



HÔTEL-DIEU GRACE
ESTD HEALTHCARE 1888

Dealing with Compassion Fatigue & Negative Emotions

Dr. Anne McLachlan, C.Psych.

Practice in Neuropsychology, Clinical & Rehabilitation
Psychology



Outline

- What caregivers are dealing with
- What is compassion fatigue?
- Self-awareness of emotions
- Setting healthy boundaries
- Self-care



What you told us about being a caregiver

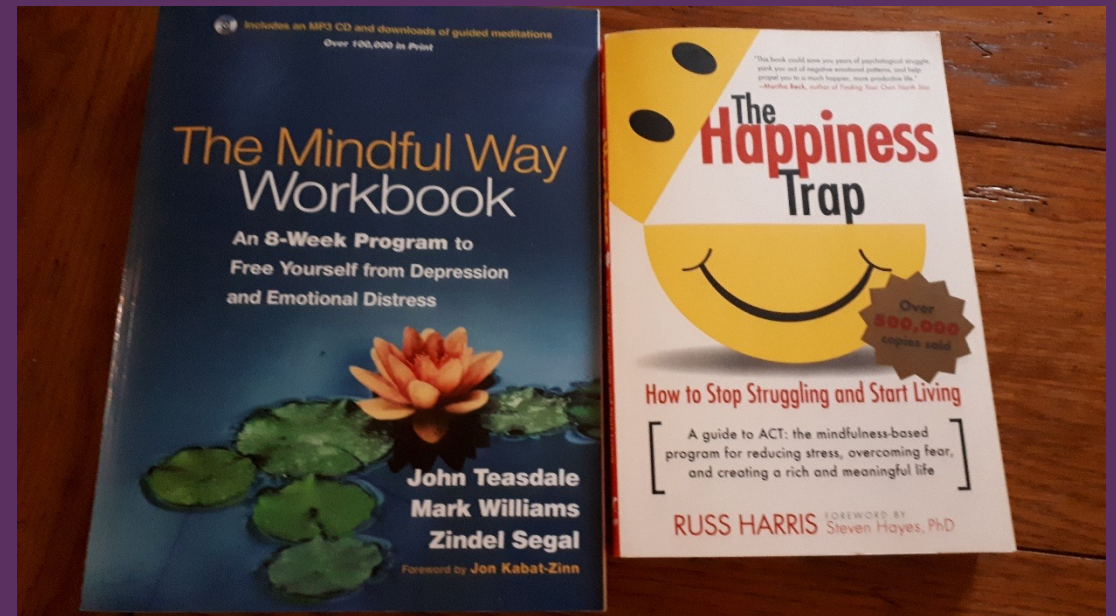
- Feeling helpless, worried, frightened, abandoned, devastated, embarrassed, guilty
- Unpredictability of mental illness & substance use
- Always on alert
- Difficult to separate own emotions from those of person with mental illness
- Toll on personal & work life
- May provide support to more than 1 family member



Credit & Source of Information

None of the information that I am presenting today are my original thoughts.

Information from the websites of Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), American Psychological Association (APA), Positive Psychology & Mark Manson



Please bear in mind...

- Today, we are going to talk about coping strategies and psychological techniques that are helpful for compassion fatigue, stress and mild mental health symptoms
- For people with severe mental illness, medication is an important part of treatment
- Medication provides a platform for them to be able to function day to day, to learn coping skills, and to participate in other types of therapy



What is Compassion Fatigue?

- Difficulty feeling empathy
- Feelings of helplessness & powerlessness
- Sleep problems
- Irritability or Anger
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Social isolation
- Increased substance use



What leads to Compassion Fatigue

Constant exposure to another person's emotional pain & trying to relieve their suffering

Focusing on providing support to others & neglecting one's own physical & mental health



How to Reduce Compassion Fatigue

- Self-Awareness of Negative Emotions
- Set Healthy Boundaries
- Engage in Self-care



First, Let's Breathe

- Sit upright with feet flat on the floor, shoulders down
- Focus on the breath as you breathe in & out, feel it going into your nose, your abdomen move, and the breathe out of your body
- Become aware of physical sensations, emotions & thoughts
- Return to focus on the breath
- If your mind wanders off, gently with no judgement, bring it back to the breath – be present in the moment
- Open your eyes again



Awareness of Negative Emotions

- Mindfulness breathing allows you to become aware of your emotions, and how they are linked to physical sensations and to thoughts
- Be present in the moment - It allows space among thoughts, feelings, & physical sensations before we act or react
- Disentangle emotions, physical sensations & thoughts



