentality)
- ❖ Ignoring the problem
- ❖ Complaining to colleagues
- ❖ Self-medicating
- ❖ Unrealistic expectations of self and others
- ❖ Reducing leisure and downtime
- ❖ Working longer and harder
- ❖ Ignoring your physical, emotional and spiritual needs

What Does Work

- ❖ **Contemplative Practices** — meditation, mindfulness, etc.
- ❖ **Nature** — powerful antidepressant and treats hurry sickness (when mindful)
- ❖ **Healing Touch** — hugging, massage, affection
- ❖ **Expression** — art, music, writing, hobbies, etc.
- ❖ **Laughter** — the genuine kind
- ❖ **Exercise** — the “wonder drug” for emotional self-regulation
- ❖ **Nutrition** — physical health supports mental health
- ❖ **Sleep** — compassion fatigue disrupts sleep
- ❖ **Spirit** — connecting with your values and faith
- ❖ **Others??**

Example: Expressive Writing

- **Time:** Write a minimum of 10 to 15 minutes daily.
- **Topic:** What you choose to write about should be very personal and important to you. Focus on how it feels to be a caregiver.
- **Write continuously:** Do not worry about punctuation, spelling, and grammar. If you run out of things to say, draw a line and feel free to “doodle” or illustrate your feelings.
- **Write only for yourself:** This exercise is for your eyes only. Do what is necessary to safeguard your privacy.
- **Observe the Flip-out Rule:** If you get into the writing, and you feel that you cannot write about a certain event because it will push you over the edge, STOP writing!
- **Expect impacts:** Many people briefly feel a bit sad or agitated after expressive writing, especially on the first day or two. Usually, this feeling goes away completely before long.

Example: Nature Interaction

- **Time:** As little as 5 minutes outside elevates mood and reduces perceived stress.
- **Focus:** Using mindfulness while interacting with the natural world amplifies these positive effects.
- **Inputs:** As Fritz Perls said, “Lose your mind and come to your senses.” Use sensory immersion to optimize the experience (splashing water on face, smelling flowers, sifting sand through fingers, listening to waves on the shore, basking in sunlight etc.).
- **Impacts:** Nature interaction has a strong anti-depressant effect, reduces cortisol (primary stress hormone), and improves cognitive performance by reducing hurry sickness and increasing memory and concentration.

Example: Mindfulness

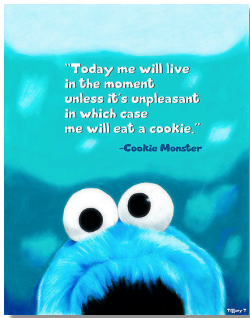
- **Be Here Now:** *Mindfulness is openness to and awareness of the present moment without judgement.*
- **Time:** Various options. For meditation, 10-15 minutes daily. Other methods can be integrated into daily activities and habits.
- **Mindful Habits:** Doing what you already do (brush teeth, shower, make coffee, eat, walk, etc.) but in a mindful way.
- **Mindful Moments:** Short pauses (60 to 90 seconds) during the day in preparation for client visits, meetings, presentations, etc.
- **Breathing Pauses:** Stopping during moments of stress or anxiety to take three deep, full breaths — resets mood and improves emotional self-regulation.

Being Mindful



- Being mindful occurs on its own
- Think of experiences of mindfulness you've had spontaneously
- Share with each other
- What made these experiences mindful?

Mindful People



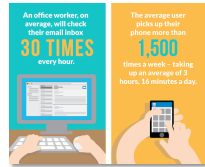
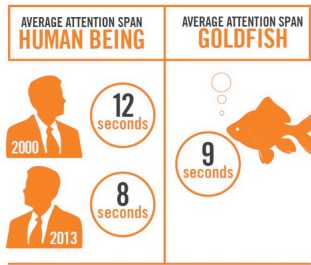
- Live more in the moment
- Fully present with others
- Less ADD — more focus
- Less susceptible to emotional hijacking
- Maintain “internal locus of control”
- Healthier — Happier

Exacerbating Factor: IT Overload

- Technology and hyper-stimulation alter neurological structures and processes
- IT modifies behavior, often creating ADHD, hostility and hurry sickness
- Creates “hurry sickness,” which causes generalized hostility and burnout



Human Attention Span



The average attention span of the modern human being is about half as long as whatever you're trying to tell them.

