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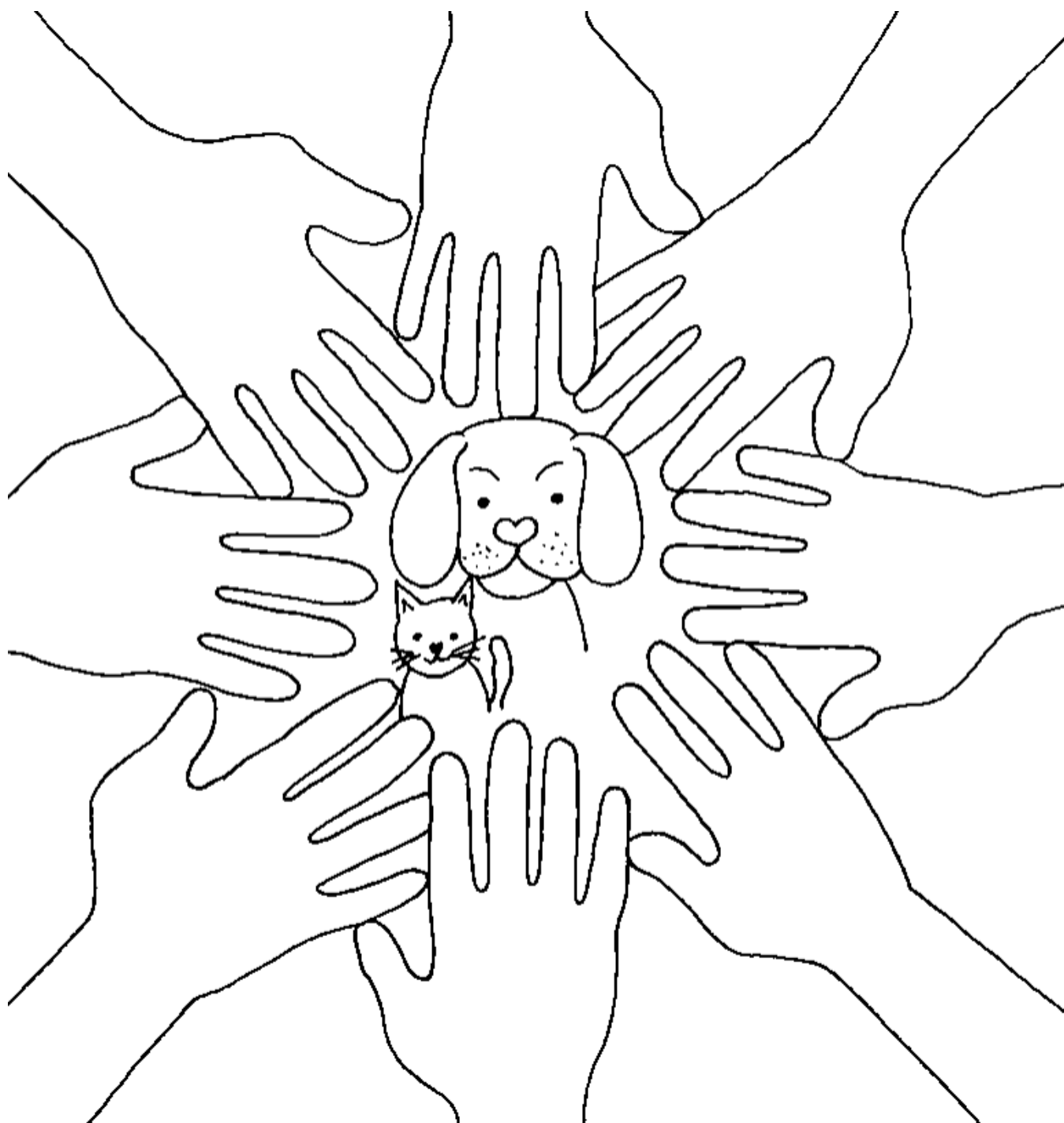
"Unleash Your Potential"



Compassion In Action

A Humane Education Guide about Caring Through Compassion Fatigue

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Certified Professional Dog Trainer



Welcome!

This guide is dedicated to the quiet heroes who show up every day for animals in need — shelter staff, rescue volunteers, foster families, vet techs, animal trainers, and advocates, the ones who give their whole hearts and sometimes forget to save a little for themselves.

A heartfelt thank you to the families, educators, and children who are working together to create safer, kinder, and more emotionally aware communities!

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

– Aristotle, Greek philosopher



Please Note

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*Remember, It's Cool to Be Kind!
Being Kind to Yourself Counts, Too!*



Compassion In Action

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Please note:

This guide is under construction.

Feedback welcome & appreciated.

+ Seeking Publishing Support. Thanks!

This Book Belongs to & All About Me

My Name

My Favorite Color

My Phone #

My Birthday

My Home Address

My Favorite Quote

I Like

I Tolerate

I Love

I Dislike

My Favorite Movie

**My Favorite
Animal**

My Favorite Book



Understanding Compassion Fatigue

Empathy is a powerful and essential quality for those who serve others, whether in the military, emergency response, healthcare, social work, animal welfare, counseling, humanitarian aid, or journalism. It allows professionals and caregivers to connect deeply and offer genuine support to those in crisis.

However, when individuals consistently open themselves up to others' pain, they may begin to internalize that suffering. Over time, this emotional absorption can lead to compassion fatigue, a state of physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to the trauma and distress of others.

What Is Compassion Fatigue?

Also known as *secondary traumatic stress*, compassion fatigue occurs when the act of caring for those who are suffering begins to take a toll on the caregiver's own well-being. It can develop after a single traumatic event or as the cumulative effect of years of exposure to others' pain.

A Brief History of the Term

While the emotional toll of caring for others has long been recognized, the term "compassion fatigue" was first introduced by writer Carla Joinson in 1992. Psychologist Dr. Charles Figley later expanded on the concept, describing it as:

"A state of exhaustion and dysfunction—biologically, psychologically, and emotionally, as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress... Compassion fatigue is the natural consequence of stress resulting from caring for traumatized people or animals."

— Dr. Charles Figley, Director of the Tulane Traumatology Institute

Compassion Fatigue vs. Burnout

While the two are often confused, compassion fatigue and burnout are not the same:

- Burnout results from general, chronic workplace stress or feeling overextended in daily life (such as job demands or parenting).
- Compassion fatigue stems specifically from exposure to others' trauma and suffering.

Both can cause exhaustion and decreased motivation, but compassion fatigue carries an additional emotional burden tied to empathy itself, the pain of feeling for another.

When Caring Too Much Hurts

As Dr. Figley notes, ***"Caring too much can hurt."*** When caregivers continually prioritize others without attending to their own needs, it can lead to apathy, isolation, emotional suppression, or even substance misuse. This does not mean empathy is a weakness, it is a strength. But like any strength, it requires balance and self-awareness.

Finding Balance: The Role of Emotional Regulation

Research suggests that individuals in helping professions may benefit from developing healthy emotional boundaries, sometimes called "psychic numbing." This is not indifference, but rather the ability to regulate empathy when needed, allowing professionals to think clearly, problem-solve effectively, and sustain their capacity to care over time.




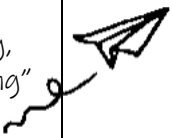
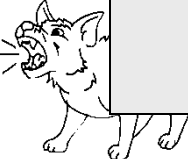
Factors of Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue can be caused by having a role overload, too many “hats” to wear, too many responsibilities and competing duties with too little time, or not enough help to attend to the many demands of the day.

Understanding The Caring-Killing Paradox

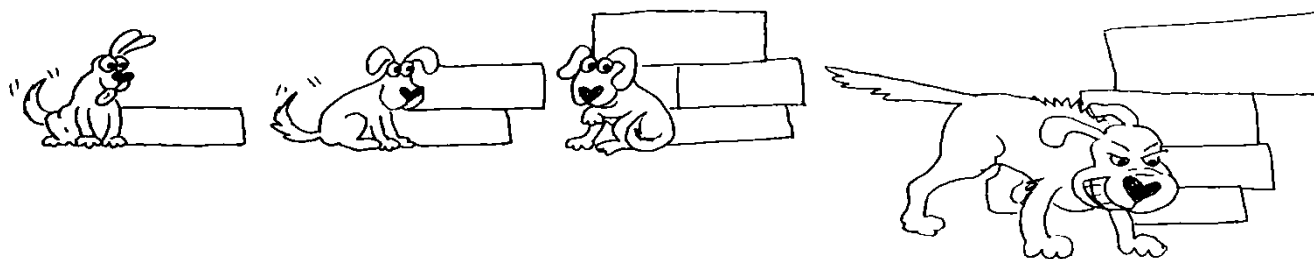
Animal care professionals face a unique challenge: they may be tasked with ending the lives of those they nurture. Even those not directly involved in euthanasia can feel the emotional weight of this responsibility. As Naomi Rachel Remen, MD, explains: *“The expectation that someone can be immersed in supporting suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through a rainstorm without getting wet.”*

Based on Pete Walker’s *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*, the 4Fs model describes instinctive trauma responses when the limbic system becomes overloaded. These responses, Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn, can manifest as coping “types” in individuals experiencing compassion fatigue.

Personality Types	Core Response	Unconscious Belief	Common Phrase
People Pleaser	Fawn	“The price of admission to any relationship is the forfeiture of all my needs, rights, preferences, and boundaries.”	“Keep others happy”
Couch Potato	Freeze 	“People are synonymous to danger”	“Hide from the world”
Workaholic	Flight	“Perfection and achievement will make me safe and loveable.”	“Human-doing, not human-being” 
Bully 	Fight	“Power and control can create safety, assuage, abandonment, and secure love.”	“No relationships, just prisoners”

Trigger Stacking

A trigger or stressor is anything that can cause an increase in cortisol or stress. These triggers can stack up and overload a limbic system causing an emotional reaction. This is true for dog reactivity just as much as it is true for compassion fatigue or any overloaded limbic system.



Signs & Symptoms

Compassion fatigue is a natural, human response to prolonged exposure to others' suffering. Recognizing it early and prioritizing self-care are essential steps toward recovery and resilience. Those who care deeply for others must also learn to extend compassion to themselves.

Those experiencing compassion fatigue may notice symptoms such as

Cognitive

- Decreased self-esteem
- Apathy
- Thoughts of self-harm or harming others

Emotional

- Irritable
- Depression
- Depleted
- Anxiety
- Numbness
- Withdrawal

Behavioral

- Impatient
- Nightmares
- Negative Coping
- Self-harming behaviors

Spiritual

- Pervasive hopelessness
- Loss of meaning
- Loss of life purpose

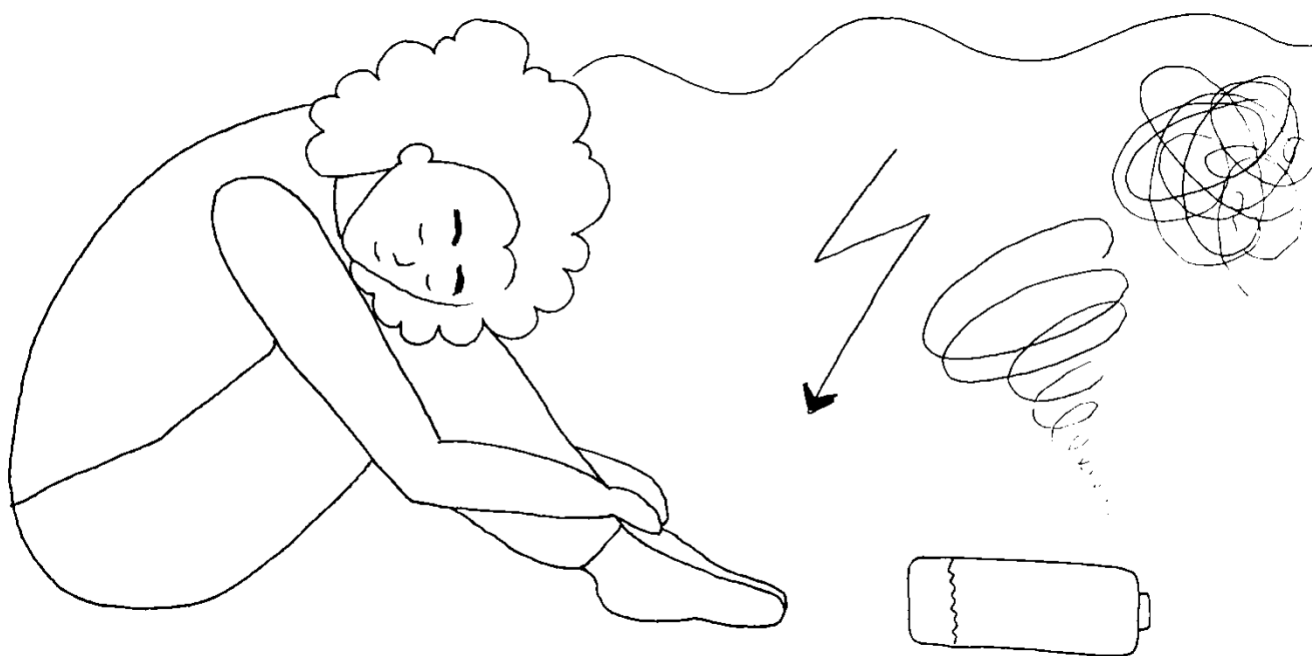
Interpersonal

- Isolated
- Mistrust
- Withdrawn
- Decreased interest in intimacy
- Decreased empathy

