



In this section of the toolkit we will delve more deeply into the concept of compassion fatigue and the stages that we might experience if compassion fatigue is not addressed. As we face the complex reality of parenting, our ability to maintain an open and compassionate approach to our children can be challenged. Compassion fatigue can develop slowly overtime and go unrecognized. This section gives us insights that can guide us to avoid or stop compassion fatigue as early as possible.



Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to this session.



#### Circle Agenda

<u>Circle Agenda for Section 3, In-Person</u> Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session in-person.

<u>Circle Agenda for Section 3, Virtual</u> Use this agenda if you are leading your group in a session virtually.

#### Handouts to Support Content Covered in Circle Agenda

**Compassion Fatigue Cycle** 

Wellness Compass Assessment

This document is formatted as a fillable PDF that can be printed or completed on an electronic device.





In this article we will delve more deeply into the concept of compassion fatigue and the stages that we might experience if compassion fatigue is not addressed. As we face the complex reality of parenting, our ability to maintain an open and compassionate approach to our children can be challenged. Compassion fatigue can develop slowly overtime and go unrecognized. This article gives us insights that can guide us to avoid or stop compassion fatigue as early as possible.



Parenting is rewarding and also challenging. <u>Ross Greene</u>, clinical child psychologist and respected author and trainer, refers to compassion fatigue quite simply as a decrease in a person's capacity to empathize with those who are suffering. Very few of us come to our role as parents knowing fully how to address the multiple expectations of preparing a child for life in the world, as well as all of the behavioral challenges that are presented to us by our children. These expectations can be overwhelming and can lead to burnout if measures are not taken to build skills, support resilience, and alleviate the symptoms.

What does compassion fatigue look like? What are the symptoms to look for early on to be able to minimize its impact and create (or return to) a path of resilience? Eric Gentry, PhD, offers a way to understand compassion fatigue in his staged model. Cat pictures were added to add some fun and assist with memory. First Stage Milwaukee, created this <u>fun video</u>, set to the Overture from the musical Cats.

Developed in partnership with:





#### compassionresiliencetoolkit.org



#### Compassion Fatigue Cycle (adapted from work of Eric Gentry, PhD, 2012)



Zealot/Idealist - We are committed, involved, and available ... ready to problem solve ... ready to make a difference ... we willingly give it all we have ... our enthusiasm overflows ... we are willing to go the extra mile and often do so without prompting ... "I'll do that!!"

An example of the Zealot Stage - New parents promising to use only cloth diapers, make their own organic baby food, and stay up on all the parenting research. Also setting the expectation that you are going to love every part of parenting.

**Irritability** - We begin to see the imperfect nature of the systems and people around us ... we distance ourselves from family, other parents and friends ... we begin to belittle our children, spouses, friends, etc. ... we talk unfairly and put down their efforts ... the use of humor is sometimes strained ... we become distracted when our children are speaking with us ... oversights and mistakes begin to occur. We may notice our anger, cynicism, diminished creativity, and sadness.

An example of the Irritable Stage - You realize the expectations you set for yourself are not attainable. You become frustrated with others and frequently use sarcasm when responding to your children. You have a hard time giving your children your full attention.





Withdrawal - We are unable to embrace the complexity of the problems ... we begin to see our children as irritants. ... complaints may be made about our efforts and we might have problems in our work life ... we are tired all the time ... we no longer wish to talk about our children and may not share our concerns with others ... we neglect our family, friends and ourselves ... our shield gets thicker and thicker to block our pain and sadness.

We may experience difficulty empathizing and may feel to numb to other's pain.

An example of the Withdrawal Stage - You are drained of energy and avoid your children when possible (lets others watch children as often as possible, use electronics excessively to distract the children when at home). You have feelings of sadness and have a hard time connecting with others.

**Zombie** - Our hopelessness turns to rage ... we begin to hate people ... we get angry at our family and friends if they dare question us. ... others become incompetent or ignorant in our eyes ... we parent in a silo, without support from others ... we have no time for humor or fun.

