



Compassion Fatigue: How are we navigating the 2020's?

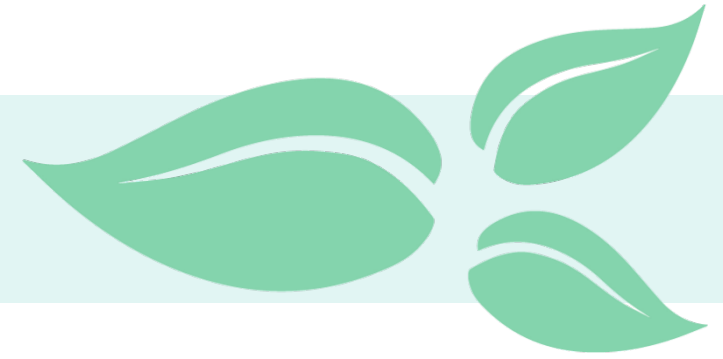
Dr. Christina Tolman
Fresno, CA



**CVM
Veterinary
Conference**



Objectives

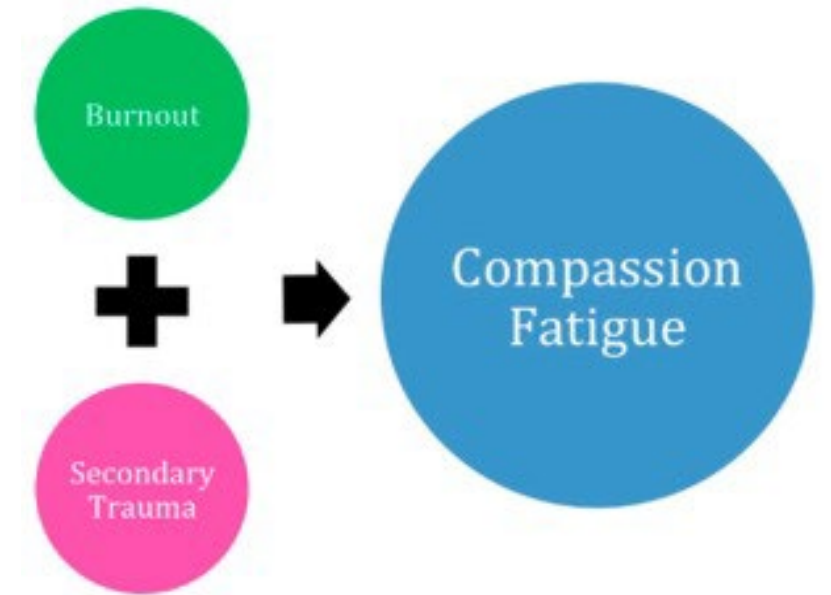


- 1) Defining compassion fatigue (CF), factors contributing to compassion fatigue, and signs of compassion fatigue in vet professionals
- 2) Understanding how today's culture may be impacting our risk of experiencing compassion fatigue
- 3) Learning ways to mitigate compassion fatigue & enhance resilience

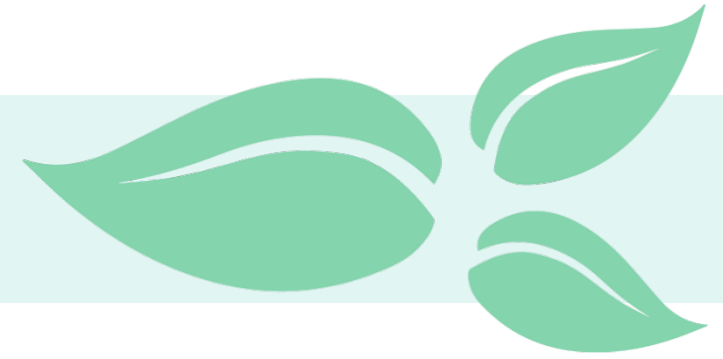
Definitions: CF



- A state of reduced capacity for compassion as a consequence of exhaustion caused by contact with the suffering of others. (NIH)
- Usually involves some aspect of burnout and vicarious/secondary trauma. (Lluch, et. al., 2022)