Physical

- Fatigue, chronic exhaustion
- Headaches
- Tension, aches and pains
- Impaired immune system
- Loss of appetite

Even the most dedicated helpers, those who work extra shifts, skip days off, or neglect their own self-care, are at risk. Those who care deeply for others must also learn to extend compassion to themselves. Caring for others begins with caring for your own mind, body, and spirit. When helpers honor their limits and nurture their well-being, they strengthen their ability to continue doing the vital work of healing, rescuing, and serving others.



The Empathy Equation

***"People attracted to animal care often enter the field already compassion fatigued.
A strong identification with the helpless, voiceless animal is often the motivator."***

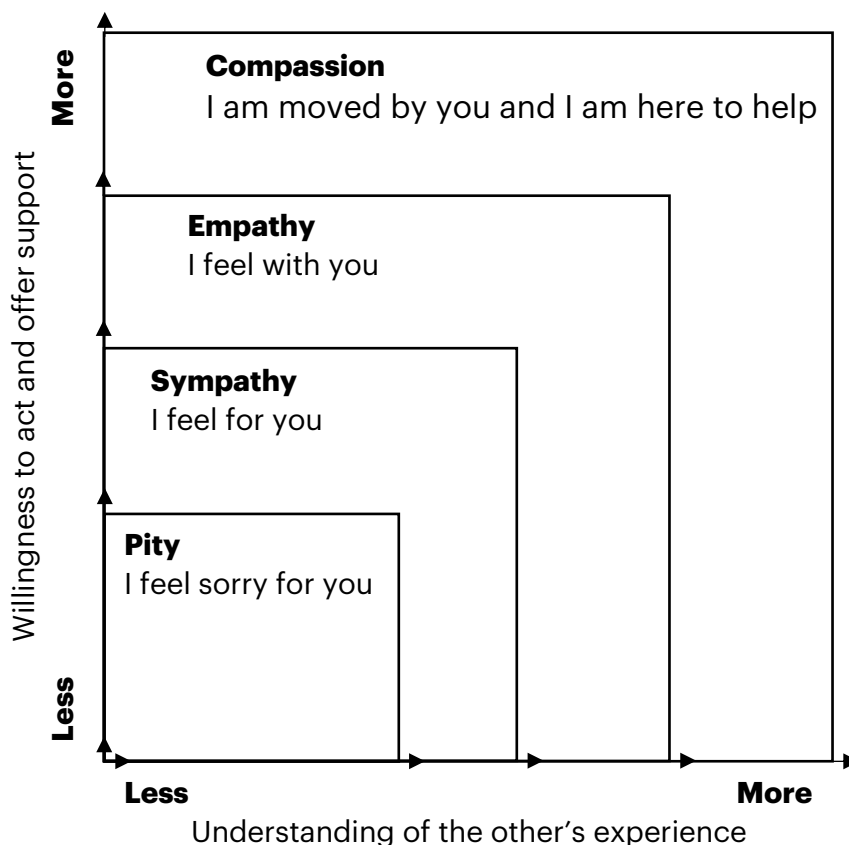
– J. Eric Gentry, PhD, Traumatologist

Some Individual Factors That May Lead to Compassion Fatigue

- Placing the needs of others before our own needs (other directedness)
- Unresolved trauma or pain from our past (kindling from compassion)
- Overdeveloped sense of responsibility and/or Perfectionism
- Lack of personal boundaries
- Lack of healthy coping skills
- Lack of time and finances
- Challenges outside work – life stressors, divorce, death, etc.
- Moral distress (humane euthanasia can be a source of moral distress, etc.)



*"The quality of your life is determined
by the quality of your choices."
– Unknown*

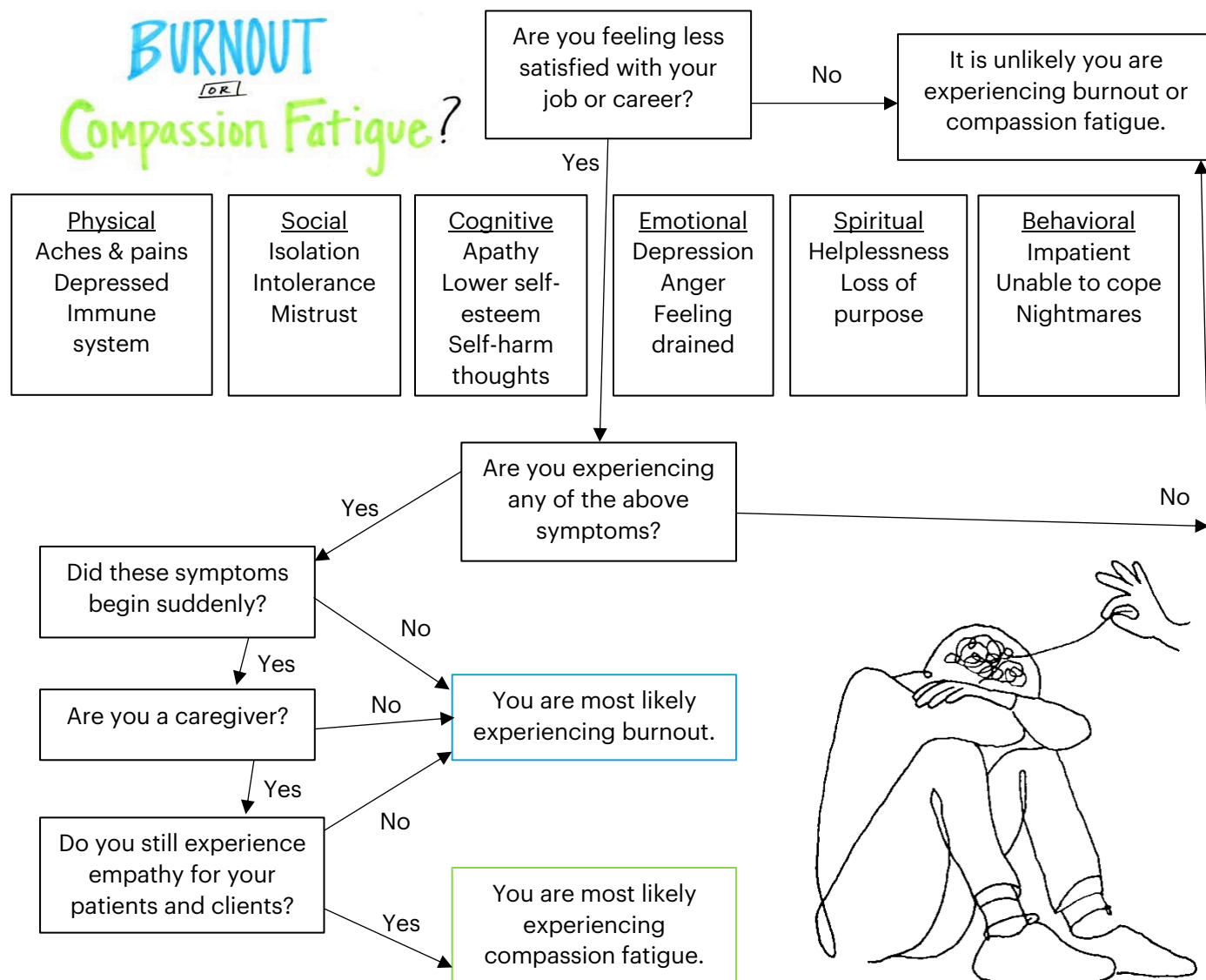


Purpose of Life

- ☐ **Purpose** – Did I have purpose today?
- ☐ **Joy** – Did I feel any joy today?
- ☐ **Function** – Did I have good physical function today?
- ☐ **Comfort** – Did I have any physical comfort today?



Burnout or Compassion Fatigue



Compassion fatigue is a state of physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to others' suffering and trauma. It often affects caregivers, healthcare providers, animal welfare workers, and others in helping roles. Individuals experiencing compassion fatigue may feel overwhelmed, numb, or detached while continuing to sacrifice their own needs for the sake of others. This condition reflects the cost of caring deeply, it is not a lack of compassion, but rather the emotional toll of sustained empathy without adequate self-care and recovery.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress or prolonged emotional demands. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment or effectiveness. Burnout develops gradually when work or life pressures exceed one's capacity to cope, leading to feelings of frustration, fatigue, and disengagement. Unlike compassion fatigue, which stems from exposure to others' trauma, burnout is primarily linked to environmental stressors such as workload, lack of control, or inadequate support. Recognizing and addressing burnout early can help restore balance, motivation, and overall well-being.

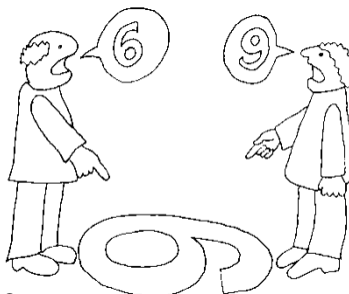


Why We Care So Much

EMPATHY reminds us of what it means to connect with others on a human level.

What is Empathy?

- E** Engage with an open heart.
- M** Make an effort to understand.
- P** Practice patient listening.
- A** Acknowledge their feelings.
- T** Take their experiences seriously.
- H** Hold space for their struggles.
- Y** Yield to compassion and kindness.



A Superpower to See from All Angles

Empathy allows us to step outside ourselves and see through another's eyes, expanding our perspective and strengthening our capacity for understanding, healing, and connection.



