

Workbook Handouts for Compassion Fatigue Workshops

These exercises were developed from several resources including “Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community” by Charles R. Figley, Ph.D. and Robert G. Roop, Ph.D. (2006) and by “Compassion Fatigue: The Unspoken Hazard in Veterinary Medicine” by Chery F. Kendrick , DVM, MPVM, MLT, ASCP (2009)

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Breathing

Probably the number one stress reduction technique used is breathing. When people experience stress they may notice that their breathing becomes shallow, and that deeper breathing follows moments such as laughter.

Taking deep cleansing breaths is the easiest way to de-stress. The benefits of breathing deeply have been medically proven.

The Wellness Workbook by Ross (1988) has perhaps the simplest breathing exercises:

Breathing Exercise:

1. Sit down or lie down
2. Inhale slowly and say to yourself: "I am..."
3. Exhale slowly and say to yourself: "relaxed."

Gradually consider the advantage of allowing yourself to breathe smoothly and naturally. Consider that when you breathe this way and stop thinking about stressors your breathing becomes even deeper. Keep in mind that the problem will not simply go away as you focus on your breathing however that this exercise will enable you to take a break from the problem calm yourself and come back to the problem with greater energy and mental clarity. The more effective you are in learning how to breathe and manage stress better the more effective you will be in solving the problems. So give yourself a break from your problems and stress just long enough to practice this exercise several times.

4. Exhale deeply, contracting your belly
5. Inhale slowly as you expand your abdomen
6. Continue inhaling as you expand your chest
7. Continue inhaling as you raise your shoulders up toward your ears
8. Hold for a few comfortable seconds
9. Exhale in reverse pattern slowly.
10. Release your shoulders, relax your chest, contract your belly.
11. Repeat

Try to do this exercise before or after meals, and especially at bedtime

Creative Visualization Exercise

This is a relaxation technique that uses guided imagery.

The whole idea is to induce relaxation quickly by creating a picture in your mind of a safe place so that you can “go” there quickly. There is also a neutralizing exercise in this creative visualization exercise that helps you detoxify.

The more you practice this exercise the quicker you will achieve a relaxed peaceful state and the deeper that relaxed state will become.

Steps:

- 1) Go to a safe quiet place where you can work through your relaxation technique in peace and quiet.
- 2) Now take a deep cleansing breath to start and walk through the following steps, slowly breathing in then slowly releasing that cleansing breath.
- 3) Close your eyes to help you more completely visualize and feel
- 4) Think of all the things you love, things that comfort you, that trigger feelings of comfort, satisfaction and lack of stress.
- 5) Bring those images forward until you feel a smile forming on your face
- 6) Think of a specific or imagined place that is safe, joyful and serene. This will be your **“Safe and Joyful Place” (SJP)**
- 7) Bring that SJP strongly to your mind and do the following:
 - a) Imagine sounds, smells, sensations- everything about the place – using all of your sense
 - b) Focus on what it looks like when you look straight above where you are in your SJP
 - c) Focus on things to the right and then to the left of you in your SJP
- 8) Allow yourself to be in this place that brings your mind the greatest peace, restfulness and joy possible

- 9) Start the detoxifying process while here in your SJP by imagining a kettle on the stove and drop each toxic by-product of your care giving into the kettle.
- 10) Now imagine that kettle of toxic by-products as a specific color- let's say dark purple for example.
- 11) Now take a dropper with all the joyous happy parts of care giving, all the good memories and sensations and imagine these as liquid in a bottle.
- 12) Take the dropper off the bottle and start adding drops into the kettle of toxic purple.
- 13) Watch as each drop dilutes and eventually neutralizes the toxic-by-products of caring for the suffering.
- 14) Now concentrate on the joy, restfulness and contentment that comes from neutralizing the toxic soup. Feel the zest for life coming back to you.
- 15) Concentrate on the contentment and love of life and the happiness derived from working with animals and people.
- 16) Take a deep cleansing breath breathing in then slowly releasing out.
- 17) Gradually return back to reality and the tasks of the day.