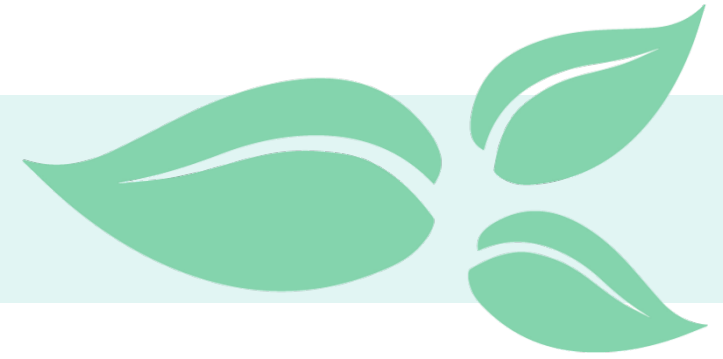


Definition: CF

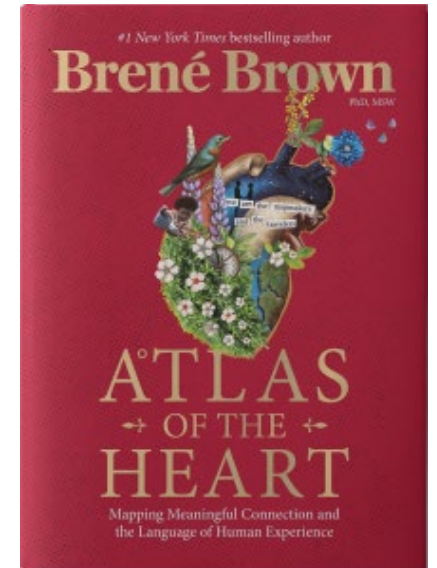


- A state of exhaustion and dysfunction (biologic/physiologic/emotional) resulting from prolonged overwhelm while seeking to alleviate the suffering of others
- Though overwhelmed, individuals typically continue to engage in self-sacrifice in the interest of their patients/clients. (AVMA, 2022)

Definitions: CF



- Compassion fatigue as “empathic distress fatigue”
- Compassion involves entering into pain with another person
- Empathic distress fatigue → When a practitioner becomes overwhelmed by their own emotional distress reaction (associated with the trauma of the one they’re caring for)
- Cognitive vs Affective Empathy (Brene Brown, 2021)



Burnout vs CF



Burnout versus Compassion Fatigue

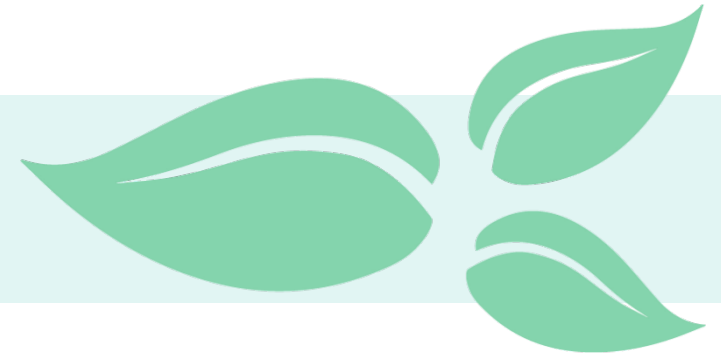
- **Burnout** results from stresses in the workplace, such as: problems with coworkers, loss of economic security or position or diminished control.
- **Compassion fatigue** is an emotional and physical burden created by the trauma of helping others in distress, which leads to a reduced capacity for empathy toward suffering in the future.



