

# Running On Empty

**AMERICAN IMMIGRATION  
LAWYERS ASSOCIATION  
AUGUST 28, 2018**

D.C. Bar  
Lawyer Assistance Program

Let's check in



# FILL IN THE BLANKS

The world is a \_\_\_\_\_ place.

Life is \_\_\_\_\_.

I am \_\_\_\_\_ as a human being.

I want to change \_\_\_\_\_ about my job.

I want to change \_\_\_\_\_ about myself.

Most often I feel \_\_\_\_\_.



**I'M QUITTING LIFE TO BECOME A BURRITO**



"“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and **not** be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to **walk through water without getting wet.**”

- Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen

# WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or chronic stress

Predictable, building over time and resulting in work dissatisfaction

Associated with high workload and few rewards

Related to the work environment  
(organizational, political, or administrative issues)

# WHAT IS VICARIOUS TRAUMA?

Transformation of your world view as a result of doing your work, from seeing the suffering of others

Accompanied by intrusive thoughts and imagery

# WHAT IS COMPASSION FATIGUE?

The cumulative physical/emotional/psychological effects of continual exposure to traumatic or distressing stories/events

When working in a helping capacity

Where demands outweigh resources



# COMMON ELEMENTS?

Fatigue, no matter how much someone rests or sleeps. This is an exhaustion that runs deeper than sleep deprivation, and it cannot be cured by a few days off

A sense of inefficacy, leaving people feeling like they are exerting significant effort, but are not making any progress or gaining any recognition

Cynicism about life, numbness, or a feeling that nothing a person does really matters

# COMPASSION FATIGUE VERSUS BURNOUT

What distinguishes compassion fatigue from burnout is that while burnout springs from where you work, compassion fatigue is associated with the work you do.

“Compassion fatigue is going to go where you are—a job switch is not going to fix that,”

Jennifer Brandt, PhD, LISW

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

### *BURN-OUT and CF*

- Cumulative
- Predictable
- Builds over time
- Results in work dissatisfaction
- Unaddressed leads to serious health problems
- Narrower focus
- Harmed by the kind of work we do
- Intrusive imagery
- Changes the meaning of life
- Affects our world view

Source: Deborah Sinclair, MSW

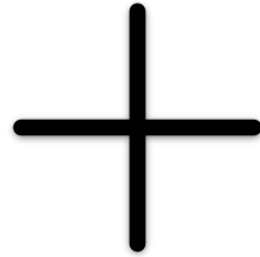


### Trauma Exposure Response

A trauma exposure response may be defined as the transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet.