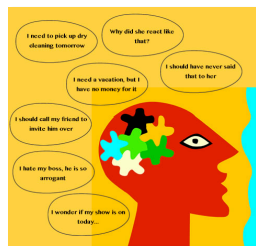
Meg Rosoff

Primary Types of Distraction

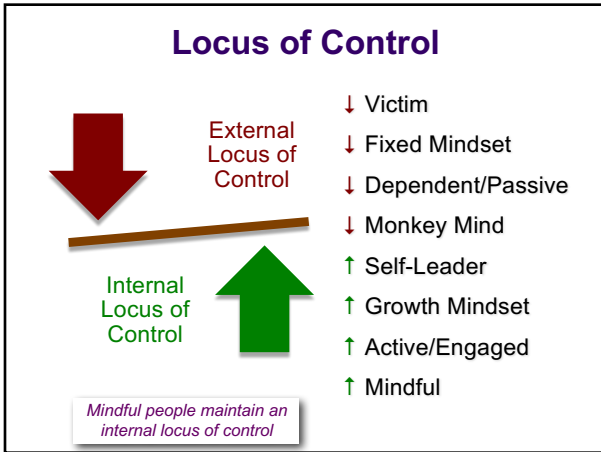
SENSORY
External interruptions

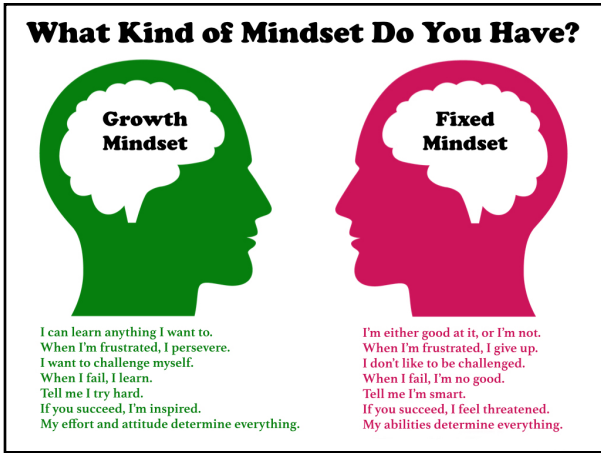


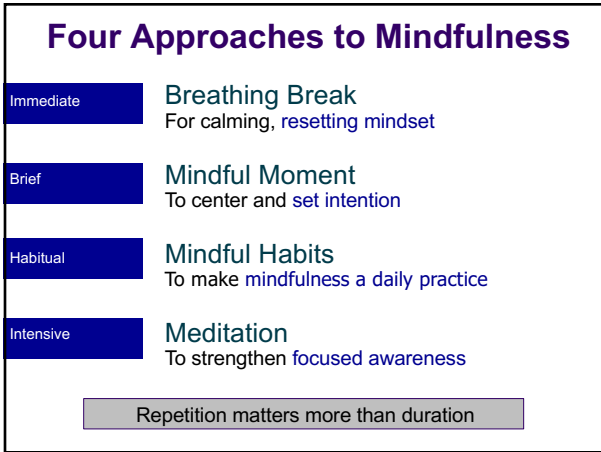
COGNITIVE
Inner dialogue (“Monkey Mind”)



- We are distracted about 47% of the time
- Distractions make us 20% “dumber” — more errors