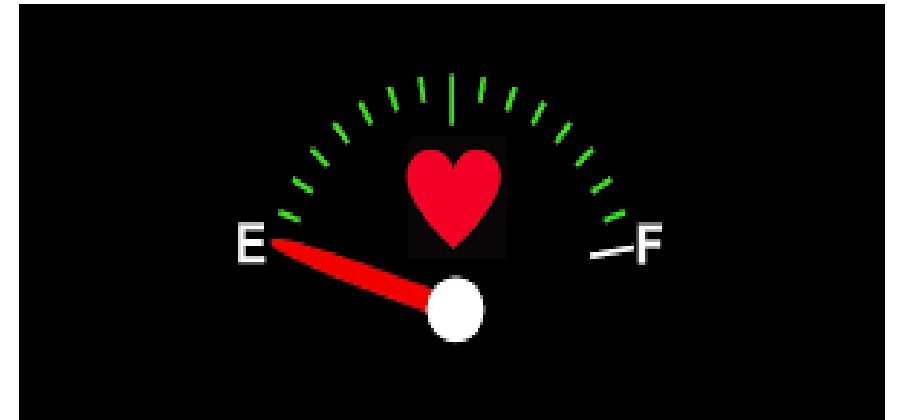
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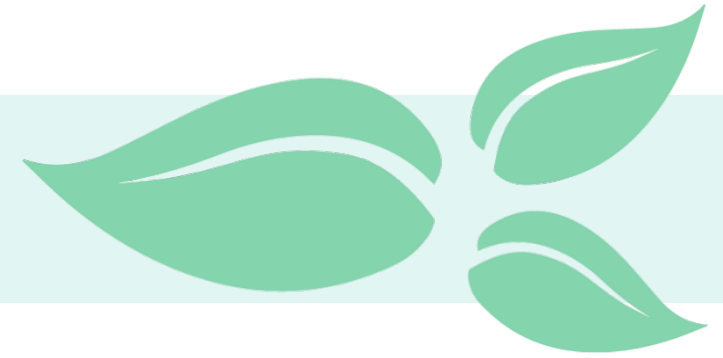
CF Summary



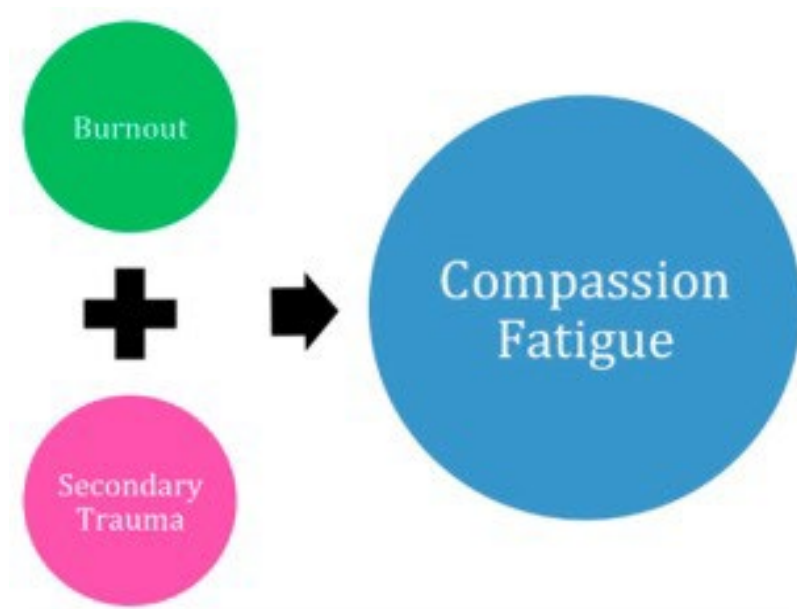
- Helper role
- Experiencing the suffering of another
- Secondary traumatization
- Affective empathic overwhelm
- Burnout/Exhaustion



Contributors to CF



Contributors



Inherent Risk Factors

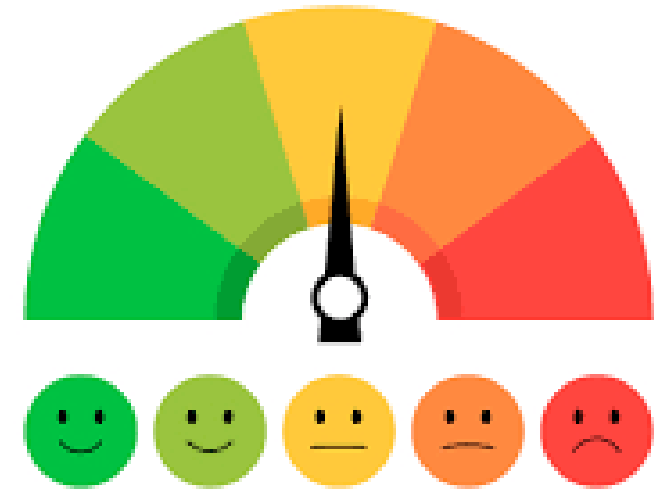
- Highly empathic persons
- History of traumatic experience(s)
- Unresolved trauma
- Onset of burnout
- Low self-compassion/self-care