We may have a sense that we can't ever do enough, an inflated sense of importance related to our parenting, hyper-vigilance/ sleeplessness, and a sense of persecution.

An example of the Zombie Stage - Feels you are the only one who can care for the family and their needs (laundry, cooking, cleaning) even though there are other capable family members available, you lose your temper with your family members often and never have fun.







**Renewal vs. Unwell** - If we have not addressed this cycle earlier, we come to a fork in the road where we either continue deeper into compassion fatigue to a place of poor health and victimization (overwhelmed and repeating the cycle, illness) or we take a turn towards renewal (hardiness, resiliency, transformation).

The good news is that at any stage in the cycle, one can learn skills and mindsets that change the path towards compassion satisfaction. The goal of the Parent and Caregiver Compassion

Resilience program is for us to learn these mindsets and skills in order to proactively address our ways of being to avoid compassion fatigue and, when it does arise, address it early with confidence and support. It is beneficial to begin by getting a sense of the starting place for ourselves.



#### Want More Energy? Consider Gratitude!

Practicing being grateful, among many other benefits, increases your energy. You can start now by thinking of three things for which you are grateful. Then choose a time of day, every day, to set your mind on gratitude. Give it time, enjoy exploring gratefulness and see if you too find added energy for the important work you do. Liza Long, is a mother of a child with mental health challenges. Here are <u>her thoughts</u> on gratitude.



#### System Drivers of Compassion Fatigue

Parent &

Caregiver





## Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Planning	<ul> <li>Send out <u>pre-read</u> for Section 3</li> <li>Prepare materials for Session 3</li> </ul>
Purpose of Circle	<ul> <li>Today you will:</li> <li>1. Explore the experience of compassion fatigue.</li> <li>2. How shame and blame impact compassion fatigue.</li> <li>3. How compassion and self-compassion can prevent or lessen compassion fatigue.</li> </ul>
Time/Materials/ Preparation	<ul> <li>Time: 90 minutes</li> <li>Materials:</li> <li>Group agreements</li> <li>Group values and family goals</li> <li>Name tags</li> <li>Pens/markers</li> <li>Centerpiece</li> <li>Talking piece</li> <li>Fidgets</li> <li>Flipchart paper with compassion resilience definition</li> <li>A few copies of the <u>Compassionate Action Steps</u> handout to spread around the center of the circle.</li> <li>Handouts: <u>Compassionate Action Steps</u>, <u>Emotional Regulation Plans</u>, <u>Strategies for Keeping Calm</u>, <u>"Just Like Me" cards</u></li> <li>Preparation: Arrange chairs in a circle without furniture in the middle. Hang compassion resilience definition on the wall.</li> </ul>

#### **IN-PERSON CIRCLE AGENDA**

Supporting families and caregivers: Compassion resilience toolkit for parents and caregivers | Section 3 | Compassion Fatigue



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Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Opening and Check-in (20 minutes)	<ul> <li>Share</li> <li>Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. (<i>Pause</i>) Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this circle and your personal reason for being here. (<i>Pause for 10 seconds</i>) I invite you to bring your attention back to the circle.</li> </ul>
	Ask
	<ul> <li>(Go-around) Please share your name and and a positive thought you had today, something that made you smile.</li> </ul>
	Share
	• As a reminder, we have our group agreements in the center of our circle to guide our time together as a group (point out their location, either in the middle of the circle, or on a wall nearby).
	<ul> <li>Last session we discussed what compassion looks like in action, how that applies to our lives and ways to regulate our and our children's emotions. Today we are going to be looking at the cycle of compassion fatigue, how we have seen ourselves in the cycle and introduce a tool to help us monitor our wellbeing.</li> </ul>

Guiding Questions	Share
(30 minutes)	• For the purposes of our time together, when we talk about <b>compassion fatigue</b> , we mean the feelings of depression, sadness, exhaustion, anxiety and irritation that may be experienced by people who are helpers in their work and/or personal life.
	<ul> <li>It is important to note that compassion fatigue is a normal response to the challenging and often overwhelming situations we face. There is a difference between compassion fatigue (develops over time) and triggered reactions (can happen without build up) - both can take us to "downstairs" brain responses we discussed in our last session.</li> </ul>
	Provide the <u>Stages of Compassion Fatigue</u> handout and walk participants through the cycle (use the handout to assist you with your explanation - examples for each part of the cycle are listed below. Also, feel free to ask the group for examples of each stage as you explain them to the group instead of using example outlined below).



Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Guiding Questions 💿 🔘	Facilitator Tip: Example for each stage of the cycle include:
(30 minutes) continued	• Zealot - New parents promising to use only cloth diapers, make their own organic baby food, and stay up on all the parenting research. Also setting the expectation that you are going to love every part of parenting.
	• Irritable - You realize the expectations you set for yourself are not attainable. You become frustrated with others and frequently use sarcasm when responding to your children. You have a hard time giving your children your full attention.
	• Withdrawal - You are drained of energy and avoid your children when possible (lets others watch children as often as possible, use electronics excessively to distract the children when at home). You have feelings of sadness and have a hard time connecting with others.
	• <b>Zombie</b> - Feels you are the only one who can care for the family and their needs (laundry, cooking, cleaning) even though there are other capable family members available, you lose your temper with your family members often and never have fun.
	Ask
	<ul> <li>(Open mic) How have you experienced the impact of compassion fatigue - whether your fatigue or someone who cared for you in your life?</li> </ul>
	• (Open mic) What do you think the impact of shame and blame is on the cycle of fatigue?
Ŷ Y Y	<i>Facilitator Tip</i> : An example here is that shame and blame can perpetuate someone's movement through the cycle. They shame themselves for not being more engaged during the withdrawn phase, which pushes them into zombie cat.
	<ul> <li>(Open mic) How have you practiced self-compassion to help you avoid feelings of blame or shame?</li> </ul>
	<i>Facilitator Tip</i> : An example may be the use of positive self-talk to help someone realize their common humanity and normalize how challenging being a parent is.
Check for Understanding	Share
(20 minutes)	<ul> <li>Rather than focusing on avoiding or fixing compassion fatigue, we believe it is more powerful to figure out how to feed and grow our compassion resilience. As a reminder, compassion</li> </ul>

to figure out how to feed and grow our compassion resilience. As a reminder, compassion
resilience is (point to poster hanging in the room):
- "Compassion resilience is the power to return to a position of empathy strength, and hope

- "Compassion resilience is the power to return to a position of empathy, strength, and hope after the daily experience of the challenges our children face and those we face as their parents. It requires us to be able to find optimism in an imperfect world."



Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Check for Understanding (20 minutes) continued	<ul> <li>Ask</li> <li>(Open mic) What are some tips you would give to other parents and caregivers on how to build compassion resilience?</li> </ul>
	Share
	• Building your compassion resilience is all about how you take care of yourself. We have a Wellness Compass Self-Care assessment for you to take home with you. This assessment isn't meant to tell you how "good" or "bad" you are doing at self-care, but rather provide you with some additional ideas of ways to practice self-care.
	Hand out Wellness Compass Self-Care Assessment.

Self-care and Closing (15 minutes)	Share
	<ul> <li>Invite all in the circle to take a moment to pause, take a few slow breaths, name in your mind something you learned today and let go of any self judgment that may be a barrier to your continued reflection on that learning.</li> </ul>
	• Our self-care strategy today is the practice of gratitude. In the last 20 years science has shown that practicing gratitude daily offers benefits to our overall well-being. Gratitude has been shown to lead to positive mood, optimism and pro-social behavior - something that could help us get out of a stage of compassion fatigue.
	Ask
	• (Go-around) Please share one thing that you feel grateful for about this group and one thing you are grateful for outside of this group.
	Share
	• Thank you for being here today. We look forward to seeing you (insert next meeting day/time here).