Mirror neuron  
network



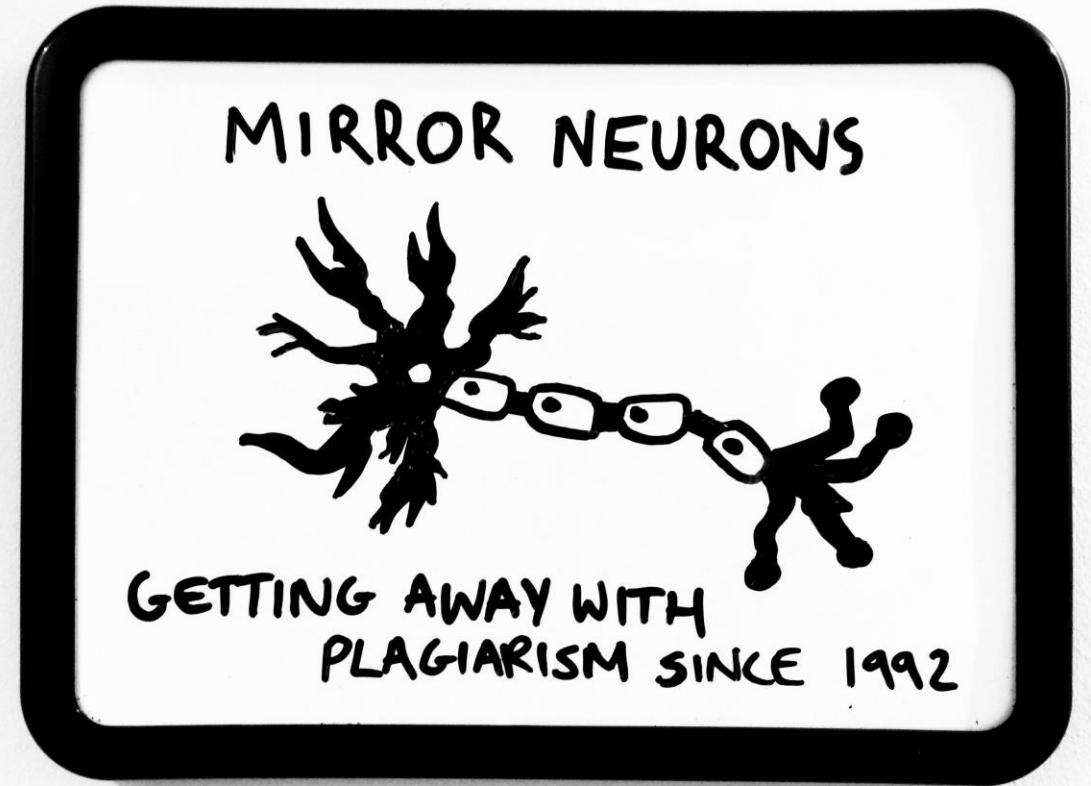
Sympathetic nervous  
system

# NEUROLOGICAL BASIS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

# ROLE OF MIRROR NEURONS

**Mirror neurons are triggered by:**

- Observing the actions or experiences of another
- Hearing the stories of another
- Reading the description of the experiences of another



# SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

## The fight or flight response

Dilation of pupil

Dry mouth

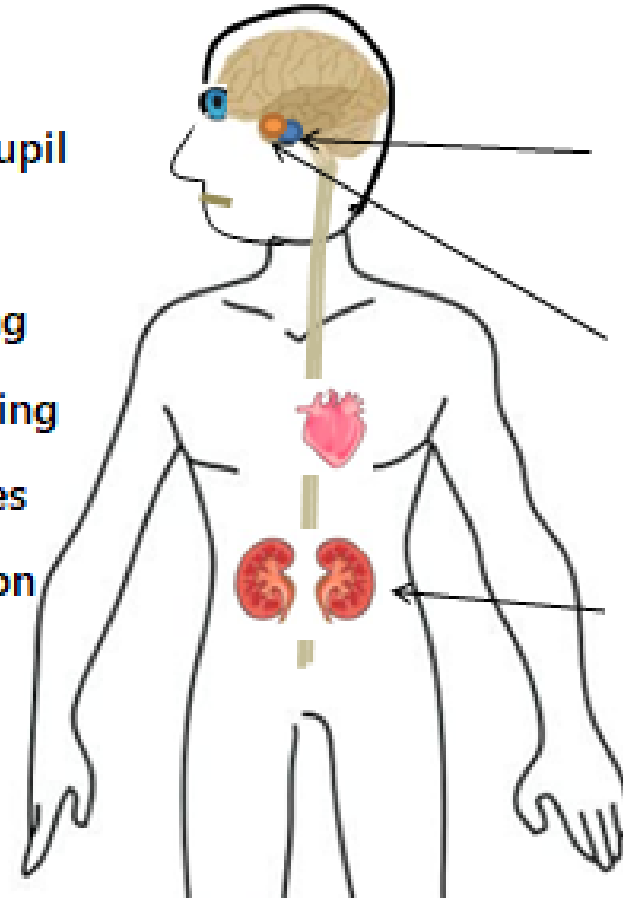
Fast breathing

Heart pounding

Tense muscles

Slow digestion

Sweating of  
palms

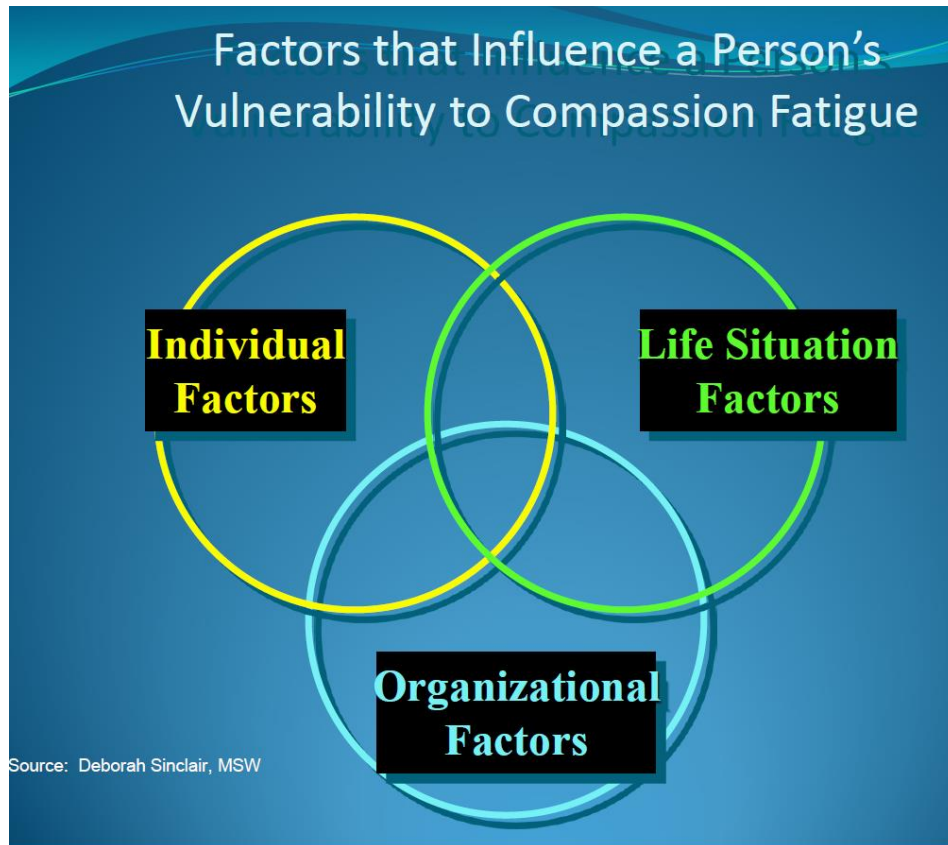


1. The amygdala reacts to threat

2. The hypothalamus activates the sympathetic nervous system, release of adrenaline

3. The adrenal cortex releases cortisol for continued alertness

# RISK FACTORS



## Individual vulnerabilities

- History of or current trauma
- Health problems
- Alcohol or Drug use/troubles
- Poor job performance
- Depression or Anxiety
- Life problems-spouse/partner, children, parents

# DEALING WITH COMPASSION FATIGUE

“You have to have empathy; you have to care. That is the reason any of us do this work. But you need a set of tools to help you process the material.”