(All impact resilience)

Severity of CF



- Duration of the experience
- Potential for reoccurrence
- Exposure to death/dying
- Moral conflict/stress (#1 for vets)



Moral stress



- When you are aware of what ethical principals are at stake, but external factors keep you from being able to follow your moral conscience (Kahler, 2014)
- When our beliefs/interests are not aligned with that of the client or practice owner



Moral Stress



- How do we uphold our values, stay within the boundaries of our practice, and honor the wishes of our clients?

Financial concerns

Pet's value

Euthanasia



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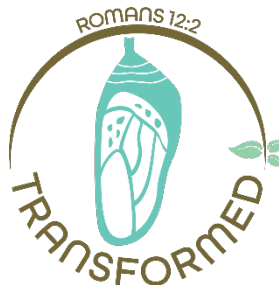


Signs of CF

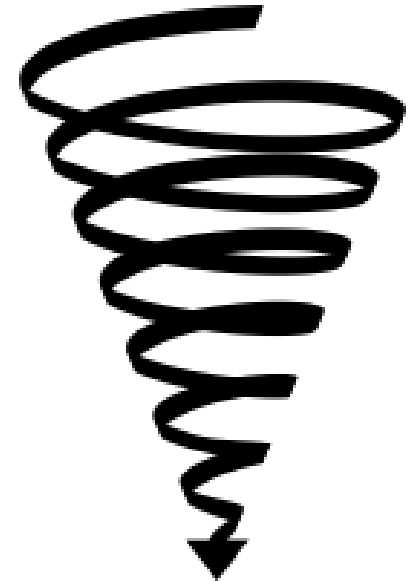
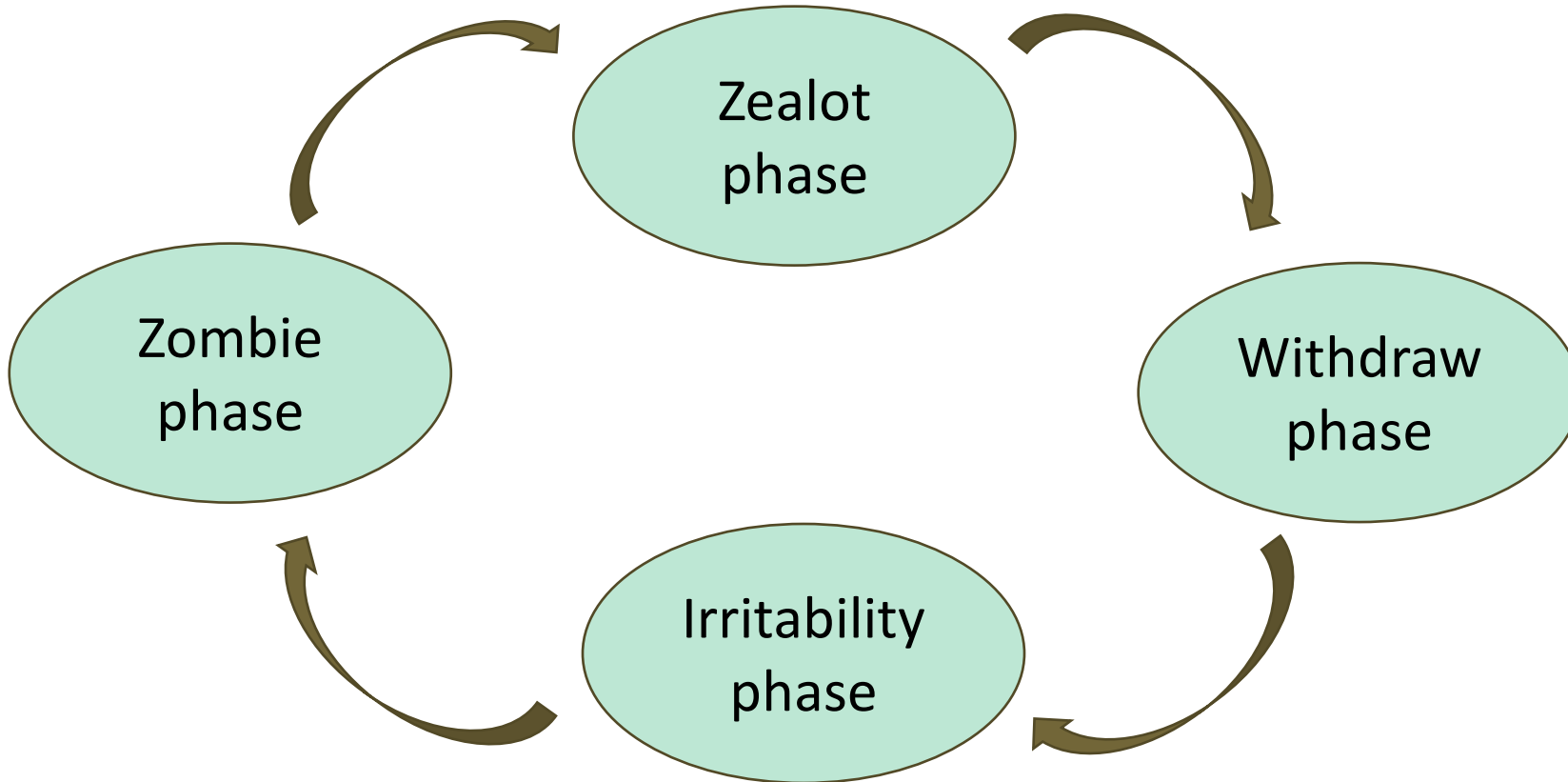
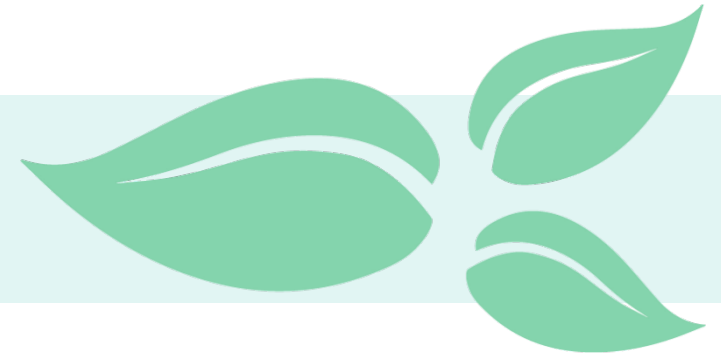


