



COMPASSION FATIGUE

**PRESENTED BY YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE
AND WORKLIFE PROGRAMS**

August 13, 2025

OBJECTIVES

- Explain compassion fatigue
- Review causes, risk factors, and symptoms
- Compare compassion fatigue and burnout
- Explore a case study
- Discover techniques to prevent and manage compassion fatigue

SECTION 1

CAUSES, RISK FACTORS, AND SYMPTOMS

COMPASSION FATIGUE EXPLAINED

**The term
was first
coined in
1992 by
registered
nurse
Carla
Joinson**

- Emotional and physical exhaustion experienced from **providing care to suffering or traumatized individuals** or animals, leading to detachment and a diminished capacity for empathy
- Evidence suggests **that animals may experience similar states of distress** related to the suffering they witness or experience

CAUSES



Prolonged exposure
to secondary trauma

Persistent or
excessive demand
for empathy



RISK FACTORS

A history of trauma

High stress levels

Poor coping skills

Neglecting self-care
(i.e., consistently prioritizing others' needs)

Lacking a sense of control over
the situation

Insufficient social support

- Being a loved one's primary caregiver
- Working in a helping profession or a setting with frequent exposure to trauma



Emergency services

Call dispatchers, first responders



Professional caregiving

Nurses, home healthcare workers



Social work

Counselors, therapists, victim supporters

RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of compassion fatigue are similar to those of chronic stress.

Common signs:



