

COMPASSION FATIGUE:

UNDERSTANDING, IMPACT & PREVENTION



WHAT IS COMPASSION FATIGUE?

Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion that occurs from the chronic stress of caring for and empathising with others who are suffering. It is often referred to as secondary traumatic stress (STS) or vicarious trauma because it results from exposure to the trauma experienced by others.

& HOW DO YOU GET IT?

Compassion fatigue develops over time as caregivers continually empathise with and support individuals who are experiencing trauma, pain, or suffering. This process can be particularly relevant for assistance dog trainers who work with individuals with medical conditions or disabilities.

PATHWAYS TO COMPASSION FATIGUE



EXPOSURE TO TRAUMATIC STORIES

Regularly hearing and empathising with clients' traumatic experiences.

EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT

Developing deep emotional bonds with both the assistance dogs and their handlers.

HIGH WORKLOAD

Managing a demanding schedule without adequate breaks.

LACK OF SUPPORT

Working in isolation or without a supportive network.

PERSONAL HISTORY

Personal experiences of trauma can heighten vulnerability.

SYMPTOMS AND RESULTS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE



Symptoms:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced ability to feel empathy and compassion
- Physical symptoms like headaches, gastrointestinal issues, or sleep disturbances
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Detachment or avoidance behaviour
- Increased irritability or anger



Results:

BURNOUT

Chronic state of physical and emotional depletion.

DECREASED JOB PERFORMANCE

Difficulty concentrating, reduced effectiveness, and errors.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Anxiety, depression, and PTSD-like symptoms.

INTERPERSONAL PROBLEMS

Strained relationships with colleagues, clients, and family.



FOR ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINERS:

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



SELF CARE



Regular Breaks: Take frequent breaks to rest and recharge.

Healthy Lifestyle: Maintain a balanced diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep.

Hobbies and Interests: Engage in activities that bring joy and relaxation outside of work.

FOR ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINERS:

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES



Set Limits: Clearly define professional boundaries with clients to avoid over-involvement.

Delegate Tasks: Share responsibilities with colleagues when possible to reduce workload.

FOR ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINERS:

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



SUPPORT SYSTEMS



Peer Support: Build a network of fellow trainers and professionals for mutual support.

Supervision and Mentorship:
Seek regular supervision or mentorship to discuss challenges and receive guidance.

FOR ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINERS:

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



TRAINING AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS



Continuous Learning: Participate in ongoing training to enhance skills and coping mechanisms.

Stress Management Techniques:
Learn and practice stress reduction techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, or yoga.

FOR ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINERS:

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES



ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT



Work Environment: Advocate for a supportive and positive work environment.

Policies and Procedures:
Implement organisational policies that promote work-life balance and employee well-being.

EXAMPLES:



CASE OF OVER-INVOLVEMENT:

An assistance dog trainer might develop a close emotional bond with a client with a severe disability, leading to stress from feeling personally responsible for the client's well-being. To prevent this, setting clear professional boundaries and engaging in regular supervision can help manage these emotions.

HIGH WORKLOAD SCENARIO:

A trainer might work long hours without adequate rest, leading to burnout. Implementing scheduled breaks and delegating tasks can help manage workload and prevent exhaustion.

SUPPORT SYSTEM UTILISATION:

A trainer dealing with secondary trauma might benefit from participating in peer support groups where they can share experiences and coping strategies, reducing feelings of isolation and stress. This is why the Working Animals Federation of Australia requires that all certified members participate in regular supervision/peer support sessions.

**BY UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING COMPASSION
FATIGUE, ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINERS CAN MAINTAIN
THEIR OWN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING WHILE
PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY CARE AND SUPPORT TO
THEIR CLIENTS.**



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