

**“I Don’t Want to Do this Anymore!”
Compassion fatigue & Tools to
Combat It**

*When practicing Social Work feels more like labor
than a labor of love, take steps to heal the healer*

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Presentation Objectives

- Define Stress, Sources of Stressors
- Define Compassion Fatigue and Burnout.
- Be familiar with tools that measure the Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout.
- Able to Identify basic characteristics of human service workers that may contribute to burnout
- Able to Identify, describe strategies and tools to relieve Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout.

Dr. Hans Selye



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What is Stress ?

- Dr. Hans Selye, a premier stress researcher has defined stress as
- “the body’s nonspecific response to any demand placed on it, whether that demand is pleasant or not.”
- stress is your body’s physical, mental and chemical reactions to circumstances that frighten, excite, confuse, endanger or irritate you.

What is Stress?

Hans Selye believes that each of us has a finite nonreplenishable amount of adaptation “energy” available to use in restoring equilibrium after a stressful event.

The stress response involves the autonomic nervous system, which ordinarily serves to keep our bodies in equilibrium through controlling our metabolism and growth rates.

The autonomic nervous system can do its work in two ways:

- It can act directly on the heart, liver, stomach, spleen, large and small intestines – causing each to speed up (**parasympathetic response**) or slow down (**sympathetic response**).
- It can act by stimulating certain of the endocrine glands (pituitary, thyroid, and adrenal) causing them to release their hormones.

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What is Stress?

The chemical chain of events that occur in the stress response is as follows:

- The hypothalamus portion of the brain stimulates with CRH (Corticotropin-releasing hormone) the autonomic nervous system which directly causes the heart to speed up and the digestive tract to slow down and the pituitary gland (master gland of the endocrine system).
- The posterior lobe of the pituitary gland releases vasopressin which constricts artery walls and increases blood pressure.
- The anterior lobe releases ACTH, which stimulates the cortex of the adrenal glands and TSH which stimulates the thyroid gland.

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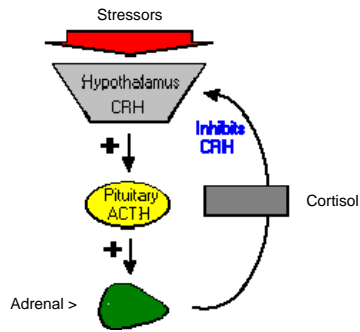
What is Stress?

The chemical chain of events that occur in the stress response is as follows (continued):

- When stimulated by TSH, the thyroid releases thyroxin, which increases metabolism.
- ACTH (Adrenocorticotropic hormone) causes the adrenal cortex to release anti-inflammatory glucocorticoids (Cortisol) which, in turn, stimulate the pancreas to release glucagon, increasing the level of blood sugar.
- When the adrenal medulla is stimulated by a neural connection from the central nervous system, it releases the Flight-Fight chemicals adrenalin (Epinephrine) and nor-adrenalin (**Nor-Epinephrine**), which equip one for emergency action by stimulating the cardiovascular system (heart rate, white blood cell count, oxygen level, clotting agents) and further speeding up metabolism.

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Chemistry of Stress

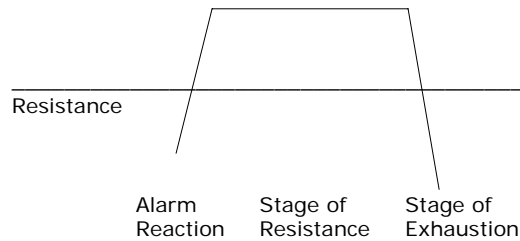


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The GAS or the General Adaption Syndrome is composed of three distinct phases:

A Model of the GAS

Level of Normal



What Are Symptoms or Warning Signs

- Physical – pain, sleep, bruxism, etc
- Emotional – anger, irritable, moody
- Mental – confused, concentration etc.
- Behavioral – Drinking/drugging, argumentative, late, decline in appearance etc.

