CMHA Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

Compassion Fatigue

www.cmhawwd.ca
Introductions
What is **Compassion Fatigue**?

The care giver’s “reduced capacity for or interest in being empathic with others’ suffering”

“The cost of caring” (Figley, 1982)
Compassion Fatigue

• The erosion of physical and mental wellbeing we begin to experience when we give of ourselves without restoration.

• Cumulative over time.

• It affects all caregivers in some way, both in our personal and professional lives.
Vicarious Trauma

• In our work, we may experience traumatic events directly, or indirectly through secondhand story telling.
• Being around people/animals who are often in distress and crisis.
• We may experience intrusive thoughts, nightmares, avoidance, hyperarousal.
You can’t walk through water without getting wet.

Vicarious trauma can change how you view the world.
Burnout

• Being over worked and/or feeling overwhelmed.
• Depleted ability to cope with demands.
• Feeling powerless.
• Loss of job satisfaction.
• Diminished view of workplace.
• Leads to physical and emotional exhaustion.
• Each week, 500 000 employed Canadians miss work due to mental health concerns.

• 39% of Ontario workers indicated they would not tell their manager if they were experiencing a mental health problem.

(www.camh.ca)
What’s on Your Plate?
Risk Factors

• Think about your role.

• What are some things that may increase your risk for compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or burnout?
• Too much work, too few hours.
• High exposure to crisis and trauma.
• Little support from management and co-workers.
• Lack of boundaries.
• Lack of resources such as EAP.
• Lack of variety/ too much repetition.
• Working in isolation.
• More responsibilities outside work.
Think about the way you engage your role.
“I’ll save you!”
Challenging Unwritten Rules

• Don’t talk about your personal issues/stress at work.
• NEVER, EVER show emotions at work.
• You have to do everything perfectly and show no weakness.
Practice Empathy.
How will I know?
Physical Signs/Symptoms

- Exhaustion
- Insomnia/hypersomnia
- Headaches
- Teeth grinding
- Muscle tension
- Increase/decrease in appetite
- Increased susceptibility to illness
Behavourial Signs/Symptoms

- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Absenteeism
- Anger and irritability
- Avoidance
- Impact on job performance
- Blaming others
- Frequent complaining
Psychological Signs/Symptoms

- Reduced ability to feel empathy
- Depression
- Cynicism
- Resentment
- Anxiety
- Difficulty separating work/personal
- Negative self image
- Distorted thinking, e.g. black & white
Have you ever thought?

• “If I have to do this one more time….”
• “What do you want ME to do about it?!?!?!?”
• “It’s Monday, 5 more days to go”.
• “Maybe I’m not in the right profession”.
Take Stock

- Know your stressors in both the workplace and home environment.
- Know your triggers.
- Know your early warning signs.
Self Care

• Practice self care strategies in both the home and workplace.

• Improve work/life balance.

• Learn to make yourself a priority.
Examples of Self Care

• Mindfulness
• Breathing exercises
• Eating and sleeping well
• Exercise
• Leisure activities
• Nurturing relationships
• Giving yourself permission to do ‘nothing’. E.g. a pajamas & Netflix day.
Staff/Student Support

• Create a non-judgmental work environment.
• Provide the opportunity to debrief.
• Explore accommodations for those in need.
• Find out what the top job stressors are for people. (anonymous survey)
• Have fun together.
Develop Resiliency

• The ability to return to a healthy state.

• Our ability to change our internal state in order to respond to stressors.

• Involves thing such as attitude and coping strategies.
Emotion Focused Coping:

• Strategies for calming your emotions.

• Can include things like deep breathing, taking a break, talking about feelings.
Problem Solving:

• Strategies for addressing practical matters.

• Can include things like reassigning duties, changing work schedules.
How do you ‘decompress’ during work?
How do you ‘decompress’ after work?
Ask for help.
It may be that most of us don’t stop very often to think about who and what we have in our life that nurtures, supports, encourages, and helps us grow. Building and maintaining good mental health is dependent on using a variety of resources to promote wellness and help provide the strength and resiliency to move through difficult times in the most positive way possible. The ‘Circle of Support’ can be used by yourself or with others to explore the different ways mental health can be built and sustained. Explore your own supports while examining the examples provided by our own staff of CMHA Grand River Branch. In the inner circle, include those things that a person can draw on for themselves such as hopes and dreams, belief system, interests, or creative pursuits. In the middle circle, explore the informal or natural supports available such as community groups, workmates, family, and friends. In the outer circle, include any formal services that can be accessed such as health, social and employment services.
Questions?