Parent &

Caregiver





### Virtual Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Planning	<ul> <li>Send out <u>pre-read</u> for Section 3</li> <li>Prepare materials for Session 3</li> <li>Share handouts from Session 2</li> </ul>
Purpose of Circle	<ul> <li>Today you will:</li> <li>1. Explore the experience of compassion fatigue.</li> <li>2. How shame and blame impact compassion fatigue.</li> <li>3. How compassion and self-compassion can prevent or lessen compassion fatigue.</li> </ul>
Time/Materials/ Preparation	Time: 90 minutes         Documents to Share During Session:         Compassion Fatigue Cycle         Wellness Compass Self-Care Practices Assessment

Opening and Check-in (20 minutes)	<ul> <li>Share</li> <li>Welcome back! I invite everyone to get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed or looking towards the ground. We are going to take a moment to pause. Take a few slow breaths. (<i>Pause</i>) Name in your mind what you want to let go of to be present in this group and your personal reason for being here. (<i>Pause for 10 seconds</i>) I invite you to bring your attention back to the group.</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Ask</li> <li>(Go-around) Share your name and a positive thought you had today, something that made you smile.</li> </ul>

#### **IN-PERSON CIRCLE AGENDA**

Supporting families and caregivers: Compassion resilience toolkit for parents and caregivers | Section 3 | Compassion Fatigue



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Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Opening and Check-in (20 minutes) continued	<ul> <li>Share</li> <li>As a reminder, we have our group agreements in the chat box to guide our time together as a group.</li> <li>Last session we discussed what compassion looks like in action, how that applies to our lives, and ways to regulate our and our children's emotions. Today we are going to be looking at the cycle of compassion fatigue, how we have seen ourselves in the cycle, and introduce a tool to help us monitor our wellbeing.</li> </ul>
Guiding Questions	Share
(30 minutes)	• For the purposes of our time together, when we talk about <b>compassion fatigue</b> , we mean the feelings of depression, sadness, exhaustion, anxiety, and irritation that may be experienced by people who are helpers in their work and/or personal life.
	• It is important to note that compassion fatigue is a normal response to the challenging and often overwhelming situations we face. There is a difference between compassion fatigue (develops over time) and triggered reactions (can happen without build up) - both can take us to "downstairs" brain responses we discussed in our last session.
~	Provide the <u>Stages of Compassion Fatigue</u> handout and walk participants through the cycle (use the handout to assist you with your explanation - examples for each part of the cycle are listed below. Also, feel free to ask the group for examples of each stage as you explain them to the group instead of using the example outlined below).
	Facilitator Tip: Example for each stage of the cycle include:
7	• Zealot - New parents promising to use only cloth diapers, make their own organic baby food, and stay up on all the parenting research. Also setting the expectation that you are going to love every part of parenting.
	• Irritable - You realize the expectations you set for yourself are not attainable. You become frustrated with others and frequently use sarcasm when responding to your children. You have a hard time giving your children your full attention.
	• Withdrawal - You are drained of energy and avoid your children when possible (lets others watch children as often as possible, use electronics excessively to distract the children when at home). You have feelings of sadness and have a hard time connecting with others.
	• <b>Zombie</b> - Feel you are the only one who can care for the family and their needs (laundry, cooking, cleaning) even though there are other capable family members available, you lose your temper with your family members often, and never have fun.



Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Guiding Questions (30 minutes) continued	<ul> <li>Ask</li> <li>(Open mic) How have you experienced the impact of compassion fatigue - whether your fatigue or someone who cared for you in your life?</li> </ul>
	• (Open mic) What do you think the impact of shame and blame is on the cycle of fatigue?
	<i>Facilitator Tip</i> : An example here is that shame and blame can perpetuate someone's movement through the cycle. They shame themselves for not being more engaged during the withdrawn phase, which pushes them into zombie cat.
00	<ul> <li>(Open mic) How have you practiced self-compassion to help you avoid feelings of blame or shame?</li> </ul>
	<i>Facilitator Tip</i> : An example may be the use of positive self-talk to help someone realize their common humanity and normalize how challenging being a parent is.
Check for	Share
Understanding (20 minutes)	<ul> <li>Rather than focusing on avoiding or fixing compassion fatigue, we believe it is more powerful to figure out how to feed and grow our compassion resilience. As a reminder, compassion resilience is:</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>"Compassion resilience is the power to return to a position of empathy, strength, and hope after the daily experience of the challenges our children face and those we face as their parents. It requires us to be able to find optimism in an imperfect world."</li> </ul>
	Ask
	<ul> <li>(Open mic) What are some tips you would give to other parents and caregivers on how to build compassion resilience?</li> </ul>
	Share
	• Building your compassion resilience is all about how you take care of yourself. We have a <u>Wellness Compass Self-Care assessment</u> for you to take home with you. This assessment isn't meant to tell you how "good" or "bad" you are doing at self-care, but rather provide you with some additional ideas of ways to practice self-care.
	Share visual of <u>Wellness Compass Self-Care Assessment.</u> In addition to emailing this assessment to participants after group, you can place a link to the assessment in the chat box for them to reference during group.



