

Compassion Fatigue: Cultivating Work-Life Balance to Prevent Burnout

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human good



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What is Stress?

Stress is the body's natural physical, emotional, and psychological response to demands or challenges.

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What is Stress?

Mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to any perceived demands or threats.

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Positive Stress (Eustress)

- Motivation
- Meeting deadlines
- Learning new skills
- Problem solving



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Negative Stress (Distress)

Occurs when demands exceed available resources over an extended period.

Examples include:

- Resident crises
- Staff shortages
- Heavy workloads
- Family responsibilities
- Financial pressures



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Common Stressors in Affordable Housing Resident Services Coordinators

- Hoarding
- Mental health crises
- Bed bug outbreaks
- Interpersonal conflict among residents
- Resident deaths (suicides)



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Common Stressors in Affordable Housing Resident Services Coordinators

- Caseloads
- Eviction prevention
- Family conflict
- Emergency hospitalizations
- Mandatory reporting



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Common Stressors in Affordable Housing Property Managers

- Lease violations (smoking/drugs,)
- Resident complaints
- Staff shortages/turnover
- Budget constraints
- MH Decompensation



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Common Stressors in Affordable Housing Property Managers

- Fair Housing compliance
- HUD/Tax credit regulations and legal documentation
- Difficult conversations
- Resident deaths



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Common Stressors in Affordable Housing

Maintenance Staff

- Emergency work orders
- Unsanitary apartments
- Hoarding cleanup
- Bed bugs



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Common Stressors in Affordable Housing

Maintenance Staff

- Resident aggression
- Physical demands
- Exposure to trauma
- Resident deaths (Suicides)



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Stress Mapping Exercise

Write down:

- Three work stressors
- Three personal stressors

Circle:

- Things you can control
- Things you cannot control



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Self-Reflection Question

How much time do we spend worrying about things outside our control?

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Why Do We Stress Out?

Two Major Reasons:

1. We perceive a situation as dangerous, difficult or painful.
2. We don't believe we have the resources to cope.

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$$\text{Stress} = P > R$$

Stress occurs when the **Pressure** is greater than the **Resource**

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Common Psychological Symptoms of Stress

Stress affects thinking before it affects behavior.

Common symptoms include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Racing thoughts
- Forgetfulness



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Common Psychological Symptoms of Stress

Common symptoms include:

- Poor decision making
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anxiety
- Excessive worrying
- Irritability



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Common Psychological Symptoms of Stress

Common symptoms include:

- Emotional numbness
- Decreased motivation
- Feeling helpless
- Reduced patience



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Emotional Symptoms

- Mood swings
- Sadness
- Anger
- Crying easily



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Emotional Symptoms

- Feeling detached
- Loss of empathy
- Frustration
- Feelings of hopelessness



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Physical Symptoms

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Insomnia



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Physical Symptoms

- Increased illness
- Digestive problems
- Elevated blood pressure
- Chest tightness



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Behavioral Warning Signs

- Calling in sick frequently (Mondays & Fridays)
- Increased mistakes
- Social isolation
- Poor or lack of communication



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Behavioral Warning Signs

- Procrastination
- Reduced productivity
- Poor eating habits
- Increased consumption of mood-altering substances (alcohol, caffeine, THC, etc.)



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Why Stress Management Matters

- Ignoring problems or pretending that things are fine when they are not only leads to greater stress in the long run.
- Managing stress effectively requires dealing with it and working through it.

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Why Stress Management Matters

Unmanaged stress can lead to:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Medical illness
- Poor resident interactions

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Why Stress Management Matters

Unmanaged stress can lead to:

- Increased turnover
- Reduced quality of services
- Burnout
- Compassion fatigue

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Why Stress Management Matters

- Engaging in avoidance behavior is not an effective technique for stress management.
- We must deal with circumstances

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Affordable Housing Providers

Burnout is a significant issue for affordable senior housing providers.

The challenges faced by affordable senior housing providers are multifaceted, often stemming from high demands and limited resources.

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Burnout Defined

Refers to a psychological term referring to a state of chronic physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion which can lead to a lack of interest or motivation regarding one's work.

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Burnout Defined

- Develops gradually due to chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.
- When left untended, burnout can cause a physical and emotional collapse.

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Burnout Defined

- Often arises from prolonged work-related stress, particularly when the demands of caregiving exceed available resources.
- It can manifest as fatigue, decreased job performance, and emotional detachment from work responsibilities.

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Warning Signs

- Emotional exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Reduced professional effectiveness
- Feeling emotionally "checked out"

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Compassion Fatigue Defined

Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion that results from caring for individuals who are experiencing trauma, crisis, illness, or significant hardship.

Sometimes called: "The Cost of Caring."