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Sources of Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

- People – Relationships, Interactions etc
- Places – Work, Home, Leisure, School etc
- Things – Stuff – Computers, Cars etc.
- Self – Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Emotions, Coping style - Personality

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Some Measures of Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

- Rahe & Holmes Life Change or known as the Holmes & Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale
- Symptom Checklist – 90, Public domain
- OQ 45.2 Outcomes Questionnaire
- Self-Assessment For Compassion Fatigue
- MBI Maslach Burnout Inventory – 22 items

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Compassion Fatigue

- Employment Specific Cause
- Physical Symptoms
- Psychological Symptoms
- Impact on Function
- Recovery

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Warning Signs Of Compassion Fatigue

Although symptoms vary, the following red flags may indicate that you have compassion fatigue:

- | | |
|---|--|
| Abusing drugs, alcohol or Food | Gastrointestinal complaints |
| Anger | High self-expectations |
| Blaming | Hopelessness |
| Chronic lateness | Hypertension |
| Depression | Inability to maintain balance of empathy and objectivity |
| Diminished sense of personal accomplishment | Increased irritability |
| Exhaustion (physical or emotional) | Less ability to feel joy |
| Frequent headaches | Low self-esteem |
| | Sleep disturbances |
| | Workaholism |

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Compassion Fatigue or Burnout?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Compassion Fatigue | Burn Out |
| • Employment Specific Cause | • Multiple Causes |
| • Physical Symptoms | • Physical Symptoms |
| • Psychological Symptoms | • Psychological Symptoms |
| • Impact on Function | • Impact on Function |
| • Recovery | • Recovery |

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Maslach and Jackson, pioneers in burnout research, defined burnout as a combination of the following:

Emotional Exhaustion

- Feeling emotionally overextended and depleted

Reduced Personal Accomplishment

- A decline in one's feelings of competence and achievement at work.

Depersonalization

- A negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people.

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Researchers Pines and Aronson stated it more simply:

- highly motivated and committed individuals lose their spirit.

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They identified 3 basic characteristics of human service workers that may contribute to burnout:

- They perform work that is (mentally) & emotionally exhausting.
- They are generally sensitive. And sensitive to people.
- They have a client-centered orientation.

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Symptoms of Burnout

- **Thinking.** Burnout can lead to confusion; impaired judgment and decision-making; forgetfulness; and decreased ability to identify alternatives, prioritize tasks, and evaluate one's own performance
- **Mood.** Burnout can cause emotional exhaustion; loss of a sense of personal accomplishment and merit; depersonalization and alienation; depression; and easy excitability, anger, and irritability

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Symptoms of Burnout

- **Somatic functioning.** Burnout can lower energy level, change appetite and sleeping, and cause gastrointestinal problems, hypochondriacal complaints, and exhaustion
- **Behavioral functioning.** Burnout can cause increased or decreased activity level; extreme fatigue; excessive isolation from coworkers, family and clients; disorganization; misplacing of items; and impaired competence on the job.

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Prevention & Resources

- According to *Prudent Practice: A Guide for Managing Malpractice Risk*, social workers who suspect they might be undergoing a process of burnout are advised to undertake preventive measures—measures to safeguard themselves and their clients, ² among them:

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Burnout Prevention and Management

- Don't go at it alone!!
- Listen and Share your concerns of & with colleagues, family, and friends
- Conduct periodic self-assessments
- Reduce isolation by maintaining regular supervision and network with colleagues
- Take needed "mental health days" and use stress-reduction techniques
- Arrange for reassignment at work, take leave
- Seek appropriate professional help, as needed.

