

# The COMFORT project



**Dedicated  
to helping GOOD people to  
continue DOING GOOD...**  
by mitigating the effects of  
Compassion Fatigue (CF) , Vicarious Traumatism (VT) and Burnout



## Compassion Fortitude

**Compassion:** *a feeling of deep empathy and sorrow for another who is struggling, or stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.*

**Fortitude:** *courage, bravery and resilience when dealing with pain and adversity over a long period.*

**This project is dedicated to honouring and helping the wounded healers, the burnt out carers, the exhausted empaths, the hurting helpers, the overwhelmed nurturers, the distressed counsellors, the frontline responders, and the traumatised teachers... all who go where angels fear to tread and suffer from Compassion Fatigue in the line of duty.**

**Compassion Fatigue is an occupational hazard and has been described as the “Cost of Caring”.** Compassion fatigue is overwhelming exhaustion that may affect people in helping/caring professions and roles. Altruism, empathy and serving others take its toll when we do not replenish our own emotional 'cup' and take care of our own needs . People with Compassion Fatigue are stressed and distressed and their coping mechanisms are less functional, and they are less effective in their role as carers, helpers, healers, nurturers and first responders. Compassion fatigue permeates both the person's professional and personal life. Someone with Compassion Fatigue is not only less resilient, but also less tolerant. The phrase 'When helping hurts' was coined to explain that it is often not only the person with CF hurting, but that they may (inadvertently) hurt others as a result of being overwhelmed by their own chronic exhaustion and low self-esteem. When caregivers focus on others without practicing authentic, sustainable self care, distressing and destructive behaviours and symptoms such as isolation, substance abuse, apathy, emotional outbursts and nightmares can surface.... if left unchecked, over time, this could potentially lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

## **What factors contribute to Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Traumatism and Burnout?**

There are many reasons for which helping professionals can develop Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma.

**The individual:** The caregiver's life circumstances, history, coping style and personality type all affect how this work may impact an individual. Most helpers have other life stressors to deal with: caregiver duties at home, a complex family history or perhaps a health challenge of their own. Helpers are not immune to pain in their own lives and, in fact, some studies show that they are more vulnerable to life changes such as divorce and addictions than people who have less stressful jobs and roles.

**The situation:** Helpers and frontline responders often do work that other people don't want to hear about. They may also spend their time caring for people who are not valued or understood by our society (for example, individuals who are homeless, abused, incarcerated, disabled or chronically ill). We also live in a society that glamorises violence and does not adequately fund efforts to reduce or prevent violence in our society (as evident for example in the high number of assaults on Social Workers, Nurses and Paramedics, this in turn makes the job more risky). The working environment is often stressful and fraught with workplace negativity as a result of individual compassion fatigue, burnout and general unhappiness. The work itself is also very stressful, dealing with clients/patients who are experiencing chronic crises, difficulty controlling their emotions, or those who may not get better. When management, workers, clients, patients and volunteers suffer from varying degrees of Compassion Fatigue, their symptoms become incorporated into the corporate culture and eventually the productive vision and mission of the organisation is replaced by dysfunctional policies, procedures and goals. These organisational symptoms may include: high absenteeism, excessive, workers compensation claims, high staff turnover, 'us' versus 'them' relationships, poor team work, unhealthy competitive relationships, defensive or aggressive relationships between staff/management/clients, challenging the status quo (rules and regulations), inability to complete assigned tasks, lack of adaptability and flexibility, bitching moaning whining and rampant rumours and gossip and constant changes in an organisation's policies and procedures.

## **What can be done?**

Over the past decade, organisational health researchers have been busy studying the most effective strategies to reduce, mitigate and prevent Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Traumatism in helping professionals. Here is what has been shown to be most effective:

Studies have shown that "who you work for" is one of the biggest determinants of employee wellness. This means having access to a supportive, flexible manager who is open to regular workload assessments in order to reduce trauma exposure, a manager who encourages staff to attend ongoing professional education and who provides timely and good quality supervision as needed. Employees who had more control over their schedule reported a higher rate of job satisfaction overall.

Reducing hours spent working directly with traumatised individuals was one of the most effective ways of reducing Vicarious Traumatization. Personal strategies: Developing and maintaining a strong social support both at home and at work; Increased self-awareness through mindfulness meditation and narrative work such as journaling. Sadly, regular self-care is often an afterthought for busy helping professionals, or seen as self-indulgence rather than a necessity. Just as Compassion Fatigue is a process that develops over time healing from its effects needs grace, space and time. Some people may return to full functionality by taking a well-deserved holiday or going for a massage, but most of us need to make lasting lifestyle changes and put our own self care and wellness at the top of the priority list. Frontline responders, healers, helpers and caregivers also need to develop stress resiliency skills so they can continue to be able to do this demanding work.



I offer individual Debriefing an Organisational Management Course and Staff (or Volunteer) Workshops on Compassion Fatigue

**3 hour course (for Management and HR)** explores the following topics:

- What is Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Traumatization and Burnout
- What are the causes?
- What are the individual and organisational symptoms?
- Chronic versus Healthy Caregiving
- Breaking the Compassion Fatigue Cycle
- Developing authentic, sustainable Self-Care practices
- Creating a Self-Help Plan

COST: R1500 per head

To register contact Dido Blagden, 065 806 3894, [didoblagden@gmail.com](mailto:didoblagden@gmail.com)  
<http://.DareToBeExtraordinary.com/comfort>

Please include a brief summary of your education and experience with Compassion Fatigue.

### 3 hour Workshop (for Staff or Volunteers):

- Helps caregivers to recognise Compassion Fatigue Symptoms
- Educates and encourages them to manage their symptoms through authentic, healthy self-care practices.
- Promotes sustainable healthy caregiving and Compassion Satisfaction.

### 3 Hour Workshop agenda sample:

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 9:30am      | Introductions   |
| 10am        | Compassion Fatigue Overview<br>(definition, causes, symptoms)   |
| 10:30am     | Telling our stories and<br>identifying Compassion Fatigue<br>in our own lives.  |
| 11- 11:15am | Break   |
| 11:15am     | Breaking the Compassion Fatigue cycle<br>Basic Needs<br>Identifying our own Basic Needs                                   |
| 11:45am     | Authentic Self Care<br>Preparing to heal<br>Challenges ahead<br>Creating a sustainable authentic Self-Help Plan           |
| 12:00pm     | Compassion Fatigue in the Workplace<br>Brainstorming session (where do we see CF?)<br>Applying awareness to the Workplace |
| 12:20pm     | Q & A   |
| 12:30pm     | Closing<br>Participants comments: Evaluation/ Survey  |

### **Workshop Fee (per head) :**

R1500 if less than 5 participants,  
R750 between 5-10 participants,  
R500 more than 10 participants

Materials included. Enrolments are limited.

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# The Caregiver's Bill of Rights



## As a caregiver I have the right...

- ... to be respected for the work I choose to do.
- ... to take pride in my work and know that I am making a difference.
- ... to garner appreciation and validation for the care I give others.
- ... to receive adequate pay for my job as a professional caregiver.
- ... to discern my personal boundaries and have others respect my choices.
- ... to seek assistance from others, if and when it is necessary.
- ... to take time off to re-energize myself.
- ... to socialize, maintain my interests, and sustain a balanced lifestyle.
- ... to my own feelings, including negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration.
- ... to express my thoughts and feelings to appropriate people at appropriate times.
- ... to convey hope to those in my care.
- ... to believe those in my care will prosper in mind, body and spirit as a result of my caregiving.

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