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Warning Signs

- Feeling emotionally numb
- Reduced empathy
- Cynicism
- Difficulty sleeping



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Warning Signs

- Constant fatigue
- Feeling guilty taking time off
- Irritability
- Feeling responsible for everyone's problems



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Why Affordable Senior Housing Staff Are Vulnerable

Staff often experience:

- Resident loss
- Poverty
- Housing insecurity
- Elder abuse
- Hoarding



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Why Affordable Senior Housing Staff Are Vulnerable

Staff often experience:

- Mental illness
- Isolation
- Substance use
- Frequent emergencies
- Limited resources



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Why Affordable Senior Housing Staff Are Vulnerable

Many staff become the
"helper of last resort."



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Strategies for Reducing Stress

Daily Habits

- Take scheduled breaks
- Stretch
- Walk outside
- Stay hydrated
- Eat lunch away from your desk

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Strategies for Reducing Stress

Daily Habits

- Practice deep breathing
- Use personal time off (MH day)
- Disconnect after work
- Celebrate small successes

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Strategies for Reducing Stress

Emotional Wellness

- Develop healthy boundaries.

Remember:

- You are responsible TO residents.
- You are not responsible FOR residents.

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Self-Reflection Question

When was the last time you engaged in an activity or hobby you used to enjoy doing?



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Healthy Coping Skills

- Exercise
- Meditation
- Prayer
- Reading
- Music



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Healthy Coping Skills

- Hobbies
- Gardening
- Talking with friends
- Professional counseling
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)



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Time Management Skills

- Time block your calendar
- Complete difficult tasks first (chunk it down)
- Limit interruptions
- Avoid multitasking
- Use task lists

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Time Management Tips

- Set realistic expectations
- Delegate appropriately
- Schedule documentation time
- Protect lunch breaks

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Work-Life Balance Defined

- Equilibrium or harmony between the demands of work and the various aspects of personal life, such as family, health, leisure, and social activities.
- Effectively managing time and energy to meet both professional responsibilities and personal needs without allowing one to overshadow the other.

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Creating Work-Life Balance

Work should not consume your identity.

Practice:

- Turning off work email after hours
- Planning a staycation/vacation
- Saying no appropriately
- Using flexible scheduling when possible

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Creating Work-Life Balance

Practice:

- Spending time with loved ones
- Pursuing hobbies
- Maintaining regular medical appointments

Ruben's Motto: "I work to live; not live to work."

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Building Resilience

Resilience grows through:

- Supportive coworkers (it's OK to ask for help)
- Healthy supervision
- Mentor/peer consultation
- Training and other professional development

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Building Resilience

Resilience grows through:

- Humor
- Exercise
- Purpose
- Reflection
- Self-compassion; give yourself grace

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Self-Reflection Question

When was the last time you did something for the first time?

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Organizational Strategies

Leaders can reduce burnout by:

- Providing supervision
- Recognizing employee achievements
- Encouraging time off
- Maintaining manageable caseloads

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Organizational Strategies

Leaders can reduce burnout by:

- Providing training and other professional training opportunities
- Supporting Employee Assistance Programs
- Promoting psychological safety

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Resident Death

Maria, a Resident Services Coordinator, has supported a resident for eight years. The resident dies unexpectedly.

Maria continues working but cannot stop thinking about the resident.

She begins avoiding new residents because she fears becoming emotionally attached.

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Discussion

1. What signs of compassion fatigue are present?

2. How should her supervisor respond?

3. What self-care strategies would help?

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Bedbug Crisis

A property has experienced an ongoing bed bug infestation for several months.

Staff fear bringing bedbugs home.

Maintenance staff refuse to enter certain apartments.

Resident Services staff feel anxious every day.

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Discussion

1.What stressors are affecting the team?

2.What organizational supports should be implemented?

3.What individual coping strategies can staff use?

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The Impossible Caseload

A Resident Services Coordinator serves over 300 residents while covering another property due to a vacancy.

Residents become frustrated because appointments are delayed.

The RSC begins skipping lunch and working late every evening.

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Discussion

1. Is this burnout, compassion fatigue, or both?
2. What boundaries should be established?
3. What role does management play?



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I can't Save Everyone

A resident experiencing mental illness repeatedly refuses services despite frequent crises.

The Resident Services Coordinator feels like a failure.



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Discussion

1. What unhealthy thinking patterns are present?
2. How can staff practice healthy professional boundaries?



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Scenario#5

A resident frequently visits your office to talk about their personal struggles.

While you want to support them, they often stay for an hour or more, impacting your ability to complete other tasks.

You've started to dread their visits but feel guilty setting limits.

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Discussion

How would you set boundaries while maintaining a supportive relationship?

What strategies can you use to manage your time and energy effectively in situations like this?

How might you involve other resources (e.g., mental health professionals, social workers)?

