

Compassion Fatigue: Undernourished Soul

By

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The term Compassion Fatigue was first used in 1992 to describe what was happening to so many nurses who dealt with caring and dealing with death and traumas they were helping with in their work. In Indian Country, if we are helping our people Heal, and move toward Wellness, we have to learn about our own Compassion fatigue, and our own self-care plan. “You cannot give away what you don not have”, is advice we hear all the time, or “you can only take people as far as you have gone”. Our Ceremonial lives teach us the cycles of renewal, or cleaning off our spirit so we can live well. I remember Edward Little Dog, a Blackfeet elder telling me when I would come to sweat after spending 10 days in Washington D.C. arriving exhausted, frustrated, and just plain pitiful.....”That stuff sticks to you like fly paper, negativity, gossip, Racism, concrete walk ways; you have to clean it off, start new”. Each of us, out of Habit do things to Renew and make ourselves feel better.....all were asking is for you to think about the past 5 years, 10 years, 6 months, and see if these symptoms were something you experienced. If they are, we ask you to start the New Year with a refreshing NEW self Care plan.

Signs and Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue/Secondary Traumatization

- ✚ Job performance goes down
- ✚ Mistakes go up
- ✚ Morale drops
- ✚ Personal relationships are affected
- ✚ Home Life deteriorates
- ✚ Personality deteriorates
- ✚ General decline in overall health (sick all the time) colds, sinus, stomach, headache
- ✚ Heightened sense of personal vulnerability
- ✚ Distrust and cynicism about the human condition
- ✚ Experience profound grief and mourning
- ✚ Moments of frank hate and contempt with a wish to get rid of the victim
- ✚ Feeling distrustful of others
- ✚ Feeling overly responsible for community safety
- ✚ Overusing coping skills
- ✚ Feeling Isolated

- ✚ Denying your own needs
- ✚ Hyper vigilance or increased startled response
- ✚ Symptoms last more than a month
- ✚ Feelings of incompetence

Forgiving the Unforgivable: When Trauma still has its hooks in us

- ✚ Trauma destroys the trust relationship of the victim and with themselves and the world
- ✚ The victim no longer knows how to act or what to expect from the world in order to survive
- ✚ Secondary trauma refers to those people who care for or are involved with those who have been directly traumatized
- ✚ Betrayal Trauma increases the likelihood of psychogenic amnesia (dissociative) . Forgetting may help maintain necessary attachments, improving chances of survival
- ✚ Fear Trauma increase the likelihood of the avoidance defense being used for self protection
- ✚ Neglect Trauma taught you that your personal needs are not met so you neglect to ask for what you need.

Remember the Characteristics of PTSD

- ✚ Revisualizes the event or series of events, often as flashbacks
- ✚ Trauma event is acted out in subsequent relationships as the victim unconsciously tries to create an outcome that restores power and control to themselves instead of victimization
- ✚ Fear-largely of Intimacy and terror of further pain, loss of control and victimization associated with relationships
- ✚ A sense of having no future that there is no point in creating plans or expectations of satisfaction, because the trauma has shown that at any moment they could be destroyed

Sincere Questions to ask our Self and what you can do:

- ✚ When was the last time was you willingly went to the doctor and had everything checked out?
- ✚ Have you ever considered a “Tune up” and thought about going to Treatment, or going for a second time even if it has been years?
- ✚ Learning to Meditate, kind of like an Indian Buddha
- ✚ When you hear horrific stories, or on a regular basis how do you De-Brief?
- ✚ Know your personal vulnerabilities
- ✚ TIME-OFF, how do you proactively plan your time-off?
- ✚ Massage
- ✚ Relaxation interventions
- ✚ Limited exposure to T.V., Facebook, Internet, and printed materials
- ✚ Avoid high starch and high Sugar foods
- ✚ Give yourself credit for small changes in your thinking and your behaviors
- ✚ Find something to laugh about