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Some Strategies For Handling Stress or Protective Factors

Physical Strategies

- **Physical Activity:** exercise, walking, run, swim, bicycling, etc. Write/Journal.
- **Progressive Relaxation:** tensing & relaxing of the major muscles of the body.
- **Breathing:** Slow deep breathing (use calm music).
- **Good Nutrition:** eat a balanced diet & not skip more than one meal a day.
- **Do Something for someone else.**

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Some Strategies For Handling Stress or Protective Factors

Emotional Strategies

- **Support system:** Having a network of friends, co-workers, family, friends, feedback & support.
- **Break Time:** removing yourself from a highly emotionally charged situation temporarily.
- **Humor:** The art of laughter at self & problems.
- **Assertiveness:** Being direct, needs, rights, without blaming or threatening or infringing on the rights of others.
- **Expression of feelings:** discussing/describing a variation of feelings (Mad, Glad, Sad, Scared).

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Some Strategies For Handling Stress or Protective Factors

Mental Strategies:

- **Change Your Mind:** letting the mind be diverted by different thoughts.
- **Re-labeling:** The art of seeing a promise in every problem.
- **Whispering:** The art of giving yourself positive messages when things are going wrong.
- **Imagination:** Guided fantasy or visual imagery.
- **Letting Go:** Why hold on to pain, anxiety, or frustration, fear, anger? You can't control anything or anyone except yourself!

Decide to let go and do it!

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Some Strategies For Handling Stress or Protective Factors

Mental Strategies:

- **Time Management: Re-organize Yourself: What do you want / priorities?**
- **Make a PLAN & make it work!**
- **Positive Self-Talk:** approaching a difficult or negative situation in a self-appreciating, positive way.
- **Brainstorming:** generating ideas that are possible solutions to a difficult or stressful problem.

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Options for Responding to Any Problem

*From Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Disorder Personality
by Marsha Linehan. ©1993 The Guilford Press.
Adapted by Edward G. Silverhardt, BCD, LCSW, LSCSW 2004*

- **Solve The Problem**
- **Feel Better About The Problem**
- **Tolerate The Problem**
- **Stay Miserable**

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Options for Responding to Any Problem
Solve The Problem

- Leave; get out of the situation for good.
And/Or
- Change the situation, in other words
- If you can't control the situation or the person(s) involved that are contributing to you're not being happy,
- It's time for you to do something different!

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Options for Responding to Any Problem
Feel Better About The Problem

- Regulate your emotional response to the problem.
- In other words if you can't control the situation or the person(s) involved that are contributing to your not being happy,
- It's time for you to do something different.
- Learn how to "let go" by "Detaching" yourself from those people or your thoughts that stir up negative feelings.

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Options for Responding to Any Problem
Tolerate The Problem

- It's time for you to do something different.
- Accept and tolerate both the problem and your response to the problem.
- Be flexible, and try to accept that which you can not change or control except yourself.

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Options for Responding to Any Problem Stay Miserable

- By digging in your heels and not being willing to change or adapt to the situation or people,
- You will pretty much guarantee yourself bad thoughts and feelings and not so great health.
- It's time for you to do something different.

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Deconstructing Stressors

When you are not happy with the way you handled a situation, try this exercise.

- Write down three ways that it could have gone better.
- Write down three ways that it could have gone worse.
- Imagine yourself as someone whose coping style you respect. Think how they would have handled the situation, and write it down.
- This exercise may serve as a reminder that mistakes aren't failures and give you great practice for future crises.

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Do's and don'ts of recovery

- **Don't:**
Blame others.
Look for a new job, buy a new car, get a divorce or have an affair.
Fall into the habit of complaining with your colleagues.
Hire a lawyer.
Work harder and longer.
Self-medicate.
Neglect your own needs and interests.
- **Do:**
Find someone to talk to.
Understand that the pain you feel is normal.
Start exercising and eating properly.
Get enough sleep.
Take some time off.
Develop interests outside of your field of practice.
Identify what's important to you.

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In Summary

- Defined Stress, Sources of Stressors
- Defined Compassion Fatigue and Burnout.
- Familiar with tools that measure the Stress and Burnout.
- Identified basic characteristics of human service workers that may contribute to burnout
- Identified, described and demonstrated strategies and tools to relieve Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout.

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Thank You

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