Circle Topic	CR Section 3: What is Compassion Fatigue?
Self-care and Closing (15 minutes)	<ul> <li>Share</li> <li>Invite all in the circle to take a moment to pause, take a few slow breaths, name in your mind something you learned today, and let go of any self judgment that may be a barrier to your continued reflection on that learning.</li> </ul>
	• Our self-care strategy today is the practice of gratitude. In the last 20 years science has shown that practicing gratitude daily offers benefits to our overall wellbeing. Gratitude has been shown to lead to positive mood, optimism, and pro-social behavior - something that could help us get out of a stage of compassion fatigue.
	Ask
	• (Go-around) Please share one thing that you feel grateful for about this group and one thing you are grateful for outside of this group.
	Share
	<ul> <li>Thank you for being here today. We look forward to seeing you (insert next meeting day/time here).</li> </ul>



Unwell vs. Renewal – If we have not addressed this cycle earlier, we come to a fork in the road where we either continue deeper into compassion fatigue to a place of illness, fatigue and state of overwhelm or we take a turn

towards renewal, a place of resiliency, hardiness and transformation.

Zombie – Our hopelessness turns to rage... We begin to hate any and all people...We get angry at our family and friends if they dare question us... Others become incompetent or ignorant in our eyes... We parent in a silo, without support from others... We have no patience and lose our sense of humor... We may have a sense that we can't ever do enough, an inflated sense of importance related to our role as a parent, hyper-vigilance/ sleeplessness, and a sense of persecution.

Renewal vs. Pathology

### Compassion Fatigue's Path

ZEALOT - We are committed, involved, and available... Ready to problem solve... Ready to make a difference... We willingly give it all we have... We are willing to go the extra mile and

often do so without prompting .... "I'll do that !!"

(Cycle is from work of Eric Gentry, PhD, 2012)

**IRRITABILITY** - We begin to see the imperfect nature of the systems and people around us... We distance ourselves from family and friends... Begin to belittle our children, partners and friends... We talk unfairly about their challenges and put down their efforts... The use of humor is sometimes strained... We daydream or become distracted when our children are speaking with us... Oversights and mistakes begin to occur. We may notice our anger, cynicism, diminished creativity, and sadness.

Withdrawal — We are unable to embrace the complexity of the problems and our enthusiasm turns sour... We begin to see our children as irritants... Complaints may be made about our efforts and we might have problems in our work life... We are tired all the time... We no longer wish to talk to our children... We neglect our family, friends and ourselves. Our shield gets thicker and thicker

friends and ourselves... Our shield gets thicker and thicker to block our pain and sadness. We may experience difficulty empathizing and feel numb to other's pain.



