How to Deal with “Compassion Fatigue”

As a faculty member, advising and supporting students who are overwhelmed with the stress of the pandemic and other stressful situations can be emotionally draining. It is all too easy to carry the emotional burden into your own life. It’s important to take measures to address and preserve your own emotional reserves so that you can maintain your well-being and continue to effectively meet the needs of your students.

The following tips can help:

**Take stock of your symptoms.**
Common signs of emotional fatigue include the following:

- Feeling bored, detached, and/or having a sense of failure that you’re unable to relieve the pain of a person
- Becoming frustrated, easily irritated, or short-tempered
- Losing compassion for some people while becoming overly involved with others
- Inability to separate yourself from the job in off hours
- Feeling as if you’re working harder, but accomplishing less
- Sleeplessness, headaches, backaches, being easily startled, and other physical symptoms

**Take Steps to Combat Emotional Fatigue**

**Take mini “time-outs” every day.** Spending a few minutes practicing mindfulness—being aware of the present moment without judgment—can create an oasis of calm, countering the reactions to stress and bringing a sense of balance.

To start, sit quietly and focus your attention on slow, deep breathing. Notice any uneasy thoughts or sensations that may arise, allowing them to pass by like drifting clouds. Practicing mindfulness can also help you reflect on what triggers your emotional and physical reactions, learn from them, and move forward.

**Build in other restorative activities.** Take the dog for a walk a walk, listen to music, read a book, go for a hike, call a friend, or return to a hobby that once gave you pleasure—just do something for yourself every day.

**Get moving.** Even light exercise like walking, stretching or dancing to your favorite tune can help boost your energy, clear your mind, and even help with sleep.

**Cultivate healthy relationships.** Schedule a lunch or a dinner/movie/walking date with a friend or family member to share some fun. This can help relieve tension.

**Banish negative self-talk.** Practice being kind and compassionate in thoughts toward yourself, reminding yourself of the good things you do each day. Consider keeping a daily gratitude journal. Writing down a few things you are grateful for each day—even if it’s just for the sun streaming through your window—has been associated with positive improvements in well-being.

**Additional tips for good self-care**

- **Meet your basic needs.** Be sure to eat, drink and sleep regularly.
- **Take your scheduled breaks.** Whenever possible, give yourself a rest.
- **Connect with co-workers.** Talk to and support each other.
- **Stay in touch with family.** Contact your loved ones, if possible.

**Turn to Health Advocate**

If you’re suffering from sleeplessness, poor self-care, loss of interest, or other symptoms, a Health Advocate Licensed Counselor can guide you with coping strategies and connect you with additional self-care resources. It’s confidential, offered at no charge to you, and referrals are provided for in-depth help, if needed. In a crisis, we’re here 24/7, at 866-799-2728.