

## COMPASSION FATIGUE

There are many professions which are directly related to care giving and providing support to an individual who is vulnerable due to physical, intellectual or emotional challenges. Some of these professionals work in social service, religious and health care settings. Others include those who provide in home care for family members such as elderly parents or a child who has a disability. Still others provide care by choice to someone by welcoming them into their home, such as specialized family care providers. Those involved in direct care and provision of services are most likely doing so because of desire to help someone who is dependent upon others for their well being. Many people are taught from an early age to put the needs of others ahead of their own, and they obtain satisfaction from doing so. But, when does this caring become too much?

Families who care for someone who has a disability may feel more stressed than other families. In addition to direct care duties, additional stressors often include behavioral challenges, night time disturbances, health issues and management of multiple impairments. A term has been coined, "compassion fatigue," otherwise known as burnout. Compassion fatigue happens when caring for another/others becomes too much and the caregiver becomes mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. The caregiver may begin to experience detachment, and lack of sympathy or emotion for the one for whom they are caring. Feelings of anxiety, hopelessness and guilt may surface. Poor self-care in regard to hygiene and appearance may occur. An internet source, "Buzzle" ([www.buzzle.com/articles/compassions-fatigue-causes.html](http://www.buzzle.com/articles/compassions-fatigue-causes.html)) also identifies these signs of compassion fatigue in an article by Rimlee Bhuyan:

- Lack of enjoyment in day-to-day activities
- Not deriving any joy from things that used to excite you earlier
- Difficulty in concentrating on any task
- Feelings of anxiety and perpetual fear
- Feelings of irritability triggered by trivial things
- Isolation from family and friends
- Inability to make big or small decisions
- Avoidance of certain situations and people
- Unprovoked outbursts of anger
- Constant feeling of dread and imagination of doom<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing the feelings one is experiencing is the first step in the management of compassion fatigue. Verbalizing feelings to another, whether it be a family member or professionals with whom you are already working, is helpful. Others can help you determine how you can get a break from care giving. Respite care may be available. Learning to delegate some household or caretaking duties may be a solution. Sometimes caregivers feel that no one can provide care or

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<sup>1</sup> Bhuyan, Dimlee. *Compassion Fatigue Causes*. June 28, 2011.  
<http://www.buzzle.com/articiples/compassionfatigue/>

complete household duties as well as themselves. But, learning to delegate and/or allow someone to help who will do a “good enough” job is a solution. Other helpful remedies include:

- Healthy eating
- Regular exercise
- Practice good sleep habits
- Limit intake of alcohol or nicotine
- Take breaks throughout the day
- Utilize available vacation time
- Balance care giving activities with hobbies you enjoy
- Participate in social and spiritual activities
- Participate in a support group or talk with others who also are providing care giving
- Keep a journal of your thoughts/feelings
- Seek professional counseling if no improvement in symptoms

Being proactive in caring for yourself is important and allows you to be better able to meet the needs of and enjoy the individual(s) for whom you provide care.

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#### References:

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