

Wellness, Self-Compassion, Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Resilience



In the first section we underscored that compassionate action requires intent and skill. This section of the toolkit provides further definitions that are foundational to all else found throughout the toolkit. We will be introduced to the wellness model we will use in the toolkit and the concept of compassion fatigue. Activities will help us explore our beliefs about self-care and self-compassion.



WELLNESS: The authors of the toolkit have chosen to use the Compass Model of Wellness based on the work of Dr. Scott and Holly Stoner of Samaritan Family Wellness Center in Wisconsin. We have adapted it from its original form for use in the health care setting.



In the Compass Model of Wellness there are four sectors of our life that contribute to our wellness and two areas under each sector. All of these areas are interconnected to support our overall well-being.

Developed in partnership with:



compassionresiliencetoolkit.org

What Are We Talking About?



Mind

1. **Work** – the ability to get the most out of educational, volunteer, and employment opportunities
2. **Organization** – the ability to manage time, priorities, money, and belongings

Spirit

3. **Core Values** – the development of a personal value system that supports your sense of meaning and purpose
4. **Rest & Play** – the ability to balance work and play to renew oneself

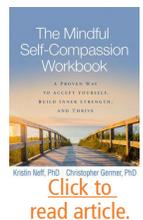
Strength

5. **Stress Resilience** – the ability to deal positively with the challenges of life
6. **Care for Body** – the ability to build healthy habits around your physical well-being and to end unhealthy habits

Heart

7. **Relationships** – the ability to create and maintain healthy connections with others
8. **Emotions** – the ability to express your emotions and receive others' emotions in a healthy way

Self-Compassion: Compassion is a two-way street! Just as we have come to understand that we cannot fully love others without loving ourselves, we cannot maintain a compassionate approach towards others if we do not practice self-compassion. *Self-compassion is extending kindness to ourselves in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or our own general suffering.* One of our nation's leading experts in self-compassion, Dr. Kristin Neff, offers further explanation in [this brief article](#).



When we consistently approach people with compassion, the outcome can be satisfaction, burnout or secondary (vicarious) trauma. **Compassion satisfaction**, simply put, is the positive feeling you derive from being able to do your work well, to receive gratification and reward from the caregiving role. The goal of this toolkit is for us to grow the experience of that satisfaction and lessen burnout and secondary trauma.

Burnout refers to *the exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress related to very high workload, non-supportive work environment, and/or feeling that our efforts make no difference.*

Secondary Trauma (also known as secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma) *can happen to us when we come to know the traumatically stressful events that the people we serve have experienced. Some helpers experience some of the same symptoms of trauma as if the experience had happened to them.* Those who work with traumatized or distressed individuals and/or are in a position to hear about trauma on a regular basis are particularly susceptible.

We will be using compassion fatigue as an umbrella term for both burnout and secondary trauma.

Compassion Fatigue can be summed up as *the feelings of depression, sadness, exhaustion, anxiety and irritation that may be experienced by people who are helpers in their work and/or personal life.* It is important to note that compassion fatigue is a normal response to the complex and overwhelming abnormal situations we might find in the workplace and hear about from those we serve. In that way, if, or when, compassion fatigue arises, you may benefit from interpreting its symptoms more as "messages from what is right, good, and strong within us, rather than indicators of shameful weakness, defects, or sickness."¹ Rather than thinking of compassion fatigue as something to be avoided or fixed, it may be more powerful to figure out how to feed and grow our "compassion resilience."

¹ Gentry, JE. (2002). *Compassion fatigue. Journal of Trauma Practice, 1(3-4), 37-61*

What Are We Talking About?



Compassion Resilience is the ability to maintain our physical, emotional and mental well-being while responding compassionately to people who are suffering. Think of this resilience as a reservoir of well-being that we can draw upon on difficult days and in difficult situations. It allows us to be present and effective in challenging situations, as well as on those days when everything goes right.

The very fact that you are working to improve the health and wellbeing of others shows that you have some level of compassion resilience already. Without compassion resilience you likely would not be in this field — still caring. However, the demands and pressures of the health care field can certainly serve to drain one’s compassion resilience if we do not regularly act to refill our reservoir.

We all have our own ways of filling this reservoir of compassion resilience and this toolkit will offer information and strategies that expand our options. We will learn about thoughts and behaviors that undercut our resilience. Being aware lets us make the most helpful choices for our well-being.

Building compassion resilience is an active process. We can choose our point of view as we move through this toolkit. One perspective to consider is to think of building compassion resilience as a freedom, not a burden. We can also take on the perspective of a scientist as we track and manage our resilience. We can ask ourselves what fills our tank. What drains it? Consider the strategies integrated throughout the toolkit; take them for a spin and explore what works best for each of us.



STRENGTH and MIND: Want More Energy? Consider Gratitude!

Practicing being grateful, among many other benefits, increases your energy. It turns out that our minds are wired to focus on the negative as a survival strategy. The [three good things practice](#) helps rewire your brain to notice the good in your life. You can start now by thinking of three things for which you are grateful and what role you had in them. Research shows writing them down has a longer positive effect on your wellbeing. Then choose a time of day, every day, to set your mind on gratitude. Give it time, enjoy exploring gratefulness. Hopefully you too will find added positive energy for the important work you do.

If you want to take this concept further, [see what the Greater Good Science Center suggests](#).

HEART and STRENGTH: Harnessing your Breath—Box (or Four-Square) Breathing



Compassion Fatigue Awareness

The next section of the toolkit goes further into the concept of compassion fatigue and then offers a way to assess our personal compassion satisfaction and fatigue.