Isolation



Sadness



Checking out



Irritability



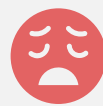
Poor or no self-care



Overeating, overspending, addiction



Thoughts, flashbacks, and nightmares

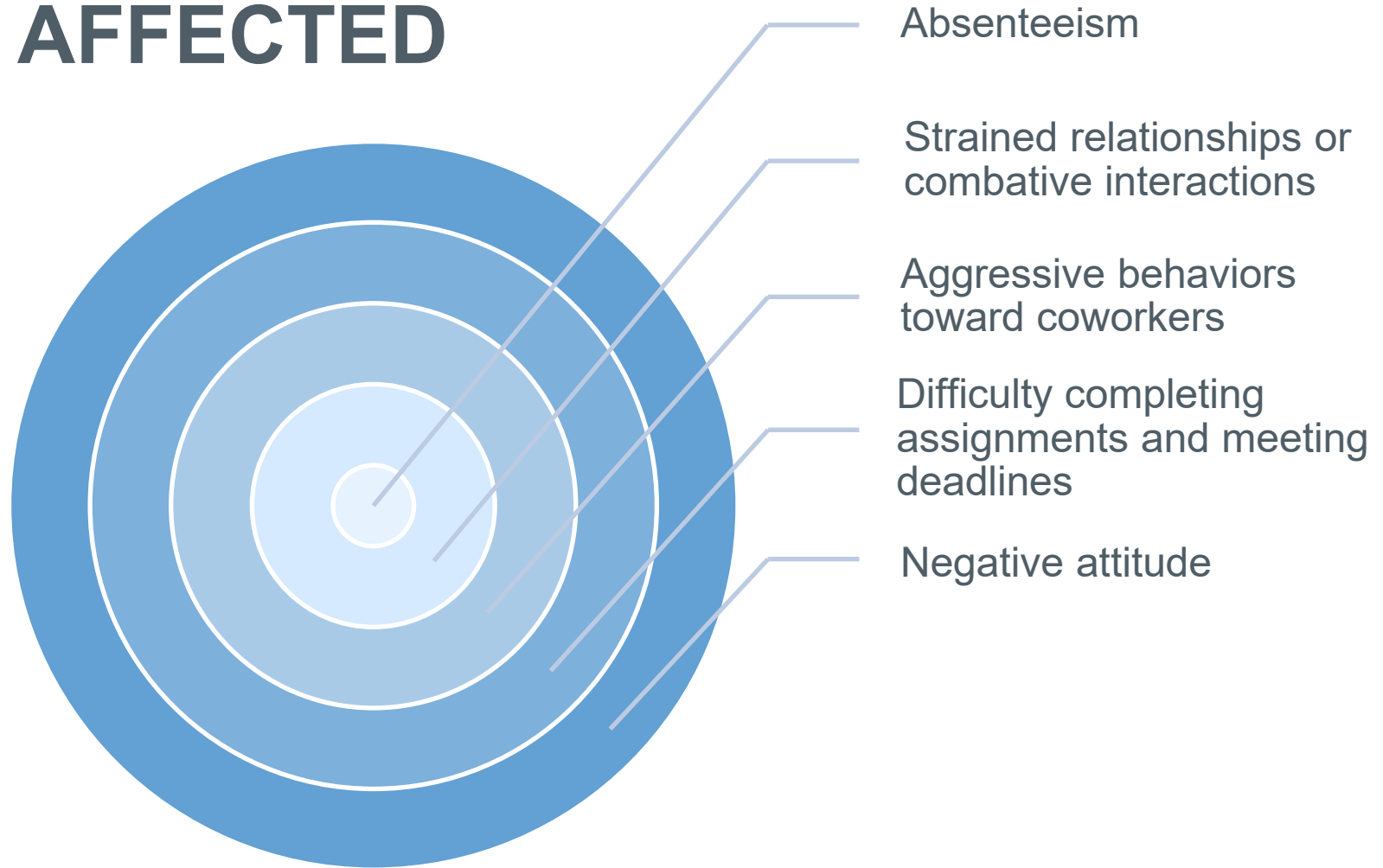


Mental and physical exhaustion



Health issues

HOW YOUR WORK IS AFFECTED



COMPASSION FATIGUE VS BURNOUT

The difference is in the origin, onset, and main effect

Compassion fatigue

- Originates from caring for others and working with trauma victims
- Sudden onset is possible
- Involves loss of empathy

Burnout

- Emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged or excessive stress
- Originates from occupational stress
- Develops gradually over time
- Involves cynicism and disengagement from work

SECTION 2

CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

Jordan works full time and recently became a **primary caregiver for his mother**, who is recovering from a stroke.

- Most mornings, he helps her get ready for the day, organizes medication, and arranges transportation to physical therapy
- After work, he shops for groceries, manages bills, and assists with her evening routine

At first, Jordan felt proud to step up and support his mom. Over time, **the long hours and constant responsibilities** have taken a toll.

- He skips meals, avoids friends, and struggles to concentrate at work
- Sleep has become inconsistent, and he often feels emotionally drained
- He keeps pushing through, telling himself that others have it worse

Recently, Jordan **snapped at a coworker** during a routine meeting

- This was completely out of character and left him feeling miserable
- He hasn't talked to anyone about the extent of the stress he is under

SECTION 3

PREVENTING AND MANAGING COMPASSION FATIGUE

EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE



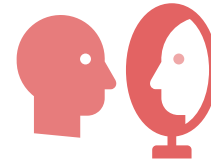
Acknowledge your feelings

- Suppressing emotions can increase stress
- Allow yourself to feel sadness, frustration, or grief
- Be kind to yourself



