

The Compassion Fatigue Workbook



**Creative Tools for Transforming
Compassion Fatigue
& Vicarious Traumatization**

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The Compassion Fatigue Workbook: Creative Tools for Transforming Compassion Fatigue & Vicarious Traumatization

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How to use this workbook

There is no right or wrong way to use this workbook. You can skip through and pick out the most useful tools or you can work through it systematically chapter by chapter. To get the most benefit from this book, I suggest setting aside some protected time each week to read and work through the exercises. This workbook will lead you through many experiential activities and offer concrete strategies that will hopefully help you make real changes in your personal and professional life. Please feel free to email me with any comments or feedback: whp@cogeco.ca

First things first:

✓ **GET A BUDDY/CREATE A SUPPORT SYSTEM:**

One of the best ways to use this workbook is to create a buddy system and work through the workbook together, one chapter per meeting. Find two or three friends or work colleagues and agree to meet weekly or speak to one another via email or by phone. All of these exercises have been used in group settings during our workshops and are therefore designed to be extremely safe. You do not need to pre-read all of them before committing to working on this in a group setting. However, I would strongly recommend that all group members read the article on Low Impact Debriefing before meeting. This article can be found in chapter three.

✓ **SET ASIDE TIME:**

As your first commitment to yourself, I suggest that you set aside a minimum of an hour (and ideally two hours) per week for the next 6 weeks in order to fully experience the benefits of this workbook. As the book progresses, you will be asked to make other commitments. Write them down, in ink, in your calendar – if you do not own a calendar or electronic daytimer, please put this workbook down now and run to the nearest stationery store to get one. **Treat this time as respectfully as you would a promise to someone else you care for.**

✓ **MAKE THIS WORKBOOK PART OF YOUR JOB:**

Ask if your workplace would be willing to help you pay for the cost of this workbook. More than 75% of the hundreds of helpers who have attended our live workshops were supported by their agency to attend. Several of those agencies also had us come and do more in depth coaching with their teams. In addition, you may ask your supervisor if you can work on the exercises during a protected professional development slot. Reserve a time when you will not be interrupted or bogged down by other work. You may need to play with the timing until you get it right -whatever works best for you is the right time.

✓ **WRITE IT DOWN:**

Get yourself a journal, notebook or binder - whatever you would prefer using to document your personal journey with this course. There will be many activities that focus on just noticing, then there will be checklists and questionnaires, and finally activities that will hone in on personal strategies for dealing with stress and compassion fatigue. You are likely to want to have it somewhere in one place. Studies show that goals that are written down are more successful than goals that are simply thought about. You have probably noticed this with people trying to lose weight or follow a budget.

✓ **MAKING IT PERSONAL Homework:**

This workbook offers many strategies both at home and at work. For these strategies to actually work for you, you need to be willing to make real and lasting changes to your life. Feeling overwhelmed didn't happen to you overnight and it is not likely to improve just because you have this workbook and it sits on your desk day after day.

Be mindful that your inner critic may come up with lots of reasons why this won't work, why you won't be able to do this, why this isn't a good time and most commonly: "*But I already know all of this, I know how to have better self care!*" Helpers are better than anyone at "yes butting". In fact we have "yes butted" our way into miserable self care, poor health and low moods. It is so easy to find a reason why we can't start an exercise program, eat better, or spend more time with friends. The goal of this workbook is to challenge you just slightly beyond your comfort zone but to keep all activities and "change requests" both reasonable and realistic.

Therefore, to maximise the benefits of this workbook, I recommend that you take the extra time to complete the homework once you have worked through each chapter.

I invite you to read the insightful words of Al Siebert from his book The Resiliency Advantage: "*Your resiliency strengths come from self-motivated, self-managed efforts to develop resiliency skills. Some people who hear or read about ways to become more resilient mistakenly think that the power lies in the recommended method. They go through the steps in a detached way thinking the technique will make things better. Then when things don't turn out well, they blame the technique for not working. This is like tossing a can opener at a can of food and then blaming the can opener when the can doesn't open*". (Siebert, 2005)

Don't blame the can opener, take a risk and follow the exercises in this workbook in earnest. If you make your own self-care a priority you can make real changes to your life and mitigate the impact of compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization.

Disclaimer

This workbook is meant to target issues pertaining to how your work affects you. In working through the material you may experience powerful feelings and reactions. This book is not meant to be a substitute for psychological counselling or medical care. If you are feeling vulnerable at this time, it is best to combine working on this manual with psychotherapy. If you suspect that you are suffering from clinical depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, please seek the help of a mental health professional right away.

Abbreviations

For simplicity's sake, I will refer to Compassion Fatigue as *CF* and Vicarious Traumatization as *VT*.