Benefits of Mindfulness

Stress Response Within Body: Characteristics of Being Overstressed	Relaxation Response Within Body: Characteristics of Practicing Meditation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unfulfilled potential - Clouded thinking - Panic attacks - Migraines & headaches - Overeating - Inability to focus - Irritability - Mood swings - Teeth grinding - Cortisol released - Faster shallow breathing - Muscle tension increases - Inflammation increases - Cold hands & feet - Anxiety & Depression - Blood pressure increases - Heart rate increases - Faster aging - Poor digestion - Addiction - Insomnia - Low energy - Wind chills - Fight or Flight mode - Weak immune system - Weak discipline - Door open to diseases like cancer, fibromyalgia, diabetes, chronic fatigue, etc. <p style="text-align: center;">Before Meditation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alpha, theta, delta brainwave patterns increase - Blood pressure lowers - Anxiety & depression melt away - Digestion improves - Emotional Intelligence - DNA "telomeres" repair - Self-awareness increases - Sense of well being - Sleep improves - Calm, clear thinking - Hormones normalize - Releases "feel good" endorphins - Growth Hormone levels increase - Less addiction - Muscles relax - Release toxins - Serotonin, melatonin, GABA levels normalize - Improved focus - Positive thinking - Mind chatter slows down - Learning ability increases - Better problem solving - Instincts awaken - Heart rate slows - Sex drive increases - Slow aging - Absorb nutrients better - Blood Oxygen levels increase - Slow, deep breathing - Circulation increases - Healthy cell growth <p style="text-align: center;">After Meditation</p>

Neuroscience research verifies multiple generative benefits from as little as 12 minutes of meditation daily or from a series of 90-second "mindful moments" throughout the day

Breathing Break

1. Pause
2. Eyes closed or open
3. Take three deep breaths . . .

Inhale deeply through nose, pause, exhale through mouth

2. Inhale

1. Belly out

2. Exhale

1. Belly in

4. Set Intention

Distractions and hyper-stimulation create "hurry sickness" which, in turn, creates anger and burnout. Mindfulness slows the brain's inner "clock," damping down emotional hijacking and stress.

Mindfulness gives you time. Time gives you choices. Choices, skillfully made, lead to freedom. You don't have to be swept away by your feeling. You can respond with wisdom and kindness rather than habit and reactivity.

Henepola Guaratana
PICTUREQUOTES.COM

Temporal Pause



"Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom." – Viktor E. Frankl

Without
Mindfulness

Stimulus



Reaction

With
Mindfulness

Stimulus



Mindfulness



Response

Mindful Moment

1. Pause
2. Opening Ritual (you create)
3. Center Body (sit, stand, recline)
4. Close Eyes
5. Take Three Deep Breaths
Inhale through nose, pause, exhale through mouth
6. Observe and Release

Body (sensations)	Exhale tension, tightness
Mind (thinking)	Exhale "monkey mind"
Heart (feeling)	Exhale negative emotions
7. Set Intention
8. Closing Ritual (you create)



Mindful Moments — Tips

Opening/Closing Ritual — A gesture, movement or other behavior that "cues" the mind to shift awareness inward (opening) and outward (closing)

Breathing Release — In releasing a body sensation, thought pattern or emotion, imagine breathing in and out from that location in your body (example: breathing in and out of the heart for emotions)

Setting Intention — Say it silently to yourself in the privacy of your thoughts, or speak it quietly to yourself

Mindful Habits

1. Identify habits you practice daily
2. Engage in habitual behavior in a mindful fashion
 - No distractions
 - Sensory focus
 - Fully present
3. Examples:
 - Eating
 - Bathing
 - Walking



Building a Habit — Just Do It

“The biggest reason people fail at creating and sticking to new habits is that they don’t keep doing it. The key to forming a habit is not how much you do of the habit each day (exercise for 30 minutes, meditate for 20 minutes, etc.), but whether you do it at all. So the key is just getting started.”