Set emotional boundaries

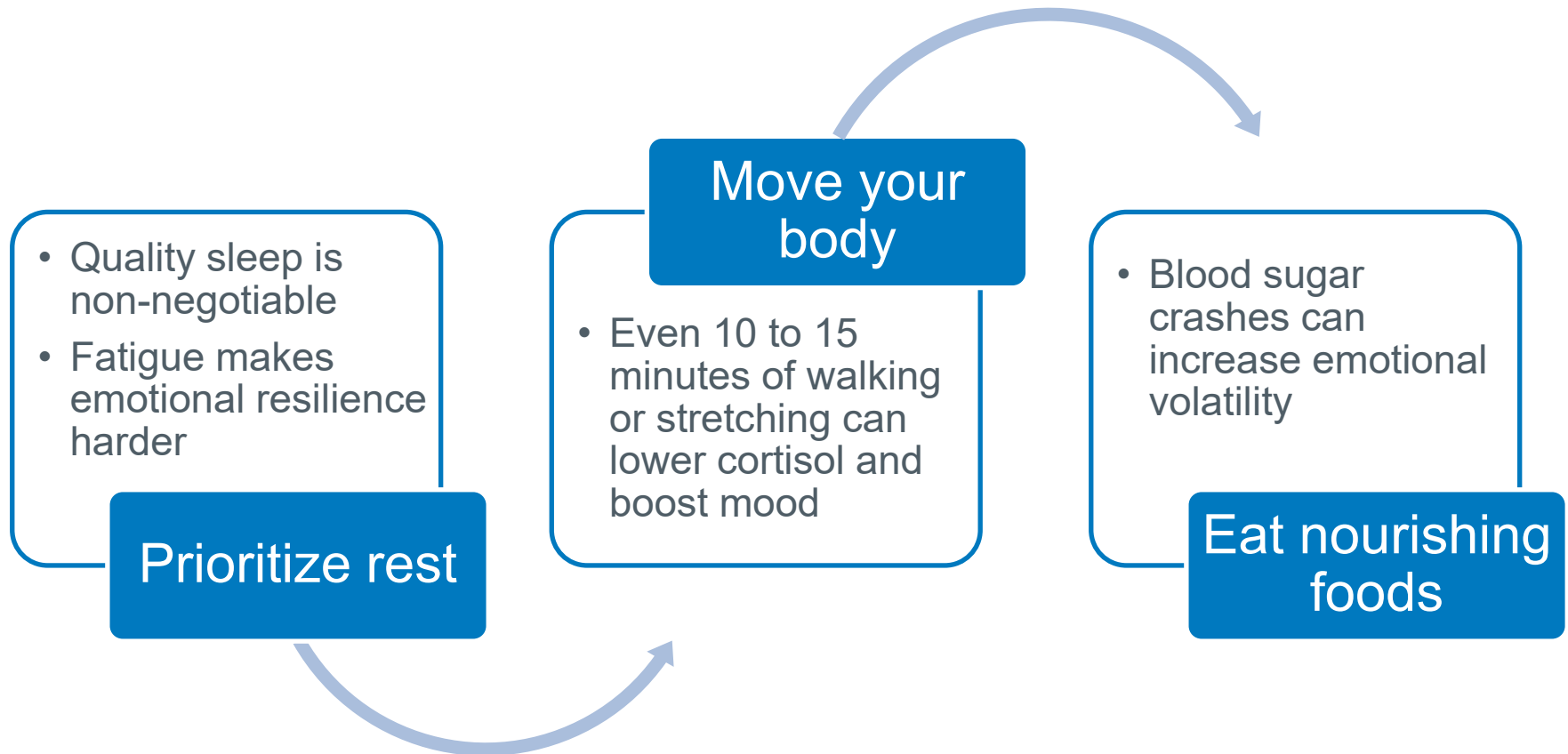
- Remind yourself you can care about someone without taking on their pain



Be self-aware and self-assess

- How am I doing/feeling?
- How is my emotional well-being?
- How is my energy level?

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING



WORK-LIFE BALANCE



Take real breaks

Step away fully, even for short intervals (no emails, no thinking about work)



Schedule recovery time

After an emotionally intense day, set boundaries and block off downtime in the evening or the next day



Engage in activities that bring joy and relaxation

MINDFULNESS AND GROUNDING

Use grounding techniques

Touch something textured, name five things you see, or focus on your breath to return to the present