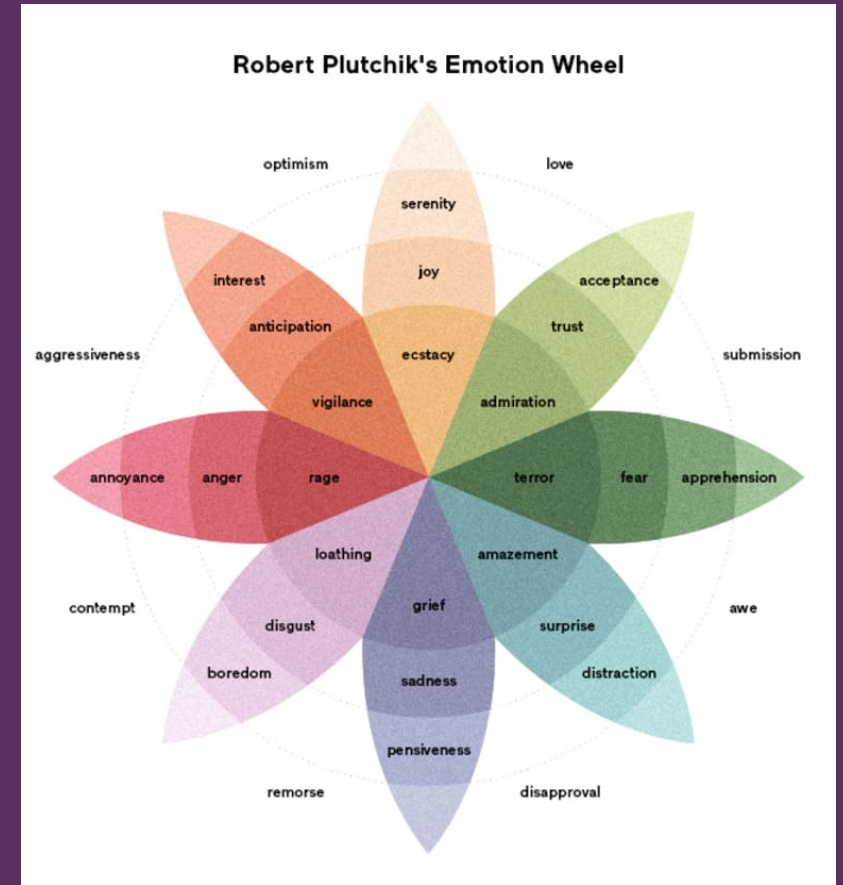
Awareness of Emotions

8 Basic Emotions:

- Surprise
- Fear
- Anger
- Disgust
- Sadness
- Anticipation
- Admiration
- Joy

Love is combo of Joy & Admiration

Guilt is combo of Sadness, Disgust & Surprise



Acceptance of Negative Emotions

- The goal is not to avoid negative thoughts, emotions or physical sensations but to accept them and then choose how to act
- Emotions as mental sensations that a person has but are not who a person is
- “I am feeling angry” not “I am an angry person”