– Leo Babauta

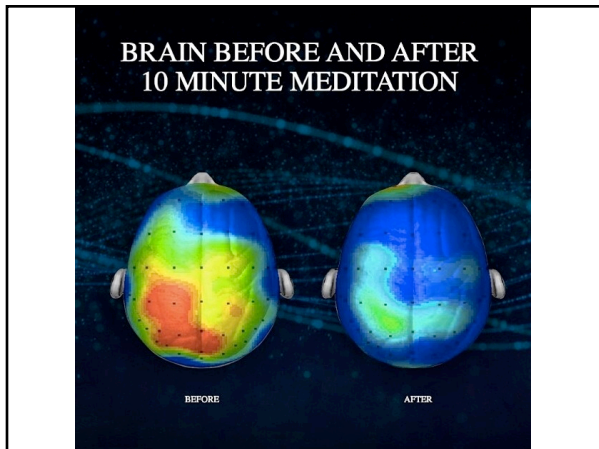
Meditation — Breathing Focus

- ❖ Sit or lie, center body, and set your intention
- ❖ Close your eyes or lower and soften your gaze
- ❖ Turn your awareness inward – lightly rest your attention on your breathing
- ❖ As thoughts arise, let them come and go, disengaging emotionally from them
- ❖ Gently return your attention to your breathing

Meditation — Other Foci

- ❖ **Sound Focus** — internal (mantra) or external (nature sound, white noise, etc.)
- ❖ **Visual Focus** — internal image/visualization or external (nature, candle, etc.)
- ❖ **Tactile Focus** — touching object (stone, seed, beads, etc.)
- ❖ **Movement Focus** — mindful walking, Tai Chi, Yoga, etc.

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Meditation — Common Obstacles

Even expert meditators struggle at the start:

- Couldn't stop thinking — Kept thinking of my "to do" list
- Kept falling asleep, nodding off
- Wanted to move around — Restless legs, aches and pains
- Hurry Sickness — Kept thinking, "How much longer?"
- Kept judging myself — "Not doing it right"
- Couldn't quiet my mind (you don't need to)

Meditation — What Is It Like?

Some descriptions from meditators:

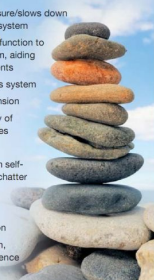
- *"It's not that I stop thinking, but the way I react to my thoughts changes. I don't react as much. I'm more of an observer than a participant."*
- *"To me, it's like a sanctuary, like that dark closet you used to hide in as a kid, or under the blankets. It's a friend."*
- *"My mind is never quiet, not even when I'm meditating, but it slows down and feels less hectic and rushed. For me, it's how I chill."*

Meditation Resources

Resources for meditators:

- **Apps**
 - Headspace
 - Insight Timer
 - One-Moment Meditation
 - Stop-Breathe-Think
- **Websites**
 - freemindfulness.org
 - centerhealthyminds.org

Benefits of meditation

- 
- Lowers blood pressure/slow down the cardiovascular system
 - Restores balanced function to the digestive system, aiding absorption of nutrients
 - Relaxes the nervous system
 - Relieves muscle tension
 - Diminishes intensity of headaches/migraines
 - Relieves insomnia
 - Frees the mind from self-doubt and internal chatter
 - Releases fears
 - Reduces anxiety
 - Improves depression
 - Generates optimism, self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

Mindful Culture

Meetings — Share a mindful moment together to open and close meetings

Client Visits — Pause before entering and employ a mindful moment to center and set intention

Champions — Both formal and informal leaders can role model mindful moment behavior

Normalizing — Once a critical mass (usually a minority) of people begin exhibiting mindful behaviors, they will become part of the cultural norm

Personal Resilience Plan

- Review your Personal Resilience Assessment
- Highlight items where you scored 1 or 0
- Decide one or two things you will do to improve in one or more of these lower scoring areas
- **Announce your intentions to a colleague: (1) What you will do. (2) Why you will do it (benefit)**
- In addition, please consider **practicing one or more of the four approaches to mindfulness at work and at home**
- **Tell others** (co-workers, family) — ask them to help **keep you honest**

Simple Truth