—Margaret L Satterhwaite  
NYU law professor





# WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?

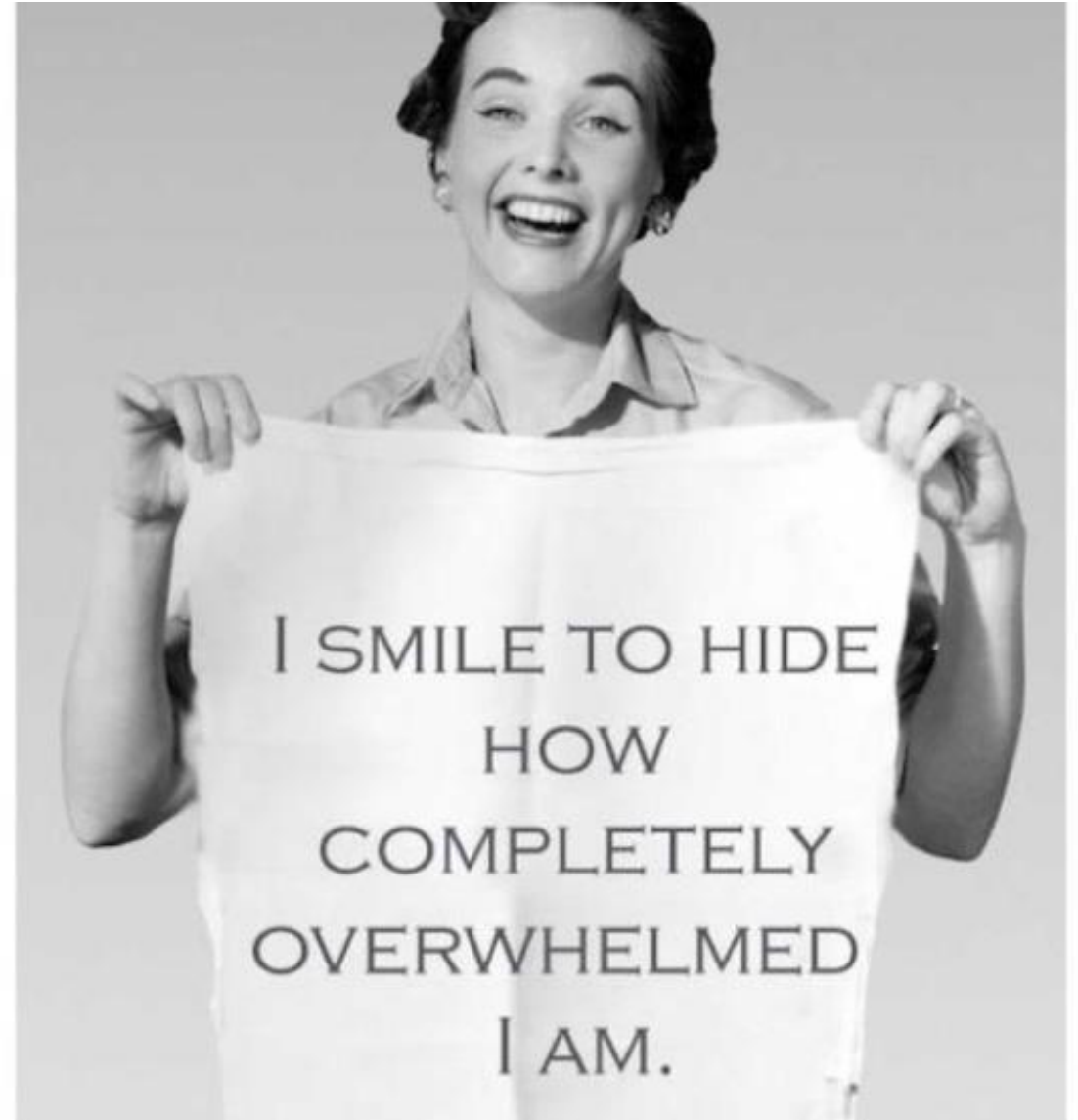
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Today



# HOW DO YOU FEEL?

What is your stress level now?



# RESEARCH BASED SUGGESTIONS

- Recognize the **risks** for yourself
- Find a way to **debrief** distressing material
- Work on **self awareness** every day
- Take an **inventory** of how balanced your life is -- be intentional about balancing it out
- Evaluate** your tension reducing behaviors
- Be **intentional** about **protecting** yourself