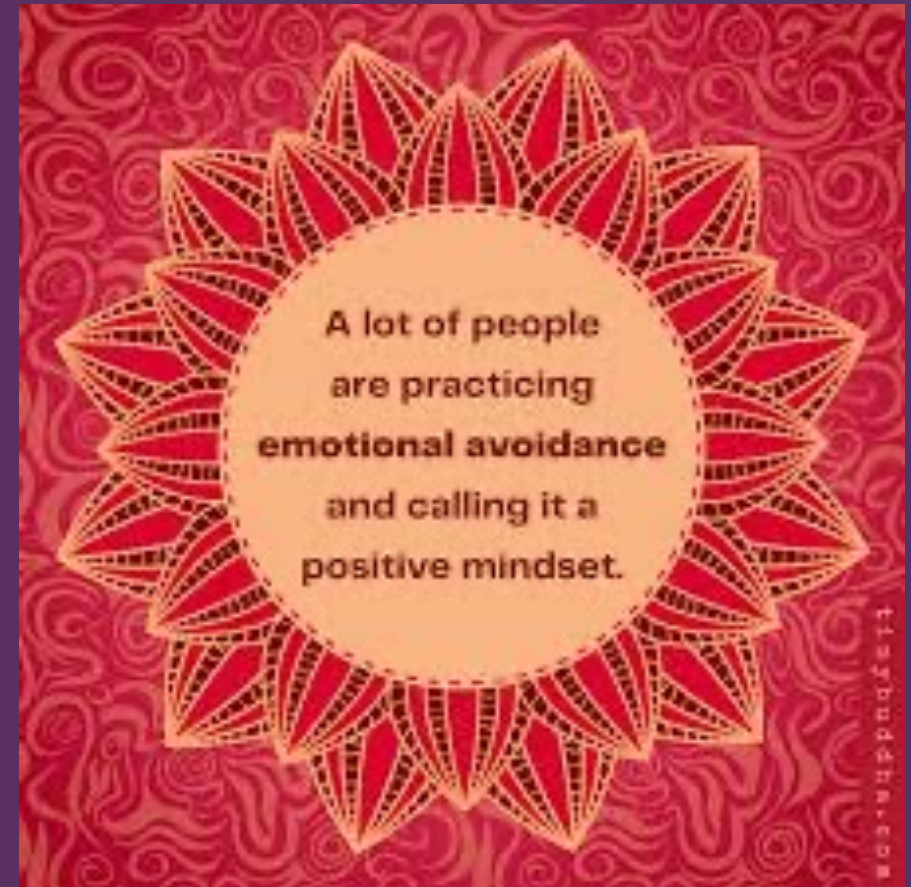


Emotions are neither good nor bad

It is just as “OK” to have emotions like anger, grief and anxiety as to have joy, curiosity, and love

If you fight with negative emotions, they can overwhelm you

If you avoid negative emotions, they can ambush you



Acknowledge the emotion

- Sit with those emotions and breathe
- Emotions ebb and flow like waves
- Then decide if you will change your thoughts, change your behaviour, or change your situation



Emotions & Thoughts

Emotions come from thoughts: i.e., Anger comes with the thought, “This is so unfair.”

Separate yourself from your thoughts: “This is a thought I’m having.

Also, Thoughts are not always Facts, sometimes they are Opinions (aka judgement)

Ask Yourself: “Is this thought that I’m having a fact or an opinion?”

- “That is a blue shirt” vs. “That is an ugly blue shirt”



Cope with Negative Emotions by Thinking Differently

- Change the way you think by letting go of judgement
- Be open to thinking differently about the situation
 - Don't jump onto the negative thought train
- Become aware of what you can control and what is not within your control – focus on what you can control.



Acting Differently by Setting Healthy Boundaries

“Healthy Boundaries – taking responsibility for your own actions and emotions, while NOT taking responsibility for the actions or emotions of others.” (- Mark Manson)

- Identify what your own values are
- Act in a way that is consistent with your values
- Clearly communicate what you need – Keep it Simple
- Establish rules & consequences



Values

Family Relationships

- Supportive loving relationship
- Independence
- Privacy
- Spontaneity
- Shared interests

Physical & Mental Health

- Able to deal with crisis
- Experience a range of emotions
- Physical endurance
- Good cardiovascular health



Setting Healthy Boundaries

- Decide when, where and for how much time you can provide support and then communicate those boundaries.
- Respect the other person's boundaries – ask about their needs and respect their limits.
- “I’ll talk to you every morning but please don’t call me after 11 pm, I need my rest. Let’s think about who else you could call late at night.”
- “I’m feeling really angry right now but this problem is important, so let’s talk about it in an hour after I have calmed down.”



Setting Healthy Boundaries

- The behaviour of the person we are caring for is not a reflection of us.
- We don't need to match another person's sadness or match another person's anger
- We can care for another person but be separate from them



Reducing Compassion Fatigue by Engaging in Self-Care

- Engaging in self-care can be a way of setting healthy boundaries
- Change our thinking about self-care from something that is selfish to something that helps to recharge ourselves emotionally and physically
- Doing something meaningful that fits with our values
- American Psychological association recommends 5 important self-care activities



Relaxation

- Dampens the sympathetic nervous system -fight, flight or freeze
 - Activates the parasympathetic nervous system – the relaxation response
-
- Deep breathing
 - Listening to calm music
 - Watching birds
 - Mindful walking



1 to 8 Count Breathing Exercise



Get Adequate Sleep

- Have a regular bedtime and wake-up at the same time every day
- Have a regular bedtime routine – snack, quiet music, brush teeth
- Set aside worry time during the daytime, not just before bed
- A dark, cool room
- Only sex & sleep in your bed



Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

- Fuel the body and mind by eating regular meals that follow Canada's Food guide
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid excessive use of substances such as caffeine, alcohol & cannabis
- Incorporate daily physical activity (DPA) such as a walk, dancing to music, taking the stairs.
- Set realistic goals around more demanding exercise such as biking, running or lifting weights



Maintaining Social Connections

- Create community – connect with other caregivers
- Visit with friends & family
- Make telephone calls, video-chats, or write cards
- Stay involved with groups such as book clubs, coffee time, faith services



Summary: Dealing with Compassion Fatigue & Negative Emotions

- Self-awareness of compassion fatigue and negative emotions
- Acceptance of all emotional experiences as valid
- Decide if you want to change your thoughts, your behaviour, or your situation
- Set healthy boundaries
- Engage in self-care
- Expect to make mistakes & fail but practise, practise, practise



Thank you

Questions?