Be sure to take time to go to a special spot where you feel safe to go through your relaxation and visualization exercise whenever you need to.

Self Hypnosis Exercise (Self-Talk, Self-Advice)

The purpose of this exercise is to evoke a relaxed consciousness and focus that will help you overcome stress linked to various stressors.

It is especially important to understand that you need to heal yourself and to concentrate on your own situation and how YOU can control stress and its effects in your life, not rely on others to fix it for you.

First decide on the advice you want to give yourself and put it in the form of a positive statement. Some examples: "Slow down and enjoy life", "Be happy don't worry" or "Turn negatives into positives".

Be creative but make it something you really want to achieve and let it be a guide for you.

Write the suggestion down in the blank in the script below.

Now make a recording of this script with your personalized information included.

Play this recording to yourself at least once a day when you can give yourself at least 30 minutes to relax. As with any of these exercises be sure to choose a safe quiet spot and take a deep cleansing breath before starting.

Don't worry if you fall asleep listening 😊

The Script:

- 1) My name is _____. I care about myself deeply and completely and know that when I am at my best I am more effective as a care giver. I choose to reserve the following thirty minutes to myself.
- 2) I am starting my self-talk session now. It will continue until I hear myself say "Attention". In the meantime I will get more and more relaxed and focus more and more on my voice. I will give myself advice. This advice will be effective only if I want it to be effective.

- 3) I will now close my eyes and focus my attention on lying down on a comfortable bed in a very safe and comforting place that I know about. This special place allows me complete privacy, safety and comfort.
- 4) In my safe place, lying on my safe and comfortable bed, I can feel a warm, magical quilt covering my feet. This quilt is covered with materials representing the best scenes from my life in which I felt love.
- 5) When I am ready, my feet will become more and more relaxed as I pull the quilt up to cover my lower legs. When I do so, my lower legs start to become more and more relaxed. My feet are becoming even more deeply relaxed, followed closely by my lower legs. All of the muscles in my feet and lower legs are becoming limp and relaxed.
- 6) When I am ready, I will pull the magic quilt over my knees. Now they begin to feel relaxed and soon feel as relaxed as my lower legs and feet. Every muscle and tendon in my knees and below them is becoming more and more relaxed. All tension is flowing out of this area, leaving all the muscles loose and limp.
- 7) Sometimes I may hear noises or have thoughts that attract my attention. I will just gently let them go away because this time is reserved for just me. I am thinking only of relaxing and letting go of all tension. All of my muscles are becoming more and more relaxed and I am feeling pleasantly drowsy. I will not go to sleep. I will remain alert but feeling more and more relaxed. I am sinking further and further into myself with no cares or worries.

- 8) When I am ready, I will pull the magic quilt over my upper legs. Now they begin to feel relaxed and soon feel as relaxed as the area below them. Every muscle and tendon in my upper legs and below them is becoming more and more relaxed. All tension is flowing out of this area, leaving all the muscles loose and limp.
- 9) When I am ready, I will pull the magic quilt up over my stomach and just below my chest. Now my stomach begins to feel relaxed and soon feels as relaxed as the areas below. Every muscle and tendon in the areas below my chest is becoming more and more relaxed. All tension is flowing out of this area, leaving all the muscles loose and limp.
- 10) When I am ready, I will pull the magic quilt up over my arms and chest, just below my neck. Now my arms and chest begin to feel relaxed and soon feels as relaxed as the areas below them. Every muscle and tendon in the areas below my neck is becoming more and more relaxed. All tension is flowing out of this area, leaving all the muscles loose and limp.
- 11) The relaxation is like warmth, spreading to every place covered by my magic quilt. The muscles in the covered area are becoming limper. I could move if I really had to, but I am becoming so comfortably limp and relaxed that I don't want to move. I am still and relaxed, drifting deeper and deeper into a pleasant state of dreamy relaxation.
- 12) When I am ready, I will pull the magic quilt up over my neck, leaving just my head exposed. Now my neck begins to feel relaxed and soon feels as relaxed as the areas below it. Every muscle and tendon in the area covered by my quilt is becoming more

and more relaxed. All tension is flowing out of this area, leaving all the muscles loose and limp.