Practice deep breathing

Try box breathing:
Inhale-4, hold-4, exhale-4, hold-4

BOX BREATHING

1

Find a comfortable position

2

Inhale through your nose for a count of four

3

Hold for a count of four

4

Exhale through your mouth for a count of four

5

Hold for a count of four

6

Repeat

CONNECT AND REFLECT



Talk it out

Share with a colleague, mentor, or therapist who understands compassion fatigue

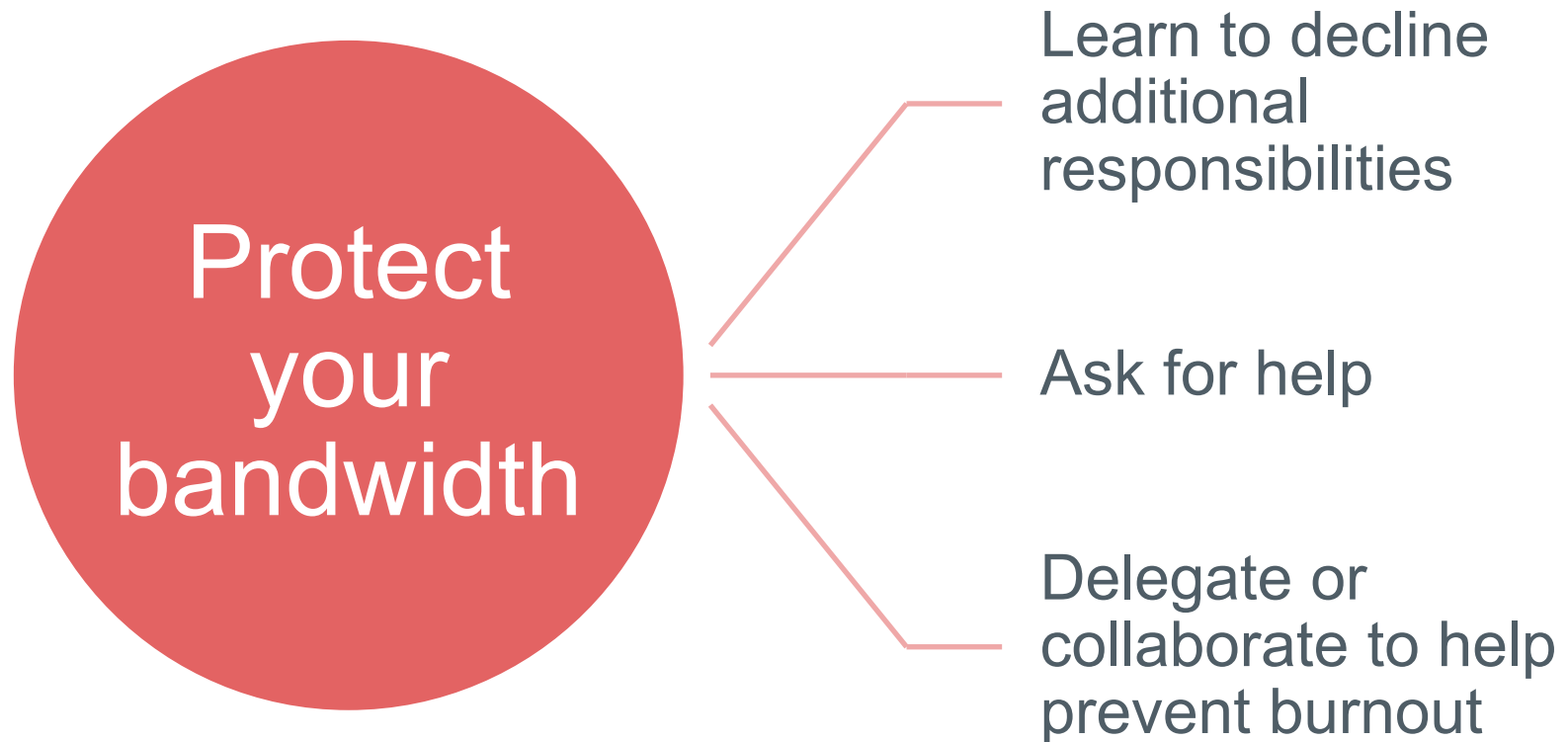


Join a support group

Talking with others in similar roles helps you feel less alone and develop new coping tools

KNOW WHEN TO SAY NO

If you don't care for yourself, you won't be able to properly care for others



FIND MEANING

It's important to validate your experiences and what you're feeling



Consider how being mindful affects your body and mind



Remind yourself why you started

Reconnect with the purpose behind your work



Celebrate small wins

Even a simple “thank you” from someone can be fuel when acknowledged

SUMMARY



Techniques to prevent and manage compassion fatigue

- Emotional self-care
- Physical well-being
- Work-life balance
- Mindfulness and grounding
- Connect and reflect
- Know when to say no
- Find meaning

RESOURCES

Books

- The Compassion Fatigue Workbook
 - Françoise Mathieu, 2012
- Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others
 - Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009
- Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle
 - Emily and Amelia Nagoski, 2019

Online Articles

- [Caregiver Burnout](#)
- [Moving From Compassion Fatigue to Resilience](#)

Websites

- [Compassionfatigue.org](#)
- [Caregiveraction.org](#)
- [MHNational.org](#)

Apps

- [Breathe2Relax](#)
- [CaringBridge](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Insight Timer](#)

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