The most effective caregivers, leaders, and advocates know how to use both,

💖 **Empathy** to connect, listen, and validate;

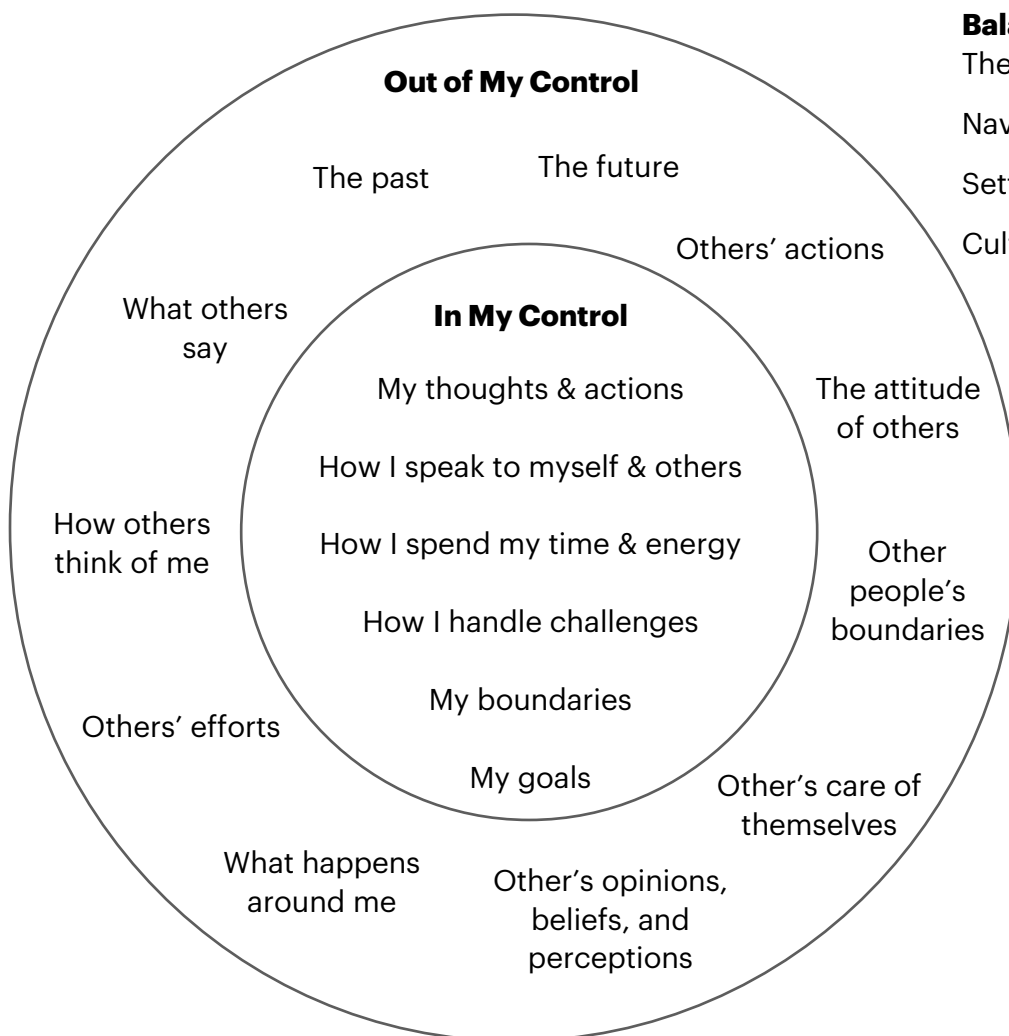
🧠 **Accountability** to guide, support, and encourage change.

Great advocates lead with empathy and follow through with accountability, creating trust, integrity, and meaningful progress.



The Weight of Witnessing

Empathy and accountability are not opposing forces, they work best together. True compassion involves understanding others' experiences while also holding space for growth, responsibility, and healthy boundaries. It's not *Empathy vs. Accountability*; *Great Advocates Use Both!* Balancing empathy and boundaries can be a challenge. Be mindful of things you can control and not.



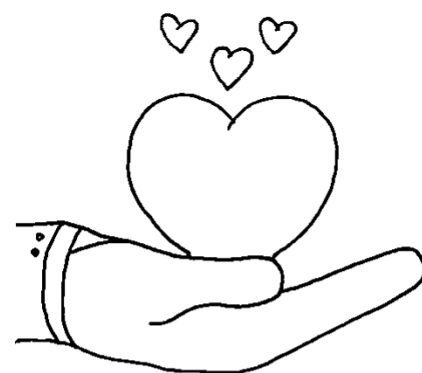
Balancing Empathy & Boundaries

The Compassionate Connection

Navigating Emotional Intensity

Setting Boundaries

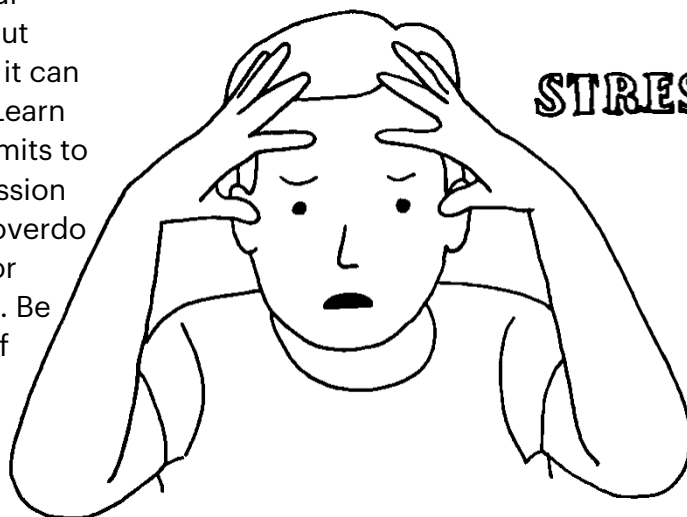
Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy



STRESS???



Your empathy is your greatest strength, but without boundaries it can become a burden. Learn to recognize your limits to ensure your compassion never leads you to overdo it causing burnout or compassion fatigue. Be sure to give some of your empathy, compassion, and love back to you!





Boundaries are Brave

"Nothing is sustainable without boundaries."

– Brene Brown



Healthy boundaries are not walls—they are shields of self-respect and sustainability. Setting boundaries allows you to protect your energy, maintain compassion, and continue helping others without losing yourself in the process.

Imagine your bravery shield as a reflection of what is—and isn't—within your control.

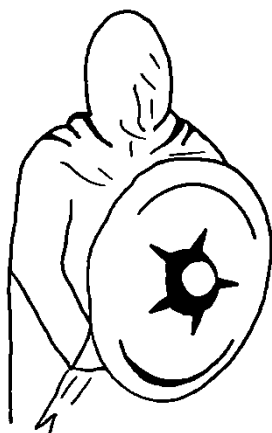
- In the inner circle, write down the things you can influence or take responsibility for.
- In the outer circle, list the things that are beyond your control—those that deserve release and freedom from your mind.

Recognizing this difference is an act of courage. It helps you direct your emotional energy where it matters most and let go of what you cannot change.



Out of My Control

In My Control



For caregivers and helpers, boundaries are not selfish, they are essential armor. They protect your ability to provide compassionate, humane care over the long term. Remember: sustaining others begins with sustaining yourself. Especially when working in a care-giver career field, it is extra important to brace your boundaries to best be able to provide prolonged compassionate, humane help.



Coping and Caring for Yourself

How to Build Resiliency

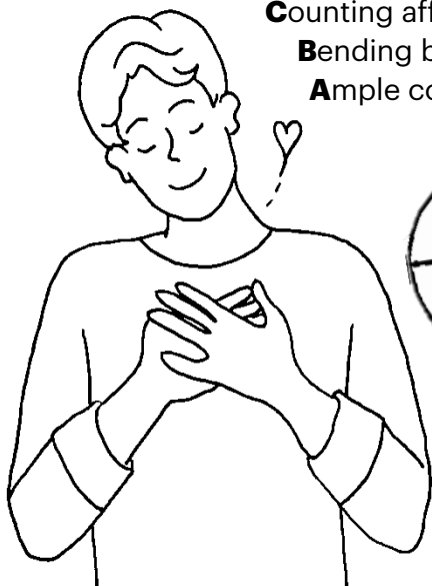
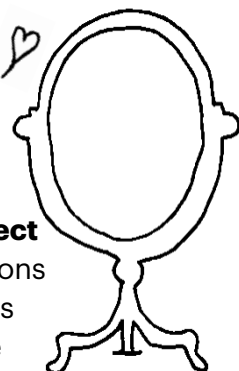
- Self-care
- Self-awareness
- A support group
- Taking action
- Mindfulness

The 5 Cs of Resilient Coping

- Calm: able to stay calm in crisis or high stress situation
- Clarity: can clearly see what's happening
- Connection: able to ask for help and learn from others
- Competence: able to call on your skills
- Courage: faith in yourself to persevere



Take time to Reflect
Counting affirmations
Bending burdens
Ample courage



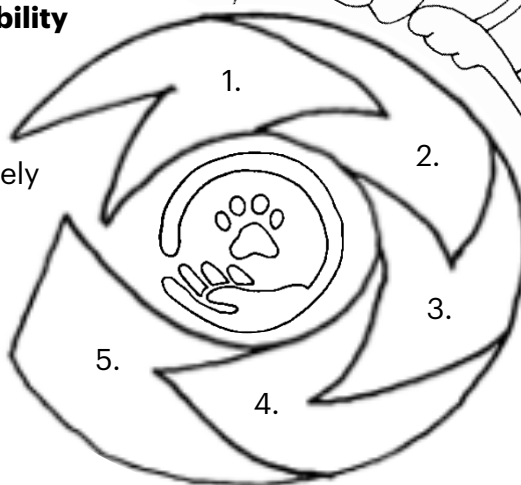
Keep Watering Yourself With

- Good thoughts
- Kind people
- Patience
- Empathy
- Healing
- Hope
- Open Mind
- Kind words
- Self-belief
- Acceptance
- Joy



Balancing Empathy and Accountability

1. Understanding the Importance of Empathy and Accountability
2. Listen and Communicate Effectively
3. Lead by Example
4. Provide Feedback
5. Find the Right Balance



A Self-Care Spectrum

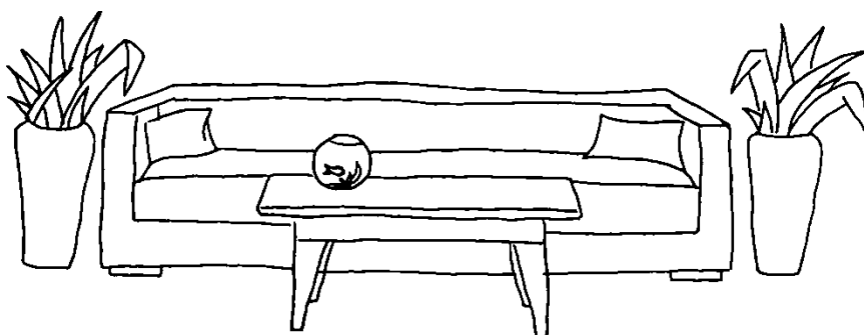
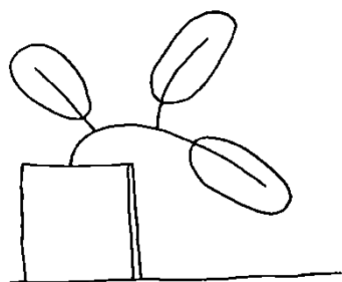
Stuck In Stress? Self-Care Is NOT Optional, And Everyone Needs It!

Self-care is never a selfish act. Real threats and perceived threats activate our stress response. Be proactive and practice self-care and stress management! It is your ethical obligation to take care of yourself. It is unethical to neglect self-care. Taking care of yourself, helps care for the world. Like they say on airplanes, put your oxygen mask on first.

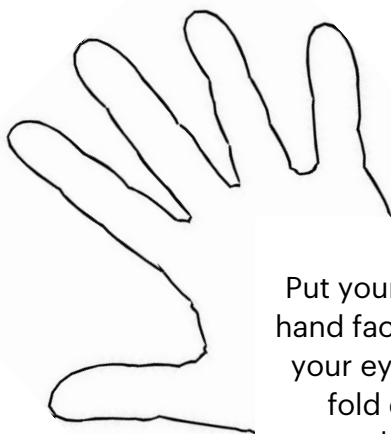
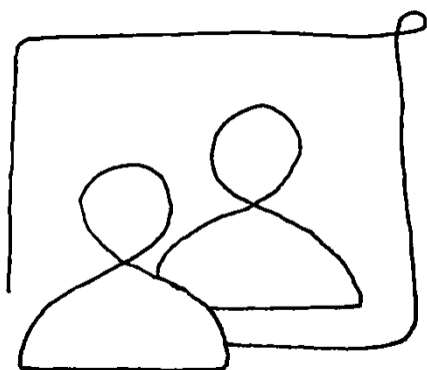
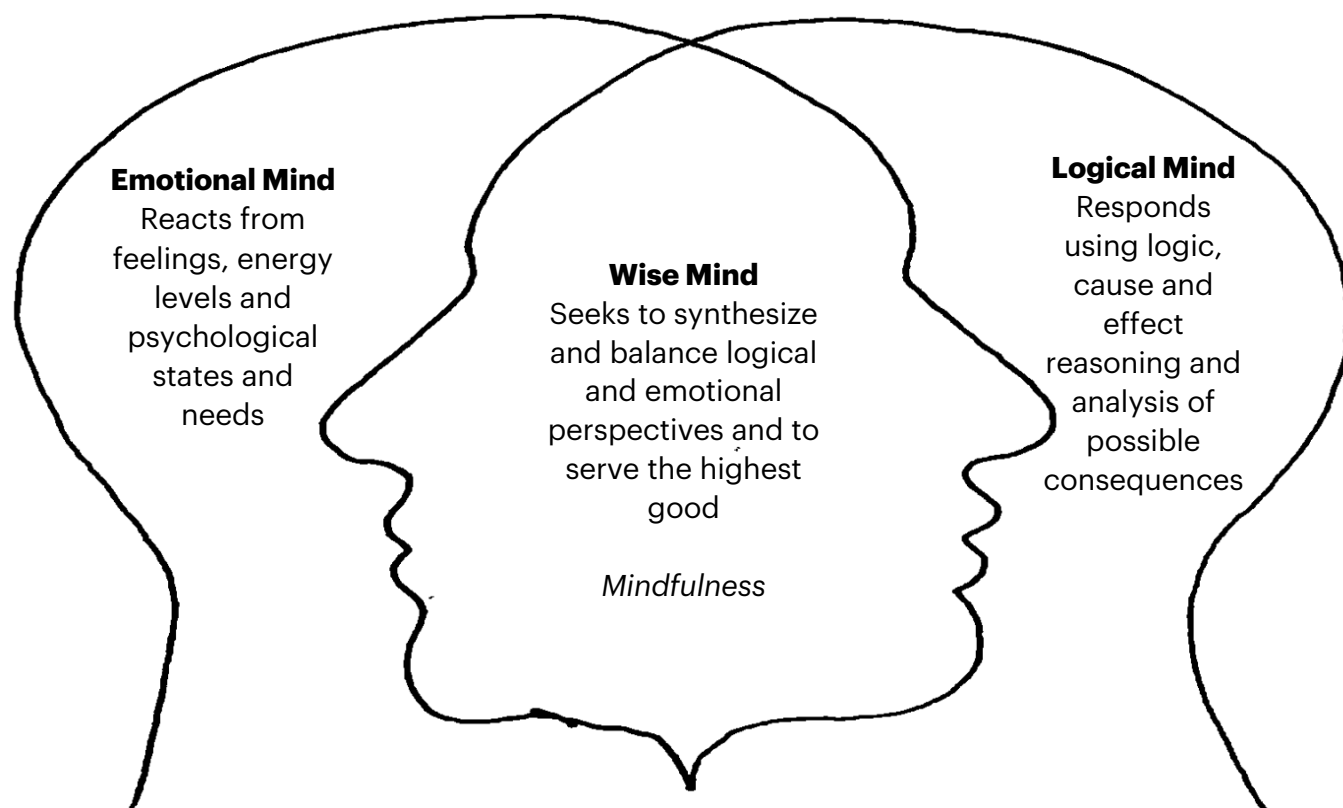
- Identify your individual reactions to stress (physical, emotional, behavioral)
- Identify unhealthy coping methods and replace with healthier coping skills
- Build your early warning system, check in with yourself daily!
- Track your sources of stress at home and at work
- Adopt new coping methods, when needed
- Learn to set realistic and healthy boundaries
- Learn to take time for your personal needs

Daily Self-Care Practices

- Talk with a buddy
- Go for a short or long walk
- Take daily breaks for self-care
- Rehearse difficult conversations
- Compassionate self-talk or self-touch
- Avoid “All or Nothing” way of thinking
- Cry when needed, yes, it is good for you
- Pet animals – proven to lower stress levels
- Ask your team for help or backup, allow others to help
- Practice saying “NO” and accepting that no one can do it all
- Take a 10-minute break. Take small moments, many times!
- Hydrate! Dehydration can cause stress and stress causes dehydration.
- Set limits and boundaries. Self-care is a process, not a sprint, pace yourself!
- Practice deep breathing, one of the best relaxation tools. Our breath is linked to our autonomic nervous system. Deep breathing activates our parasympathetic nervous system. Deep breathing for at least one minute or more turns off your flight or fight response.
- Are your basic needs being met? Sleep/rest, proper diet, exercise, vacation/time off, social support, finances, and spiritual/religious, medical care, etc.



Pause for Paws: Mindfulness Matters



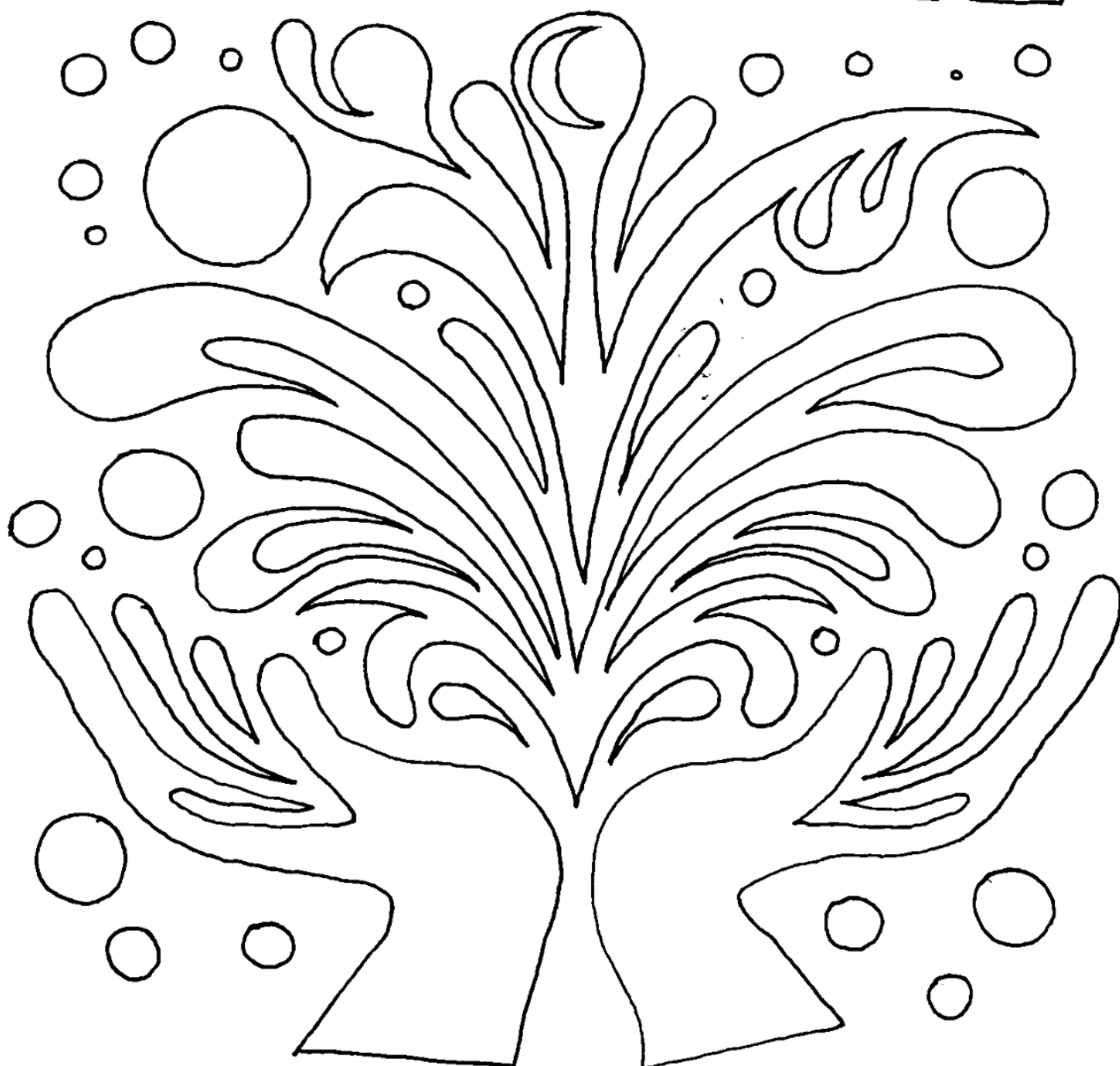
Take Five!

Put your feet flat on the floor, hands on lap, one hand facing down and one hand facing up. Close your eyes. Take a deep breathe in then out and fold down one finger on your hand facing upwards. Repeat breathing, breathing until your lungs are filled then pause briefly before you exhale completely until your lungs are empty with a natural pause after exhale. Continue to breathe in and out until all 5 fingers are down and you are ready. Slowly open your eyes and re-enter your focus to the room you are in.



Color Me Calm

JUST
BREATHE



BELIEVE



Emotional Resilience



"If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete."

- Jack Kornfield

Emotional Resilience: Befriending Anxiety

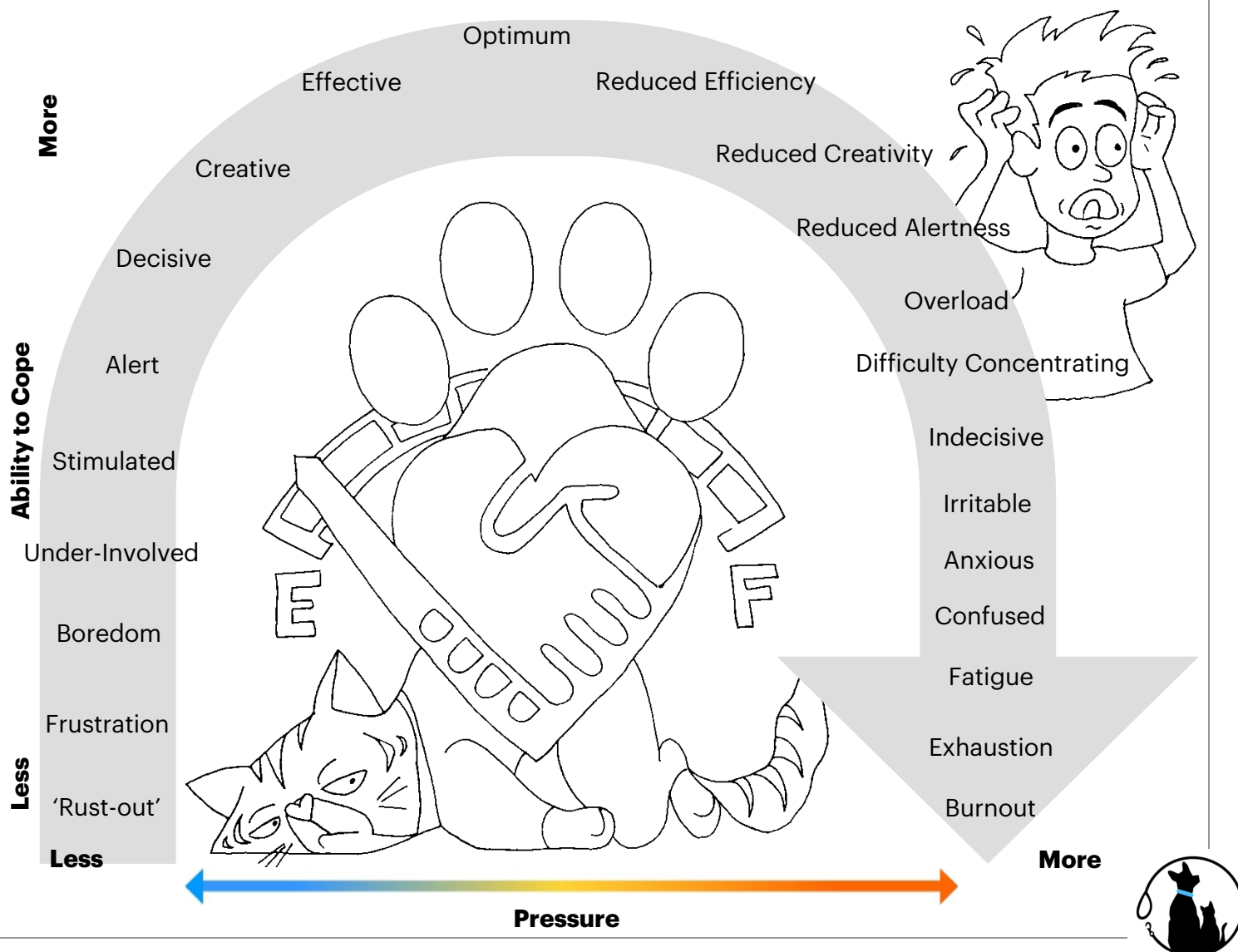
Anxiety is not your enemy, it's a messenger. When approached with curiosity and kindness, it can become a guide toward deeper self-awareness and balance. Rather than resisting anxiety, try to listen to it. Ask yourself what your body and mind are trying to communicate. Reframe your thoughts: anxiety often signals a need for care, rest, or reassurance. Meet it with mindfulness, observe without judgment, soothe with compassion, and respond rather than react. Acknowledge your fears gently and remind yourself that it's okay to feel uneasy; these feelings are part of being human. Explore healthy ways to calm and support yourself through grounding, movement, breathwork, or connection with others. And remember, you never have to face anxiety alone. Just as you extend a helping hand to others, there is always someone ready to offer theirs to you. True compassion begins when you learn to include yourself in your own circle of care.



The Science of Stress

Stress is not always harmful, it's a natural part of how our bodies and brains help us perform, focus, and adapt. According to the *Yerkes-Dodson Law*, there's an optimal level of arousal or pressure that supports performance. When stress is too low, motivation and alertness decrease; when stress is too high, we become overwhelmed and performance declines. The "sweet spot" lies in the middle, where challenge and coping ability are balanced. Our ability to cope determines where we fall on that curve, and resilience-building habits such as rest, healthy boundaries, exercise, mindfulness, and social connection expand our capacity to handle pressure without tipping into distress.

While empathy is essential for strong, supportive relationships, it also carries a physiological cost. Research shows that empathy is a whole-body experience, when we sense another's pain, anger, or anxiety, our bodies mirror those emotions through shared neural pathways. Over time, this "shared suffering" can result in empathic distress, a state of emotional exhaustion that often contributes to caregiver burnout. Fortunately, empathy isn't our only option. Compassion, defined as concern for the suffering of others combined with the motivation to help, is a healthier, more sustainable state. Neuroscience shows that compassion activates different brain regions than empathy, areas linked to warmth, reward, and positive motivation. When we shift from *feeling* others' pain to *caring* about their pain with calm intention, we move out of distress and into a place of strength and support.





Window of Tolerance

IT'S NORMAL TO HAVE A SMALLER Window of Tolerance

DURING STRESSFUL TIMES

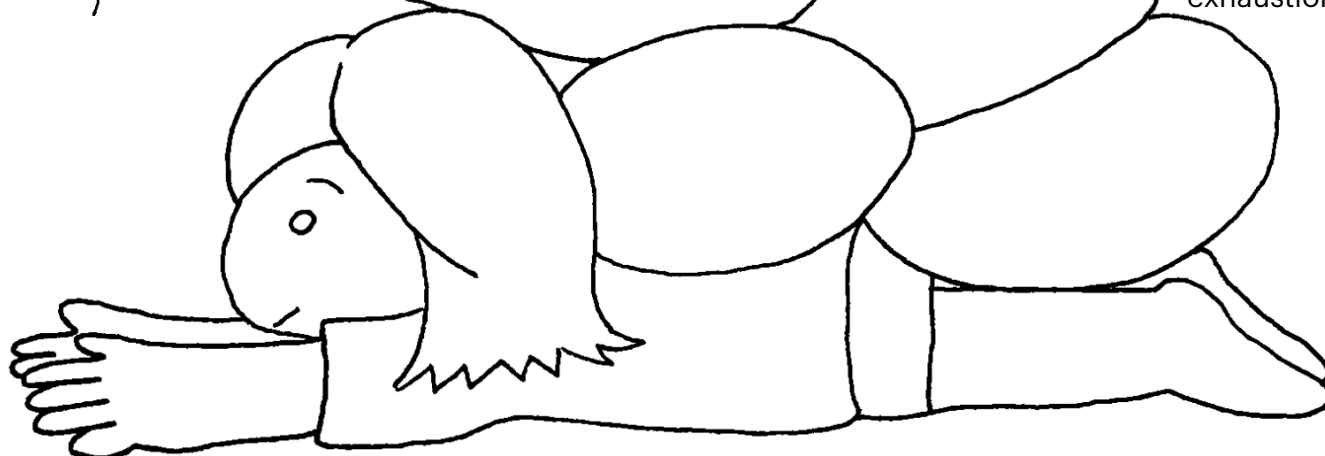
The Window of Tolerance represents the range of emotional and physiological arousal we can comfortably experience before becoming overwhelmed. When we're inside our window, we can think clearly, manage emotions, and respond to challenges effectively.

It's completely normal for our window of tolerance to shrink during stressful times, such as periods of grief, fatigue, trauma, or burnout, making it harder to cope with even small stressors.

Recognizing when we're pushed outside our window (into hyperarousal like anxiety or hypo-arousal like shutdown) helps us pause, regulate, and return to balance through grounding, breathing, and self-compassion techniques.



Inside each rock, write down the stressors or responsibilities that are currently "weighing you down." These might include work demands, family pressures, financial concerns, lack of sleep, or emotional exhaustion.



Recovery and Reframing Compassion

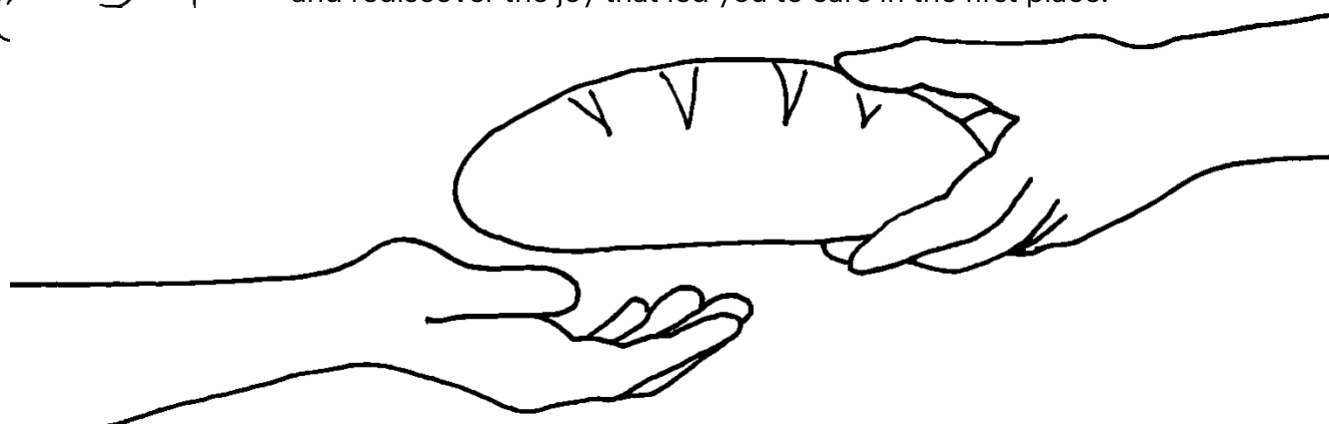


Steps to Recover from Burnout & Compassion Fatigue

- ☐ Get Better Sleep
- ☐ Set Healthy Boundaries
- ☐ Take Time Off
- ☐ Develop Healthy Stress Management & Coping Skills
- ☐ Do Something Fun: Write, Make Art, Organize
- ☐ Be Mindful & Grateful: Start a Gratitude Journal or Glimmer Jar
- ☐ Connect With Others: Spend Time with Your Friends & Family
- ☐ Fix Your Diet & Focus on Nutrition
- ☐ Exercise: Move Your Body, Stretch, Dance, Walk
- ☐ Meditate, Breathe, Rest, Relax
- ☐ Spend Time in Nature: Get Outside at Least 20 Minutes Daily
- ☐ Exercise Your Mind
- ☐ Limit Your Media Intake
- ☐ Delegate Tasks and Responsibilities to Free Up Time
- ☐ Talk With Someone: Communicate with Colleagues
- ☐ Reassess Your Goals and Priorities
- ☐ Take Breaks, Step Away from Work
- ☐ Give and Get Love from Animals
- ☐ Laugh
- ☐ Practice Self-Compassion
- ☐ Improve Self-Understanding
- ☐ Seek Professional Help when Needed



Recovery from burnout and compassion fatigue takes time, intention, and consistent self-care. Think of it as a process of reframing and renewal rather than simply “bouncing back.” Each small step, whether it’s taking a mindful walk, setting a boundary, or sharing a laugh, helps rebuild emotional reserves and strengthens resilience. Prioritize activities that restore your energy instead of depleting it, and remember that rest is not a reward, it’s a requirement. By practicing self-compassion, connecting with supportive people and pets, and realigning with your personal values and purpose, you create space for healing and rediscover the joy that led you to care in the first place.



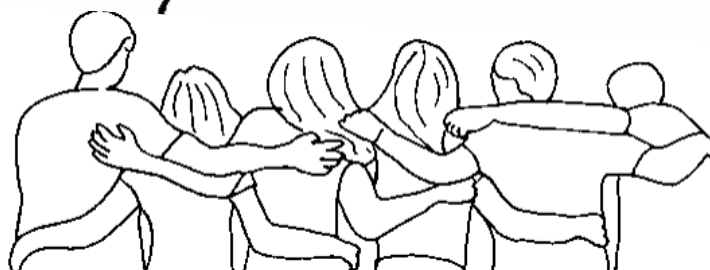
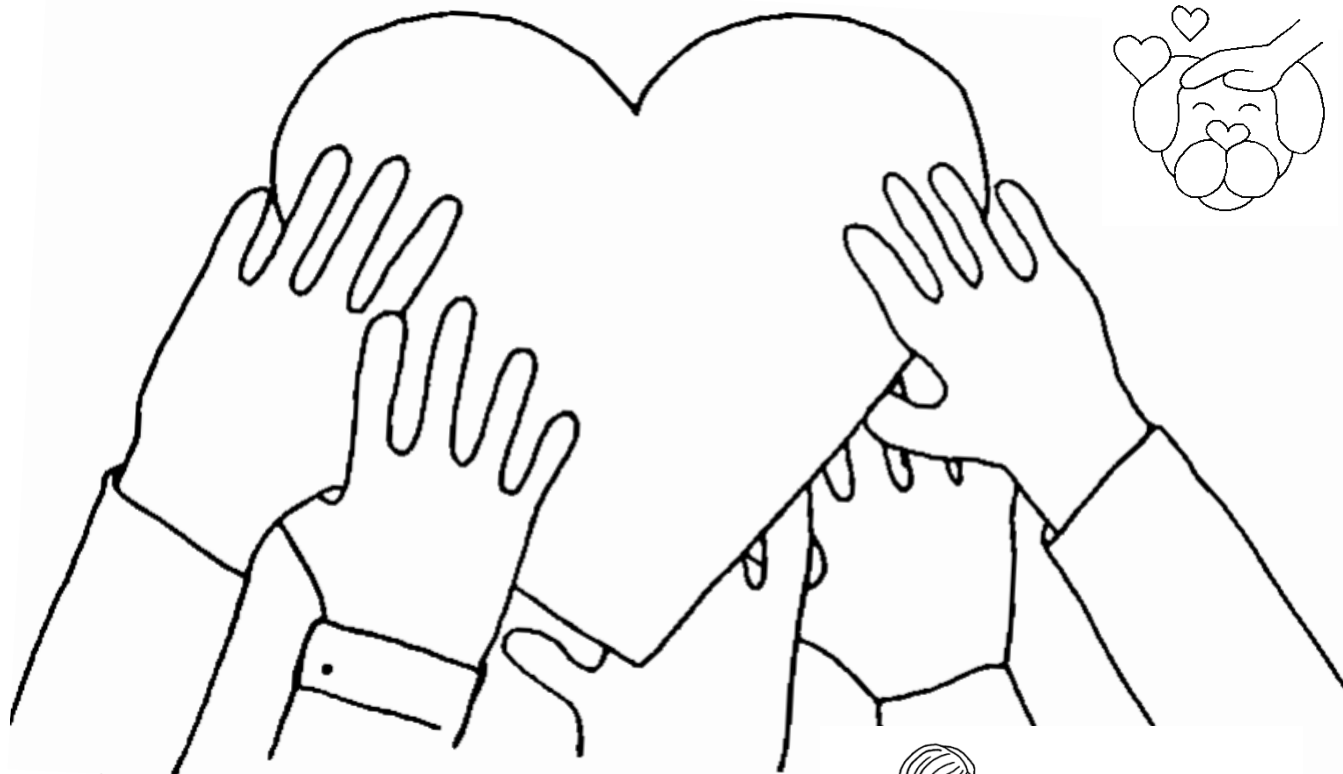
Connection and Community

Acceptance and empathy go hand in hand. When we accept our own feelings and understand others', we build stronger, kinder connections, and remember that it's always okay to feel and to just be human. When you understand how others feel, you can help them heal.

Connection and community are essential in sustaining emotional well-being and preventing compassion fatigue. Sharing experiences, listening without judgment, and offering genuine empathy remind us that we are not alone in our struggles.

Supportive relationships create a sense of belonging that helps regulate our nervous system and expand our capacity to cope with life's challenges.

Whether it's through friends, family, coworkers, peer groups, or community involvement, connection strengthens resilience and reinforces the idea that healing happens together. When we show up for one another with openness and understanding, we nurture both individual and collective growth.



As writer Ernest Hemingway said, ***"In our darkest moments, we do not need solutions or advice; what we yearn for is simply human connection."***



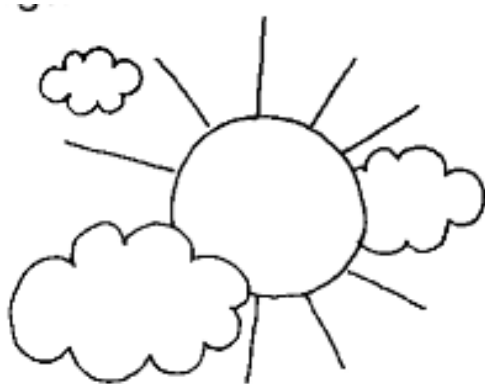
You Are Never Alone

Dr. Maya Angelou often wrote about healing and the strength we find within and alongside others.
In her poem "Alone," she reminds us:

"Lying, thinking

Last night

**How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.**



**Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.**

**There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.**

**But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.**

**Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.**

**Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.**

**Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone."**



Kindness Culture: It's Cool to Be Kind

Kindness is more than a trend, it's a culture. When we practice kindness, we create ripples that extend far beyond a single moment or gesture. Every smile, supportive word, or act of generosity strengthens the social fabric that holds communities together. In workplaces, classrooms, neighborhoods, and families, kindness inspires cooperation, reduces stress, and promotes emotional safety. It's not about perfection or people-pleasing, it's about showing respect, patience, and empathy, even in small, everyday interactions. In a world that often feels fast paced and disconnected, choosing kindness is an act of quiet rebellion, a reminder that compassion and humanity are still our greatest strengths.

However, it's just as important to direct that same kindness inward. Being kind to others while neglecting ourselves leads to imbalance and burnout. Self-kindness means giving ourselves permission to rest, make mistakes, and have boundaries without guilt. It means speaking to ourselves with the same warmth and understanding we offer to others. When we practice self-compassion, we refill our emotional reserves and strengthen our ability to give authentically rather than from depletion.

Compassion is, at its heart, a community effort. No one thrives in isolation, and genuine kindness flourishes when people support one another. Communities built on compassion model empathy, understanding, and shared responsibility. They create environments where it's safe to ask for help, express emotion, and grow together. Building a kindness culture starts with small, intentional acts, listening fully, offering encouragement, forgiving freely, and showing appreciation. When kindness becomes the norm rather than the exception, we transform not only ourselves but the world around us.

Kindness doesn't require grand gestures, it starts with simple choices made every day. Smile at a stranger, hold the door, send a thoughtful message, or simply listen when someone needs to talk. These moments of warmth and respect may seem small, but they have an extraordinary impact. You never know how deeply a kind word or action might touch someone's heart or change their day. Kindness is free, contagious, and limitless, it multiplies when shared. So, when in doubt, pause, take a breath, and choose kindness. Whether it's toward others or yourself, just be kind, it's the most powerful and accessible way to make the world a better place.



Helping Helpers Heal

7 Tips for Caregivers to Overcome Compassion

- Prioritize self-care
- Spend Time with Family and Friends
- Positive Thinking to Cope with Stress
- Spend Time Doing Hobbies
- Set Realistic Expectations
- Spend Time in Nature
- Seek Professional Help

How to Build Resilience

- Self-care
- Self-awareness
- Taking Action
- Mindfulness
- Joining a Support Group

4 Components of Resilience

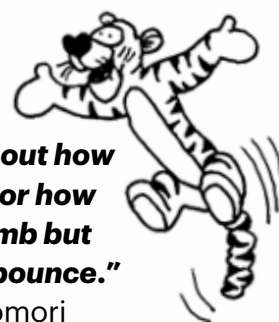
- Adequate sleep
- Good nutrition and hydration
- Regular physical activity
- Active relaxation and rest

The 5 Cs of Resilience

- Calm: able to stay calm in crisis or high stress situation
- Clarity: can clearly see what is happening
- Connection: able to ask for help and learn from others
- Competence: able to call on your skills
- Courage: faith in yourself to persevere

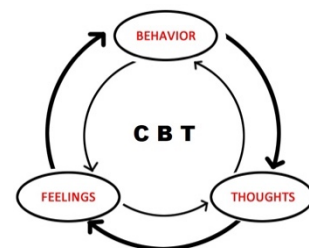
"Life is not about how fast you run or how high you climb but how well you bounce."

– Vivian Komori



CBT: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

The way we teach and communicate, both with people and with dogs, is evolving alongside our understanding of how the brain learns, feels, and responds to the world. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) provides a powerful framework not only for supporting human emotional health but also for deepening our empathy and communication with animals.



While both CBT and Conditioned Emotional Response (CER) aim to modify behavior, their methods differ. CBT focuses on identifying and reshaping the thought processes that influence behavior, while CER targets changing an emotional response to a specific stimulus through classical conditioning methods such as desensitization and counterconditioning.

In people, CBT is a type of psychotherapy that helps individuals recognize how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected. By changing unhelpful or distorted thought patterns, individuals can improve emotional well-being and develop healthier coping strategies. Similarly, when applied in the context of dog training, CBT-inspired approaches can help both humans and dogs replace negative associations with positive, rational, and confidence-building experiences.

Parallels Between CBT and Force-Free Dog Training

Both CBT and force-free dog training are grounded in positive reinforcement and effective communication. Each encourages empathy, understanding, and patience, values at the heart of compassionate care.

- Empathy and Understanding: CBT fosters self-compassion and nonjudgmental awareness, while force-free training nurtures empathy toward dogs by recognizing their emotions, motivations, and needs.
- Trust and Relationship: Both approaches emphasize building trust, respect, and a supportive environment where growth is safe and sustainable.
- Structure and Goal Orientation: CBT breaks down challenges into manageable steps, just as effective dog training divides complex behaviors into achievable milestones, celebrating small victories along the way.
- Resilience and Growth: CBT helps individuals develop coping skills and resilience, while positive reinforcement training builds a dog's confidence, adaptability, and trust, resulting in a stronger bond between handler and dog.

By recognizing these shared values, we can apply the principles of CBT not only to our human interactions but also to our relationships with our canine companions, fostering healthier minds, stronger relationships, and more compassionate communities.

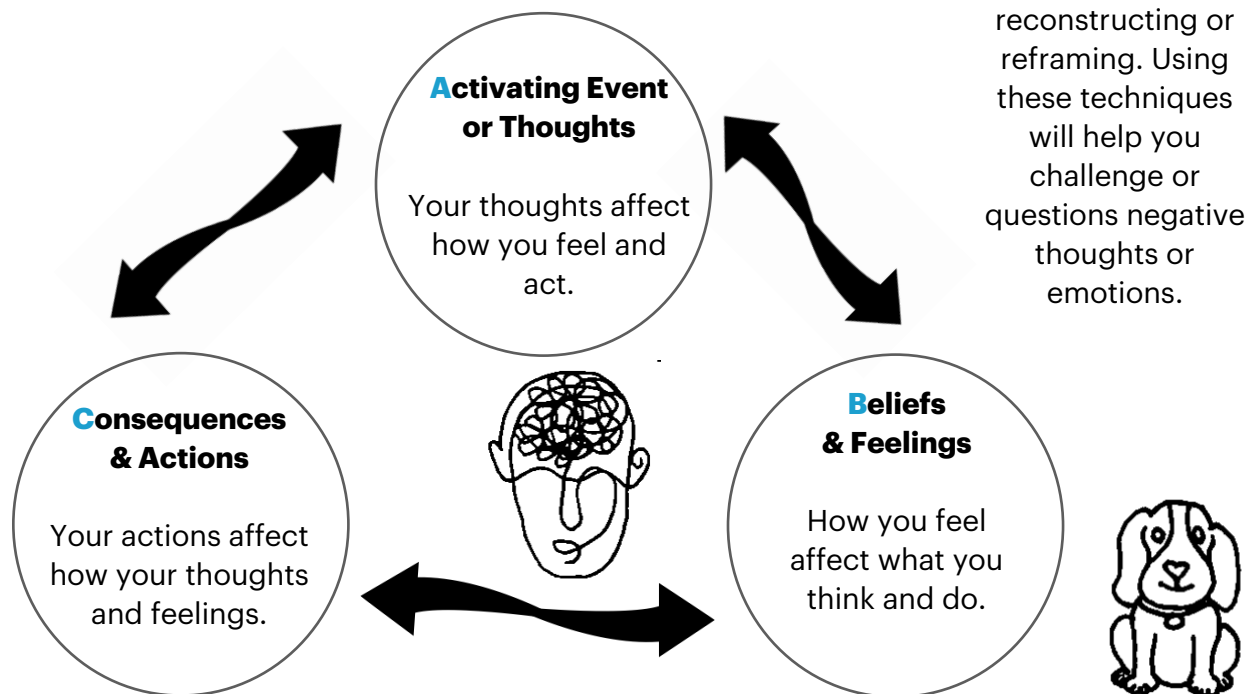
Compassion in Action

CBT teaches that how we think shapes how we feel and act, and the same truth applies in compassionate caregiving. By practicing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy, we build resilience in ourselves and model calm, confident leadership for our dogs and others around us. When compassion fatigue sets in, remember: Change your thoughts. Calm your body. Reconnect with your purpose. That's compassion in action, for both people and pets.



ABCs of CBT

The ABC OF CBT: Does A cause C or does B cause C?



How can understanding CBT help?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) uses the CBT triangle to encourage individuals to change negative or unhelpful thoughts, thereby improving their feelings and behaviors. Because thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected, shifting your perspective on stressful events can lead to greater control over your emotions and actions. Changing our thinking patterns helps both human and canine learners succeed through trust, patience, and consistency.

Example of Unhelpful Thinking:

A (Thoughts): "My dog won't listen, and I will never be able to walk my dog down the street."

B (Feelings): Sadness, worry and hopelessness

C (Behavior): Less effort, procrastination, little drive or ambition, giving little effort

Replacement and Realistic Thinking with CBT:

A (Thoughts): "I can practice basic skills at a lower difficulty level while setting my canine up for success, building toward the target behavior slowly but surely."

B (Feelings): Hopeful, confident and determined with drive and ambition to reach goals over time

C (Behavior): Works harder at breaking down training tasks to achievable goals while still shaping or raising training criteria gradually. Commits to train a little each day without flooding oneself or the canine.

Positive CBT & CER

Focus on possibilities, not problems. When we focus on emotional health, for both people and animals training and caregiving become more effective and relationships deepen. CBT reminds us that by shifting focus from stress to solutions, we build resilience and create space for compassion to grow.



Changing Your Body Chemistry

To Reduce Extreme Emotional Mind Fast, Remember T.I.P.

- ☐ **Tip the Temperature** to calm down the body quickly. Holding your breath, put your face in a bowl of cold water, or hold a cold pack (or zip-lock bag of cold water) on your eyes and cheeks. Hold for 30 seconds. Keep water above 50°F
- ☐ **Intense Exercise** to calm the body when it is revved with by emotions. Engage in intense exercise, if only for a short while. Expend your body's stored up physical energy by running, walking fast, jumping, playing basketball, lifting weights, Zumba, etc.
- ☐ **Paced Breathing & Paired Muscle Relaxation** Pace breathing and calm down by pairing muscle relaxation with breathing out. Breathe deeply into your belly. Slow your pace of inhaling and exhaling way down (on average, five to six breaths per minute). Breathe *out* more slowly than you breathe *in* (for example, 5 seconds in and 7 seconds out). While breathing into your belly deeply tense your body muscles (*not* so much as to cause a cramp). Notice the tension in your body. While breathing out, say the word "Relax" in your mind. Let go of the tension. Notice the difference in your body.

Distracting with a Wise Mind **ACCEPTS**

Activities

- ☐ Focus attention on activities to get the task complete.

Contributing

- ☐ Contribute to a need such as building drive to walk come to you to play a game.

Comparisons

- ☐ Consider how you feel now compared to another time you felt worse, counting glimmers.

Emotions

- ☐ Be mindful of your emotions and how you feel, setting you up for positive associations too.

Pushing Away

- ☐ When over threshold, leave the situation, get under threshold and capture correct choices.

Thoughts

- ☐ Thoughts are true trainers. Train your brain with counterconditioning, counting 3 positives.

Sensations

- ☐ Pair positive sensations like touch, play, or treats.

Happy Chemicals and How to Boost Them

Dopamine: The Reward Chemical

- Achieve a goal
- Practice gratitude
- Enjoy a bath, listening to music
- Eating food

Oxytocin: The Love Hormone

- Hug, cuddle or physical touch
- Quality social time
- Petting animals
- Acts of kindness, helping others

Endorphins: The Pain Relievers

- Relaxation and laughter
- High-intensity exercise

Serotonin: The Mood Stabilizer

- Sun exposure
- Eating foods rich in tryptophan
- Mindful nature walks
- Mindful deep breathing exercise



ABCs of Self-Care

Stuck in Stress?

Self-care is NOT optional, and everyone needs it! Self-care is never a selfish act. Real threats and perceived threats activate our stress response. Be proactive and practice self-care and stress management! It is your ethical obligation to take care of yourself. It is unethical to neglect self-care. Taking care of yourself, helps care for the world.

Learn Your ABCs of Self Care

A. Awareness

Awareness is to increase, look back on experiences in your career that led to frustrations or irritation and try to identify triggers, such as having to perform euthanasia and dealing with a difficult, non-compliant client. Knowing your triggers can make you less vulnerable to compassion fatigue, too.

B. Balance

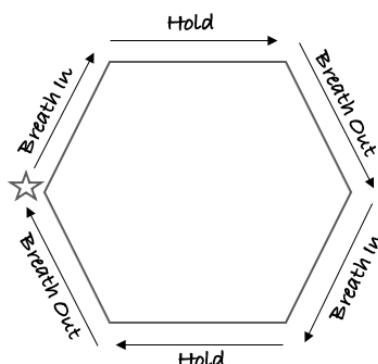
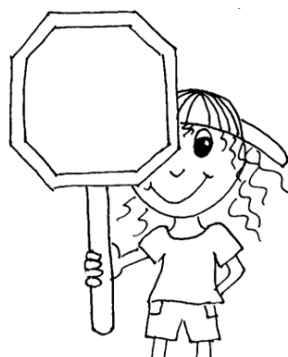
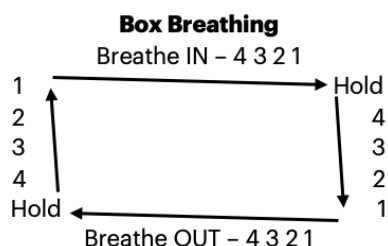
Having a work-life balance and self-care balance is imperative. Time for both your home and work habits will help you perform at your highest on the job, benefiting everyone.

C. Connections

Connections can help with accountability. Identify a potential accountability partner for someone to talk to about feelings and remind you when you are not acting like yourself or if you need a friend.

Benefits of Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is like giving your body a little helper to feel calm and happier. When you take slow, deep breaths, it helps your body relax, like when you're snuggling under a warm blanket.



The 6 Sides of Breathing

Starting at the star, trace with your finger around the six sides of the hexagon one side at a time. Following the first arrow with your finger, taking a deep breath in, feel your shoulders lift as air fills your lungs.

Trace over the top side, following the arrows as you hold your breath for a moment.

Following the third arrow, slowly breathe out as you trace the next side of the hexagon.

Complete another deep breath in as you follow the next arrow around the side.

Continue tracing around the bottom of the hexagon as you hold your deep breath in.

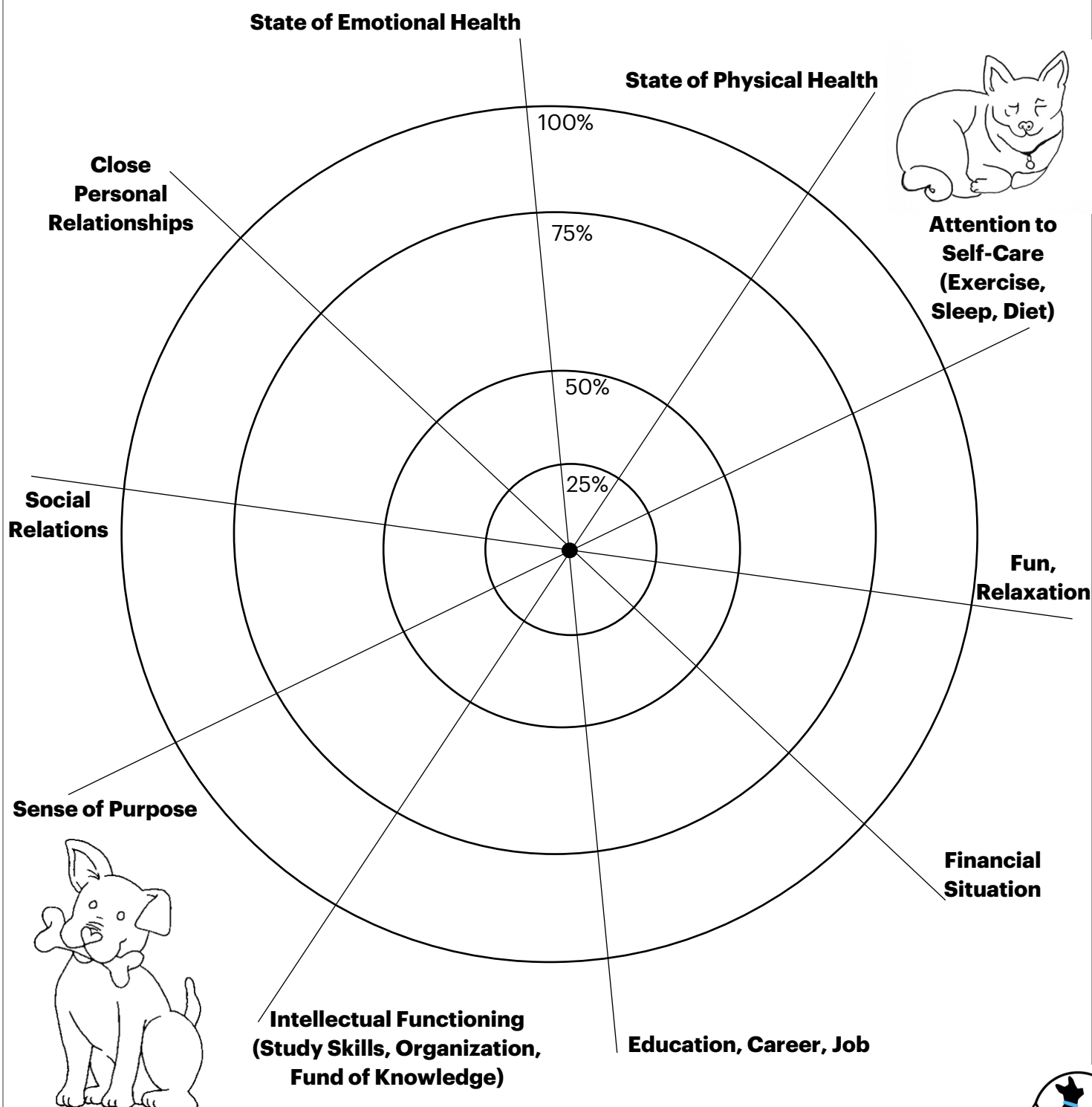
Lastly, following the sixth side of the hexagon slowly allow your breath out and feel your shoulder fall as you relax your face and mind.



Life Balance Assessment

Overall, how satisfied are you with the various area of your life?

Place an X along each line and then connect the Xs. Optimally, the shape you create will be a large circle. If the circle is small, consider depression and seek support and solutions. If the shape looks like a star, some areas either may be sources of stress and anxiety for you or may simply need more attention to those areas of your life.



Self-Care Awareness Assessment

Are you aware of your level of self-care?

1. Do you eat a nutritional diet, with whole foods and plenty of water?
2. Do you exercise regularly?
3. Do you get consistent and regular sleep?
4. Are you supported at work?
5. Are you confident in your ability to address challenges?
6. Do you set limits at work, whether it be with colleagues or tasks?
7. Do you believe in yourself and trust your abilities?
8. Do you do fun activities to decrease stress?
9. Are you comfortable saying no?
10. Do you have a dependable person who listens to you?
11. Can you leave pressures behind at the end of the day?
12. Can you sympathize and connect with clients and patients?
13. Are you kind to yourself?
14. Do you make time for things you enjoy?
15. Do you find a sense of meaning and enjoyment in your work?
16. Even when times are bad, do you have hope things will improve?
17. Do you have gratitude?
18. Most days, do you still have interest in or find joy in the world?
19. Do you find meaning in life, even during difficult times?
20. Do you ever have thoughts about self-care or suicide?

From more info: www.dvm360.com/burdenofcare

Peak Wellness

If you answered “yes” to each of the questions at left, you likely are prepared to weather the occasional emotional hardship.

Beginning of Burnout

Think of burnout as the progressive loss of idealism, energy, and goals as the result of on-the-job stress. Most experts agree that you burn out because of where you work. If you have the ability to recharge, change, or better your situation, you may be able to leave behind the burnout.

Compassion Fatigue

If work is becoming unbearable and symptoms or causes are not addressed, burnout can start to turn into compassion fatigue or reach dangerous levels. Signs include desensitization to patient stories and a decline in “beside manner”.

Compassion Fatigue Worsens

Levels of hope and empathy can take dramatic dips. Intrusive negative thoughts, excessive guilt and the inability to connect with friends and loved ones begin to take hold. Compassion fatigue worsens with the emotional and physical exhaustion of the advocate.

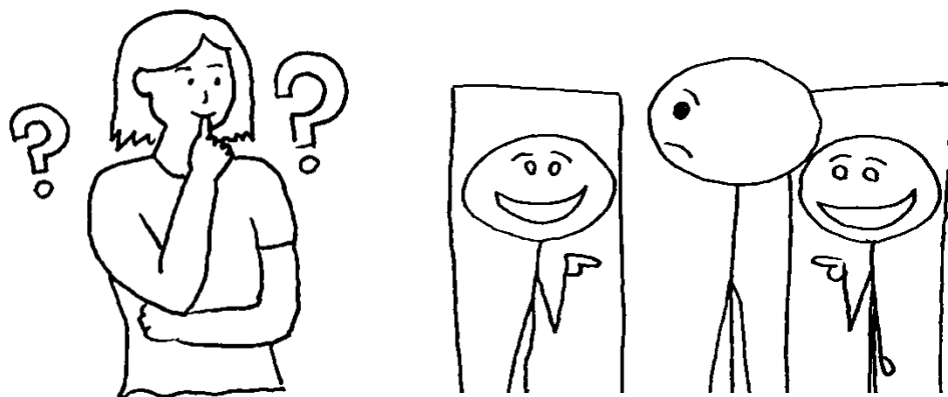
Get Support, Act Now!

If you think that you might be suffering from depression, burnout, or compassion fatigue, reach out to a trusted friend, family member, colleague, or therapist. Depression affects how you think, feel and behave leading to a variety of problems. You may have trouble doing day-to-day activities, and depression may make you feel worthless or as if life is not worth living. Seek support and know that you are not alone. Taking time to take good care of yourself will help you recognize signs of emotional strain sooner.



Burnout Self-Care Assessment Tool

This burnout self-care assessment tool is modelled after the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*. It explores three components: exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement.



Part 1. Exhaustion Assessment

- I feel emotionally drained by work.
- Working with people each day requires a lot of effort.
- I feel as if work is breaking me down.
- I feel frustrated by work.
- I feel like I work too hard at my job.
- Working in direct contact with people stressed me too much.
- I feel like I am at the end of my rope.

Never
0
A few times per year
1
Once a month
2
A few times per month
3
Once per week
4
A few times per week
5
Every day
6

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Total



Part 2. Depersonalization Assessment

- I look after others impersonally, almost as if they are objects.
- I feel tired when I get up in the morning and must face another day.
- I have the idea that my clients make me responsible for their problems.
- At the end of the workday, I am at the end of my patience.
- I really do not care what happens to some of those that I care for.
- I have grown more insensitive to people since I have been working.
- I fear that my job is making me uncaring and cold or bitter.

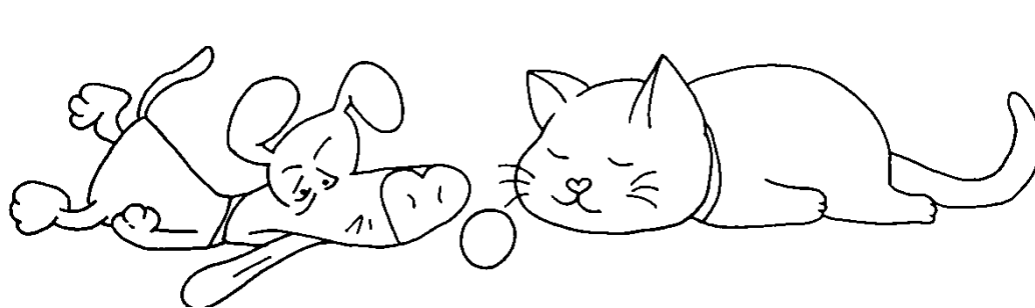
Never
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Total



Self-Care Awareness Interpretations



Part 3. Personal Achievement Assessment

I accomplish many worthwhile things in my job.

I am easily able to empathize, understand what my clients feel.

I effectively look after the problems of those I advocate for.

I handle emotional problems calmly in my work.

I feel I have a positive influence on people through my work.

I am easily able to create a relaxed atmosphere for those I care for.

I feel refreshed when I have been close to those I care for at work.

Never
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A few times per year
1
Once a month
2
A few times per month
3
Once per week
4
A few times per week
5
Every day
6

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Total

Scoring Results Interpretation

A high score in parts 1 and 2 and a low score in part 3 may indicate burnout.

Part 1. Exhaustion Assessment

Total score of 17 or less: low-level burnout

Total score of 18-29: moderate burnout

Total score over 30: high-level burnout

Burnout speaks to fatigue at the very idea of work, chronic fatigue, sleep problems, and physical problems. For most self-assessments, exhaustion would be the key component and unlike depression, the issues tend to disappear outside of work.

Part 2. Depersonalization Assessment

Total score of 5 or less: low-level burnout

Total score of 6-11: moderate burnout

Total score over 12: high-level burnout

Depersonalization is a feeling of dehumanization in interpersonal relationships. The feeling of detachment is excessive, leading to withdrawal from social contact.

Part 3. Personal Achievement Assessment

Total score of 33 or less: low-level burnout

Total score of 34-39: moderate burnout

Total score over 40: high-level burnout

A reduction of personal achievements leads one to self-assess negatively and feel unable to move a situation forward. This component represents the demotivating effects of repetitive, difficult situations leading to failure and personal doubt in one's abilities to accomplish things.



My Healing & Health Care Plan

Make a Personal Wellness Plan

- Identify what is important to you
- Spend plenty of quality time alone
- Recharge your batteries daily
- Wash up after your work shift as a symbolic washing away
- Exercise and eat properly.
- Get enough healthy sleep
- Find someone to talk to about work woes. Hold a focused conversation or have at least one meaningful connection each day
- Understand that the pain you feel in a normal part of working in a caring profession
- Do not neglect your needs and personal interest



My Burnout Recovery Plans

Demands I Can Drop

My Sensory Soothers

Sensory Blockers I Can Use

Ways to Recharge

People I Can Unmask With

My Safe Foods

People Who are Soothing to Be With

People I Can Go to for Extra Support

Soothing Ways of Engaging My Special Interests

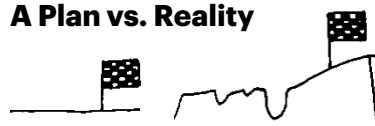


Life Balance Planning



	Grateful For	Long Term Goals	Short Term Goals	First Steps (Action Item)
Physical Health				
Emotional Health				
Self-Care				
Fun & Relaxation				
Nearby Friends				
Social Relationships				
Sense of Purpose				
Physical Health				
Education, Career, Job				
Financial Situation				

A Plan vs. Reality



Keep slithering forward. 1% > 0. Progress is progress...



Reflections: Mind Full or Mindful?

I am Passionate About

**What brings you joy and happiness?
Fill in each ray with something that brightens your day.**

What I Love Most About Me

Ways I Can Live My Passion

My Favorite Inspirational Quote

Did you ever notice how nature dedicates entire seasons to slowing down?



Reflections & Room to Grow

Circle or draw how you feel about this guide, *Compassion in Action*.



Write down at least three things you learned from this guide.

Write down at least two challenges you faced in this guide.

Room to Grow: Write How You Will Grow from Your Choices



"Our bodies are our gardens, our wills are our gardeners."
- William Shakespeare



Resources for Animal Advocates

Those who dedicate their time and hearts to helping others, especially in animal welfare, rescue, shelter work, and advocacy, carry both the rewards and emotional weight of compassion. The following organizations and resources are designed specifically for those working in animal welfare.

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project: www.compassionfatigue.org

Founded by compassion fatigue expert Françoise Mathieu, this site offers educational articles, tools, and workshops designed for caregivers, animal welfare staff, and first responders.

The Maddie's Fund® Learning Academy: www.maddiesfund.org

Provides free online courses and resources for animal welfare professionals, including webinars on self-care, community engagement, and leadership resilience.

Best Friends Animal Society – Network Partners Program: www.bestfriends.org

Connects shelters, rescues, and advocates across the country with grants, and wellness-focused initiatives.

Not One More Vet (NOMV): www.nomv.org

A global organization supporting the mental health and well-being of veterinary professionals.

Humane Society of the United States – Shelter and Rescue Support: www.humanesociety.org

Provides resources and training for staff and volunteers to strengthen compassion, manage emotional stress, and build supportive shelter cultures.

ASPCapro Compassion Fatigue Resources: www.aspcapro.org

Offers professional development, webinars, and self-care strategies for animal welfare workers.

AVMA Wellbeing and Peer Support: www.avma.org/resources-tools/wellbeing

The American Veterinary Medical Association provides mental health resources, stress management tools, and access to peer support networks for veterinarians and support staff.

VetSupport: www.vetsupport.com/compassion-fatigue

Practical tools, webinars, and support programs for those in animal care fields.

DVM360: www.dvm360.com

Articles and education focused on veterinary well-being and compassion fatigue.

The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare: www.theschwartzcenter.org

Promotes compassion in healthcare through training, support programs, and research.

Pet Peace of Mind: www.petpeaceofmind.org

A nonprofit that partners with human healthcare and hospice organizations to help patients care for their pets, promoting compassion for both people and animals during difficult times.

The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement: www.theaawa.org

Supports leadership and education in animal welfare, offering conferences, online training, and community care initiatives that address staff wellness and sustainable compassion.

The Compassion Consortium: www.compassionconsortium.org

An interfaith, inclusive organization that provides spiritual and emotional support for people who care deeply for animals and the planet, emphasizing empathy and mindful service.

The Shelter Medicine Podcast (University of Florida): www.sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu

Features expert discussions on stress, compassion fatigue, and building a culture of care in animal welfare.

The Mayhew Animal Welfare Foundation (UK & Global): www.themayhew.org

Provides community veterinary outreach and education programs emphasizing empathy, kindness, and well-being for both people and animals.



More Resources and References

Mental Health and Crisis Support

- **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** www.988lifeline.org
Call or text 988 (Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
24/7 confidential support for individuals in emotional distress.
Formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
- **Crisis Text Line:** www.crisistextline.org
Text "HOME" or "REASON" to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor 24/7.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline:** www.nami.org
Call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) or text "HELPLINE" to 62640
Provides information, support, and referrals to local mental health resources.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** www.samhsa.gov
National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
Offers free, confidential, 24/7 treatment referral and information for individuals and families facing mental or substance use disorders.



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8. Walker, Pete. *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*



My Resources



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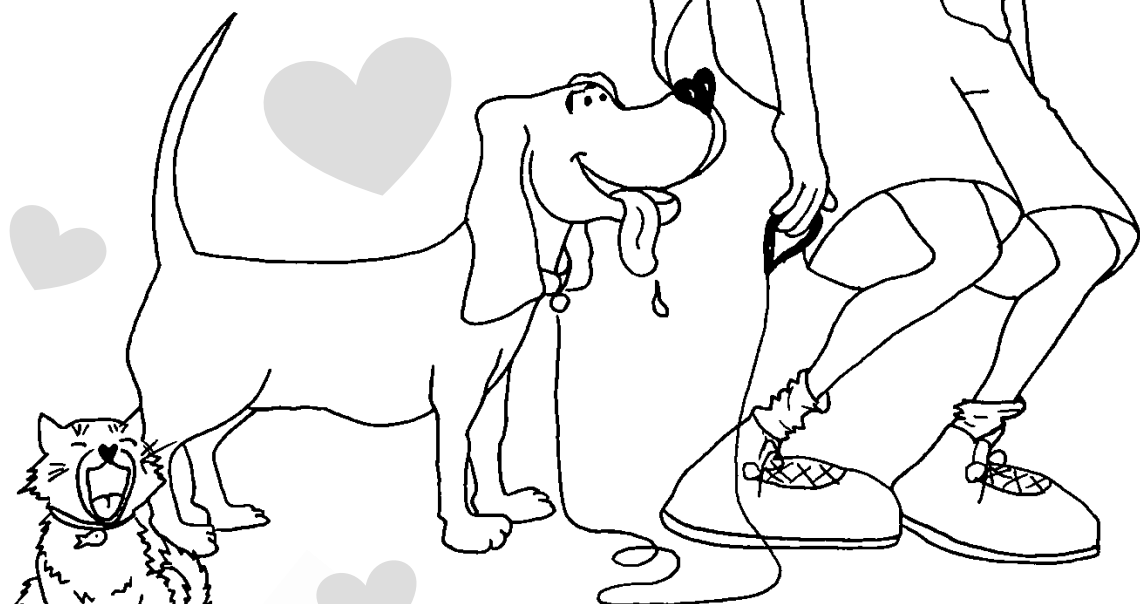
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Compassion
Fatigue Is the
Inevitable Cost
of Caring
Without Limits.



If Your
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High Five.

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