13) Even though my magic quilt remains below my head, now the relaxation is spreading into my mouth and jaw muscles. My tongue is limp, resting in my mouth. I may briefly have more saliva in my mouth, but that will go away shortly. Now my cheeks and eyes are relaxing. I could open my eyes if I wanted to, but unless I need to, it would be too much work. It would take too much effort to open my eyes. I am drifting pleasantly downward, becoming more and more relaxed.

14) The muscles in my forehead are becoming more and more relaxed. I can imagine them, like loosening rubber bands across my forehead, becoming limp and floppy. I am feeling deeper and deeper relaxation. From the tips of my toes to the top of my head, I am becoming more and more relaxing, drifting downward, deeper and deeper.

15) When I am ready I am going to count down from twenty-five. As I count down, I will continue to become more and more relaxed and pleasantly deeper and deeper into relaxation. I will get drowsy and deeply relaxed, but I will not actually go to sleep. I will simply drift deeper and deeper into my self-hypnotic state of deeply relaxed awareness.

16) By the time I reach zero, I will be in a very pleasant, sleeplike state. I will still be able to direct my thoughts. I could rouse myself immediately if I needed to, but if not, I will give myself a break. I will continue to drift deeper and deeper into relaxation.

17) When I am ready I will attend to the counting twenty-five twenty-four
twenty-three twenty-two drifting deeper and deeper with each number ...
twenty-one ... twenty ... feeling drowsier and drowsier, yet still awake ... nineteen ...
eighteen ... seventeen ... floating gently downward with each count ... sixteen ...
fifteen ... fourteen ... drifting, drowsy ... thirteen ... twelve ... eleven ... ten ... more
than halfway down, drifting deeper and deeper with each number ... nine ... eight ...
seven ... six ... five ... feeling so relaxed ... four ... becoming more and more relaxed
and drowsy ... three ... two ... one ... zero. Breathing pleasantly, slowly drifting
deeper and deeper with each breath.

18) As I continue to be deeply relaxed and become even more relaxed, I am thinking
about my advice: [At this point insert advice to yourself]:

19) All of the advice I give myself, I do so out of love and self-caring. I know that this is
good advice and that my life and my work will be better as a result of following it.

20) Each time I practice this self-talk exercise, I will become better and better at it. I will be able to relax deeper and deeper in less time with each practice.

21) Now, as I count to three, I am going to slowly, gradually, pleasantly wake up and come to attention. I will return to my normal, waking state except that I'll be far more alert and relaxed than before and fully aware of my self-advice. Now, starting up, one ... becoming more alert ... two ... getting ready to wake up ... three, wake up.

22) I congratulate myself for taking this time for my self-care and will be thinking often of my own advice throughout the day and even when I sleep.

Dealing with Violent People

Police officers love to go through a short list of “to-dos” when discussing how to deal with violent people.

If you are ever confronted with a violent person follow these general rules:

- 1) The louder they get the quieter you get.
- 2) Offer to get assistance, for example you can say: “Our manager can help resolve this for you let me go get them” or “Let me get one of the doctors to help you with this issue”.
- 3) Do NOT get confrontational or accusatory
- 4) Do empathize saying things like “I can understand how you feel...”
- 5) Give them an out by offering to wait in another area while you get a comfort item such as a drink of water, cup of coffee
- 6) Ask them if there is anyone they would like you to call to help them with whatever is distressing them
- 7) Ask them if they would like some quiet time in a quiet room

Bottom line is:

- 1) do not get caught alone with a potentially violent person
- 2) Get Help! Never hesitate to call 911 or to press a panic alarm.
- 3) Run, kick, scream, do whatever you need to do to stay safe and get away from danger.

No job is worth endangering your life for. Talk to your Safety Coordinator about other ways your clinic protects employees from potential workplace violence such as panic alarms or secret alert words.

Giving Credit Exercise

We all like to be appreciated. Take a moment to think about ways to give yourself and others credit where credit is due.