### The Wellness Compass Practices Assessment

"Self-care is not an indulgence. Self-care is a discipline. It requires tough-mindedness, a deep and personal understanding of your priorities, and a respect for both yourself and the people you choose to spend your life with." - Tami Forman

The following worksheet for assessing wellness practices is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days. When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

#### Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:

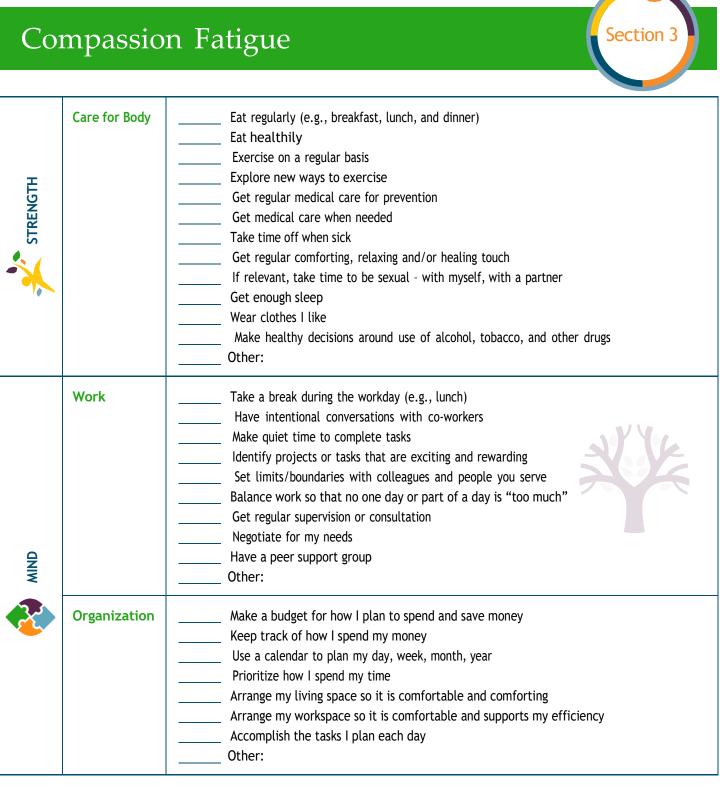
3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)	0 = I never do this
2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)	? = This never occurred to me. I might be interested
1 = I barely or rarely do this	N/A = doesn't apply or it's not of interest to m

HEART	Relationships	<ul> <li>Spend time with others whose company I enjoy</li> <li>Stay in contact with important people in my life</li> <li>Make time to reply to personal emails/letters; send holiday cards</li> <li>Allow others to do things for me</li> <li>Enlarge my social circle</li> <li>Ask for help when I need it</li> <li>Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust</li> <li>Resolve a conflict with people in a productive way</li> <li>If relevant, spend time with my companion animals</li> <li>If relevant, schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse</li> <li>If relevant, schedule regular activities with my children</li> <li>Other:</li> </ul>
	Emotions	Give myself affirmations, praise myself         Practice self-compassion         Practice being mindfully present         Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies         Seek out comforting activities, objects, people, and places         Allow myself to cry         Find things that make me laugh         Notice my inner experience - my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings         Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests         Use emotional regulation strategies         Other:

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Compassion Fatigue			
SPIRIT	Core Values	Identify what is meaningful and notice its place in my life         Find a connection/community that shares my values         Have experiences of awe         Contribute my time or other resources to causes in which I believe         Read books or listen to talks/music that inspire me         Choose to focus my attention on ideas, people and situations that nurture my optimism and hope         Be aware of the non-material aspects of life that I value         Be curious and engage in conversations with other people about their values         Other:	
	Rest & Play	<ul> <li>Explore how to maintain balance in my work and non-work life</li> <li>Make time for reflection to balance time spent doing</li> <li>Take vacations</li> <li>Take day trips or mini-vacations</li> <li>Do something that makes me laugh</li> <li>Take rest breaks in the day - a walk at work, brief nap, etc.</li> <li>Spend time in nature</li> <li>Sing</li> <li>Meditate</li> <li>Dance, swim, walk/run, play sports, or other physical activities</li> <li>Other:</li> </ul>	
STRENGTH	Stress Resilience	Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet         Make time for self-reflection         Have my own personal support - professional or peer         Write in a journal         Read about things that are unrelated to work         Do something at which I am not an expert or in charge         Attend to minimizing stress in my life         Learn something new         Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes         Practice accepting discomfort         Practice gratitude         Other:	

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#### **Overall Balance**

\_ Maintain balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization. Norton. The compass model is adapted from the work of The Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation.