

Rx for Compassion Fatigue;
Caring for yourself with the same Compassion you
extend to the wildlife in your care

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Why Do We Need to Talk About This?

Compassion Fatigue was first named in nursing literature in the 1990's and described the state of numbed empathy among other symptoms suffered by nurses.

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project defines it as “a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper”

Compassion Fatigue vs Burnout

Compassion Fatigue may be a subset of Burnout, but unlike Burnout, it may occur suddenly, and impacts those in caregiving professions, while Burnout can occur in any profession. An additional risk for many in animal welfare workers is not feeling that their work is valued by society at large.

Understanding it, Allows us to take Preventative Steps

Working in Wildlife Rehabilitation exposes you to distressing, and sometimes hazardous situations, which is a risk factor.

When there are known risk factors, it is critical to put safety measures in place, and just as firemen have protocols and equipment to support a safe work environment, wildlife rehab workers need to do the same.

Assessment Exercise: Is Your Heart Larger Than Your Hands

This tool can be found in Linda Harper, PhD's work *The Power of Joy in Giving to Animals*. CAP publishing 2014.

As the questions are read out, rate yourself from 1-5, with 0 = doesn't apply, 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = Usually, 5 = always, then total your responses

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

1. physical and emotional exhaustion
2. irritability
3. headaches
4. trouble sleeping/ changes in sleep habits
5. emotional numbing
6. stress/ anxiety
7. hopelessness
8. weigh loss

Rx suggestions

1. Have a clear understanding of your role/ expectations for your work, this will support setting strong boundaries.
2. Develop a support network, this can be a mentor, or a group of others involved in the same work, where you can debrief situations, or learn of other resources.
3. Make time for activities away from work; family, other interests, self care activities.

Rx Suggestions Cont.

4. Develop a list of easy, quick things you can do for yourself; mindfulness activities, getting 10 minutes of sunlight, eating away from your work, deliberately ending your day by removing work clothes, or acknowledging you did the best that you could...
5. Avoid vicarious exposure to additional trauma related to your work, such as watching the news, or shows related to animal welfare work.
6. When you have put in a period of long hours, build in a day off.
7. Consider additional trainings in your field.

Compassion Satisfaction

“Exploring Wellness of Wildlife Careers in New Zealand: A Descriptive Study” by Polly Yeung et al, published in Anthrozoos, in 2017, found that there was much less compassion fatigue among wildlife workers than they expected to find. This was related by to satisfaction and meaning workers found in their work.

I would like to end this session with an exercise focusing on what brings each of you satisfaction.

Resources

The Power of Joy in Giving to Animals by Linda Harper, PhD, with contributions by Faith Maloney

Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community by Charles R. Figley, PhD. and Robert G. Roop, PhD.
published by the Humane Society of the United States

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project:
<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>

National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

QPR Institute 1-888-726-7926