- 1) Be sure to take time to say "Good job!"
- 2) Be sure to take time to give yourself a pat on the back
- 3) Take time to mention to others something one of your colleagues or co-workers did that you appreciate
- 4) Offer tidbits for newsletters or FaceBook inclusion about something you or colleague did that needs recognition
- 5) Use social interactions to uplift your co-workers
- 6) Avoid negative statements, even if there was a negative event find the positive
- 7) Being a Pollyanna isn't always all bad
- 8) Smile- it takes fewer muscles to smile more to frown and a smile is much healthier
- 9) Breathe deeply and realize your self worth and team value

Learning To Say "No" Exercise

Just say "No!" Easier said than done sometimes. Be sure to actually take a moment to think of the consequences of saying yes before you agree to take that next project on.

Exercise:

Work through five examples of types of things you are asked to do during the course of your job that are optional (not necessarily in your job duty or required)

Fill in the chart below listing the pros and cons- benefits and disadvantages - of saying yes vs. saying no. Be sure to use this system to weigh the cost of saying yes all the time.

Examples	Pro/Benefit		Con/Disadvantage	
	Yes	No	Yes	No

A Finally a Simple Checklist

Complete this checklist now and then again every three months, to see how your self-care program is progressing. How often did you do the following things in the last full week you worked?

Self-Care Activity

	Self-Care Activity	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Don't Know
1	Did not respect my own dignity or self-worth				
2	Took responsibility for self-care				
3	Self-care yielded to duty to perform				
4	Thought about my right to wellness				
5	Thought about my own physical rest and nourishment				
6	Thought about my own emotional rest and nourishment				
7	Thought about moderating food, drink, cigarettes, and other substances for my own health				
8	Sought, found, and remembered appreciation from supervisors and clients				
9	Made it known that I wish to be recognized for my service				
10	Made or remembered my formal, tangible commitment to self-care				
11	Set or recalled self-care plan deadlines and goals				
12	Thought about strategies for letting go of work				
13	Made a formal, tangible commitment				
14	Set deadlines and goals				
15	Generated strategies that work and followed them				
16	Thought about strategies for gaining a sense of achievement				

Self-Care Activity

	Self-Care Activity	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Don't Know
17	Thought about acquiring adequate rest and relaxation				
18	Practiced effective, daily stress-reduction method(s)				
19	Practiced effective physical exercise to improve my health				
20	Noticed and worked on my body to improve my health				
21	Practiced effective sleep induction and maintenance for better health				
22	Practiced proper nutrition for better health				
23	Practiced effective behaviors and practices that sustain balance between work and play				
24	Practiced effective relaxation time and methods				
25	Had contact with nature or other calming stimuli				
26	Practiced effective methods of creative expression				
27	Practiced effective skills for assertiveness				
28	Practiced effective skills for stress reduction				
29	Practiced effective skills for interpersonal communication				
30	Practiced effective skills for cognitive restructuring				
31	Practiced effective skills for time management				
32	Practiced effective skills and competence in meditation or spiritual practice that is calming				
33	Practiced effective methods of self-assessment and self-awareness				
34	Found social supports				

Self-Care Activity

	Self-Care Activity	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Don't Know
35	Got help				
36	Practiced social activism				
37	Balanced work and home				
38	Practiced boundaries/limit setting regarding work and personal time				
39	Practiced setting or retaining professional boundaries				
40	Practiced setting or retaining personal boundaries				
41	Effectively addressed the pressures of multiple roles				
42	Practiced realism about how much I can do in one day				
43	Found support/help at work through peer support				
44	Found support/help at work through supervision/consultation/therapy				
45	Interacted with role models/mentors				
46	Sought and noted indications and causes of work satisfaction				
47	Thought about improvements in my self-care plan				

Your completed checklist should indicate attention to your own self-care. If it does, then you are moving toward wellness. If it does not, then you are not trying to assume responsibility for your own care. As noted throughout this book, only you know best regarding the state of your health—mentally and medically—and how best to move toward wellness.