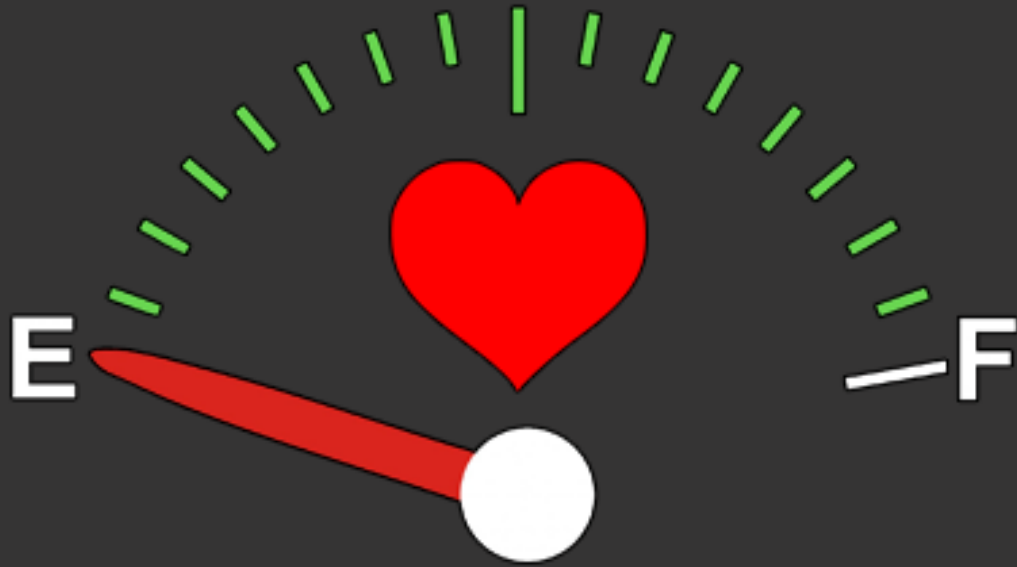
# DEBRIEF

## Low impact debriefing

- Provide fair warning
- Obtain consent
- Limited disclosure
  - Start on the outer circle of least traumatic and slowly move into the inner circle of very traumatic information
- Stop when you feel relief



# COMPASSION FATIGUE



SELF AWARENESS

Know your specific warning signs

Develop an early warning system

Check-in with self daily

# TAKE AN INVENTORY

Group Discussion: How do you manage daily stressors?

- Self-assessment: Self care inventory
- What are your tension reducing behaviors?

# DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SELF- CARE

Self-care should be tailored  
to your own areas of  
vulnerability

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Professional
- Social





# SELF-CARE THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BEFORE</b></p> <p>Physical self-care          Transitions to work          Transitions to trauma          Grounding self check-in          Recognize and anticipate potential triggers</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DURING</b></p> <p>Focus on the task at hand          Stay present and grounded          Breath, posture, and body awareness          Create distance or protection: A space around yourself, take a half step back; take a moment          Mantras          Limit imagery          Notice reactions and plan for intervention later          Leave the trauma when you leave</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LATER/ONGOING</b></p> <p>Regular practice of relaxation techniques and/or physical movement and exercise          Build and use broad support          Take care of your physical health          Have a life outside of work          Practice spiritual renewal          Transforming meaning          Transitions: to and from trauma; to and from work</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RIGHT AFTER</b></p> <p>Body awareness: relaxation or movement techniques          Breathing exercises          Visualization exercises          Redirected thinking or reframing          Utilizing support          Transitions: from trauma          Transitions: from work</p>



# ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE WELLBEING

- Expressing Gratitude
- Cultivating Optimism
- Avoiding Overthinking and Social Comparison
- Practicing Acts of Kindness
- Nurturing Social Relationships
- Developing Strategies for Coping
- Learning to Forgive
- Increasing “Flow” Experiences
- Savoring Life’s Joys
- Committing to your Goals
- Practicing Religion and Spirituality
- Taking Care of your Body (Meditation. Yoga.)

Adapted from T. Ben-Shahar

WHAT DO YOU DO AT THE END OF A WORK DAY  
TO TRANSITION YOURSELF PHYSICALLY,  
EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY?



# WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

What is your commitment to change?

- Daily Goal(s):
  
- Weekly Goal(s):
  
- Monthly Goal(s):

# RESOURCES

## **D.C. Bar Lawyer Assistance Program**

--Free and confidential assessment, referral and short-term counseling for D.C. Bar members, judges or law students at D.C. law schools

--Call 202-347-3131 or email [lap@dcbar.org](mailto:lap@dcbar.org)

## **ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs**

[www.americanbar.org/colap](http://www.americanbar.org/colap)

## **Health Insurance or Employee Assistance Program**

--Contact your health insurance to clarify mental health benefits and obtain in-network counseling resources

## **Primary Care Physician**

--Contact general practitioner for referral options

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