

# Compassion Fatigue in the Workplace: Warning signs and strategies to cope with Compassion Fatigue



## What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion Fatigue is the lessening of compassion over time. It is typically caused by an extensive exposure to second hand trauma, which causes extreme stress. This is typically caused by dealing with victims of trauma. It is found to affect both the work life and home life. It can affect many relationships especially at home as the symptoms will also be present at home.

**Ottawa Police Service: 1/3 employees missed work in the last six months due to emotional or physical fatigue**

## Strategies

### Self Improvements

- **Developing a warning system:** acknowledge building stress
- **Daily practices:** exercise, healthy eating, meditation
- **Strive for balance:** separate work from home, learn to say no

## Symptoms

### Physical

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Headaches

### Emotional

- Irritable
- Anxious
- Agitated

### Cognitive

- Difficulty with:
  - Problem solving
  - Decision making
  - Concentration

### Behavioural

- Withdrawn
- Absenteeism
- Avoidance
- Increased alcohol use

**Stress-related absences cost Canadian employers an estimated \$3.5 billion annually**

## Organizational Costs

- Decreased morale
- Lower employee satisfaction
- Increased conflict
- Increased health burden in work force
- Increased health care costs
- Increased grievances and legal disputes
- Staff turnover and retention challenges
- Absenteeism and presenteeism costs
  - Sick leave and disability costs
  - Overtime
  - Return to work protocols
  - Cost for managing disability cases
  - Work overload for colleagues
  - Loss of critical skill capacity
  - Indirect harm to work team
  - Loss of intellectual capital
  - Increase in errors
  - Decrease in quality of work

**"...mental health professionals with no law enforcement background must make special efforts ... to learn about police work and police culture in order to gain credibility with officers.."**

### Workplace Improvements

- Monitor and ensure manageable work loads
- *Provide Education/ Training / Workshops throughout career*
- *Schedule regular debriefings or meetings with co-workers*
- Read "Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement" by Kevin Gilmartin
- *Hire staff therapy resource*

### Third Party Improvements

- *See a therapist preferably one provided by work, if not a private one may be hired*
- Use the Employee Assistance Programs if one is provided
- Critical Incident Stress Management Team or Peer Support Team

**One in three North American workers are living with extreme stress daily**