**FYSB** Family & Youth Services Bureau

# Runaway and Homeless Youth Training & Technical Assistance Center

## Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

| What is it? | What do I need to know about it? |
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| **Burnout**, in terms of social services work, is synonymous with compassion fatigue.<br><br>**Compassion Fatigue** is defined as physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual exhaustion from chronic exposure to vulnerable or suffering populations characterized by three dimensions:<br><br>1. Emotional exhaustion<br><br>2. Depersonalization<br><br>3. Reduced sense of personal accomplishment<br><br>**Secondary Traumatic Stress** is similar to burnout but triggered by trauma work and characterized by symptoms of PTSD. | *Who*: Anyone in human services, but child welfare and youth care workers are exceptionally vulnerable<br><br>*Symptoms*: Depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, headaches, cardiovascular disease, feelings of dread about going to work, excessive boredom, feelings of flatness or tiredness, pessimism about the future<br><br>*Warning signs*: Frequent absences or tardiness, chronic fatigue, or evidence of poor client care may indicate that it's time for a vacation, but if symptoms persist after implementing some time off it may reflect more serious burnout.<br><br>**Risk factors:**<br>*Work environment*: High caseloads or those heavy with violence, human-induced, sexual trauma and/or child victims; long hours; community-based or public service settings; lack of control over agency policies; stigmatizing organizational culture; high turnover, poor training & inadequate supervision or peer support<br><br>*Individual*: Neurotic personality traits, youth and inexperience<br><br>**Protective factors:**<br>*Work environment*: Sustainable, balanced caseloads; specialized trauma training; feelings of choice and control; recognition and reward; sense of community, fairness, respect and justice; feeling one's work is valued; supportive organizations who assess for CF and respond with employee assistance programs, agency support groups and policy changes; regular supervision; emotional support and concrete assistance from colleagues<br><br>*Individual*: Age, experience and compassion satisfaction (a personal sense of efficacy in making a difference); self-care strategies like sleep, nutrition and exercise for physical wellness; therapy and social & emotional support for mental health; yoga, meditation or church participation for spiritual wellness; and positive coping strategies like art, music, cooking or recreation |

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**For More Information about Burnout and Compassion Fatigue:**

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Maslach, C. & Leiter, M. (1997). The truth about burnout. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Newell, J. M., & MacNeil, G. A. (2010). Professional burnout, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue: A review of theoretical terms, risk factors, and preventive methods for clinicians and researchers. Best Practice in Mental Health, 6(2),    57-68.

Sprang, G., Craig, C., & Clark, J. (2011). Burnout in child welfare workers: A comparative analysis of occupational distress across professional groups. Child Welfare, 90(6), 149-168.

Sprang, G., Clark, J. J., & Whitt-Woosley, A. (2007). Compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout: Factors impacting a professional's quality of life. Journal of Loss & Trauma, 12, 259-280.

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2