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Case Scenario #6

You've recently dealt with a series of emotionally draining cases, including residents facing eviction, health crises, and family issues. You've started to feel emotionally numb and less empathetic toward residents, which is affecting your work and personal relationships.

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Discussion

- How can you recognize and address signs of compassion fatigue?
- What self-care practices or workplace supports could help you recover?
- How can you advocate for systemic changes to reduce emotional strain on staff?

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Case Scenario #7

Your supervisor has assigned you additional responsibilities, such as planning community events and conducting unit inspections, on top of your regular duties.

Despite voicing concerns about your workload, your manager expects you to handle it all without additional support.

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Discussion

How would you communicate your concerns effectively to management?

What steps can you take to manage stress while fulfilling your responsibilities?

How can organizations create a culture that prevents staff from being overburdened?

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Personal Wellness Plan

- Three stressors I can reduce
- Three healthy coping skills
- One boundary I will establish

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Personal Wellness Plan

- One person I will ask for support
- One thing I will stop doing
- One thing I will start doing

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Key Take Aways

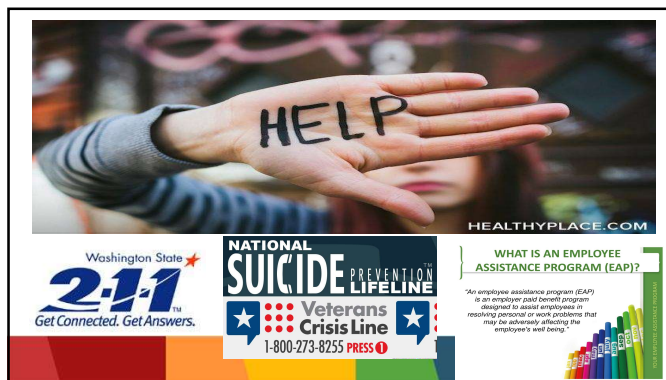
- Stress is inevitable; burnout is not.
- Healthy boundaries improve resident services.
- Taking care of yourself allows you to better care for others.

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Key Take Aways

- Resilient employees create resilient communities.
- Self-care is an ethical responsibility, not a luxury.

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Recommended Resources

Employee Support

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Local behavioral health providers
- Community mental health centers

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Recommended Resources

Professional Resources

- National Council on Aging
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- American Institute of Stress

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Books

- The Compassion Fatigue Workbook
- Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle
- The Resilient Practitioner
- Emotional Intelligence 2.0

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Compassion Fatigue: Cultivating Work-Life Balance to Prevent Burnout



FOR AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING PROVIDERS



You make a difference every day in the lives of seniors.

Compassion fatigue can happen when the emotional demands of caring for others become overwhelming. Recognizing the signs and using healthy coping strategies can help you maintain your well-being—and continue the important work you do.



EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION

Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical strain that can result from caring deeply for others.

It is NOT a sign of weakness—it is a natural response to prolonged stress and exposure to the challenges seniors face.

Over time, it can lead to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and impact your health and the quality of care you provide.

Work-life balance is essential. When you take care of yourself, you are better able to support your residents, colleagues, and community.



SIGNS & RED FLAGS

You might be experiencing compassion fatigue if you notice:



Feeling emotionally drained or “numb”



Irritability, frustration, or mood swings



Decreased empathy or feeling detached



Trouble concentrating or making decisions



Changes in sleep (trouble sleeping or over-sleeping)



Physical symptoms (headaches, fatigue, stomach issues)



Feeling hopeless, overwhelmed, or like you can't keep up

If left unaddressed, these feelings can affect your health, relationships, and the care you provide.



COPING SKILLS THAT HELP

Small steps can make a big difference. Try these tools to protect your well-being:



SET BOUNDARIES

Honor your work hours. It's okay to say “no” when you need to.



PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Make time for activities that recharge you—movement, hobbies, music, reading, faith, relaxation.



CONNECT

Talk with trusted colleagues, friends, or a mentor. You don't have to carry it all alone.



TAKE BREAKS

Step away, breathe deeply, and give your mind and body a reset.



FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Celebrate small wins and the positive impact you make every day.



SEEK SUPPORT

Utilize Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), counseling, or spiritual support when needed.



You matter.

Your well-being is vital to the well-being of your residents, your team, and your community.



BUILD A SUPPORTIVE TEAM CULTURE

Look out for one another. Encourage open conversations about stress and well-being. Together, we can create a healthy, compassionate workplace where everyone thrives.



**STRONG CAREGIVERS.
STRONG COMMUNITIES.
BETTER TOGETHER.**



NEED HELP?

If you are feeling overwhelmed or distressed, reach out for support.

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Manager or HR Department
- Local Mental Health Resources
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: **988**

Take care of yourself, so you can continue to make a difference. ♥