Be alert to the signs of **COMPASSION FATIGUE:**

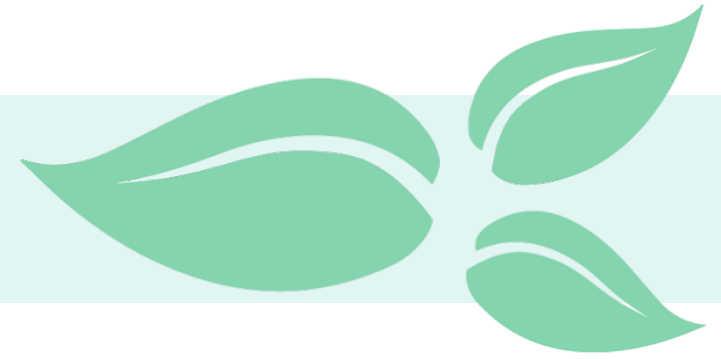
- Exhaustion
- Anger and irritability
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Apathy toward work and/or patients
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Loss of purpose
- Fear
- Sleeplessness
- Absenteeism
- Withdrawal
- Sadness, hopelessness, numbness, moodiness, cynicism, negativity
- Appetite changes
- Substance use/abuse, etc.



Signs of CF



The past two years...



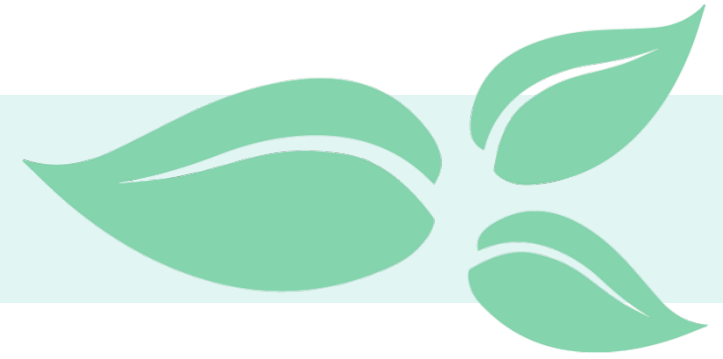
Curbside Service In Effect,
Until Further Notice

A photograph of a small brown and white dog wearing a white surgical mask, looking directly at the camera.

The past two years...



Vet Med 2020-present






- Adapting to curbside service/new policy
- Biosecurity measures
- Telemedicine/Technology changes
- Uptick in pet ownership
- Explosion in demand for vets
- Inflation, backorders, rising cost of medicine
- Feral clients



COVID and Health Care Workers



- NIH findings post-pandemic:

- Rate of burnout 
- Compassion fatigue 
- Emotional exhaustion 

- Depersonalization 
- Sense of personal accomplishment 
- Levels of compassion satisfaction 

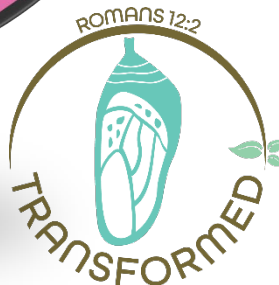


Systemic influences / Cultural norms

- Work ethic that doesn't place value on personal well-being
- Workaholism is normalized, even praised
- Compassion for others, but not self

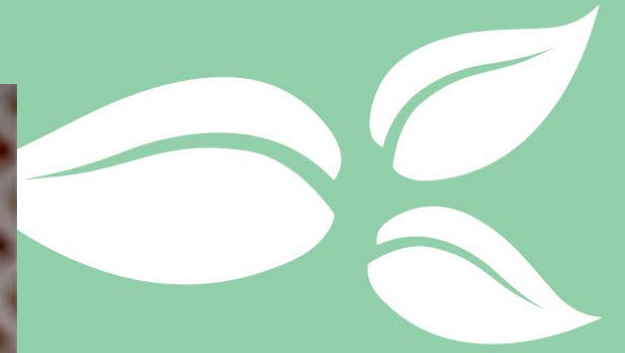


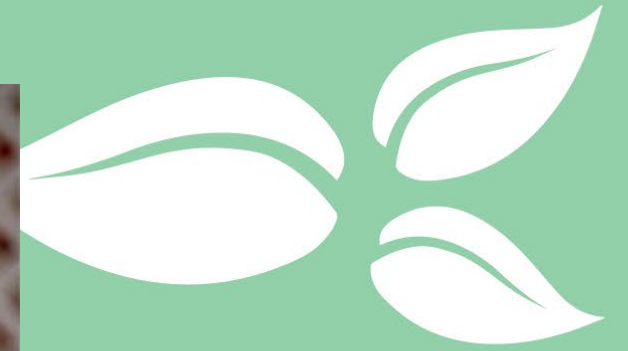
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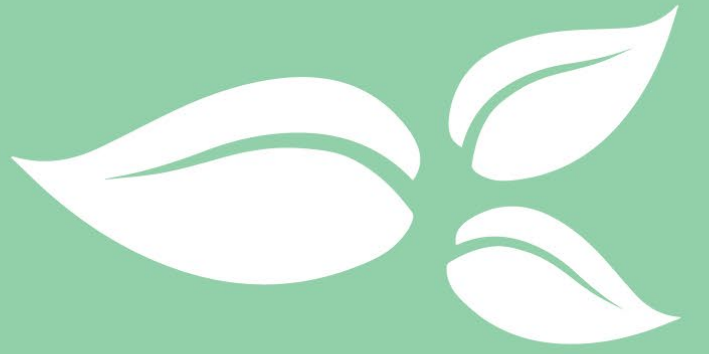


Let's touch base with some feelings...





*What feelings
come up for
these guys?*



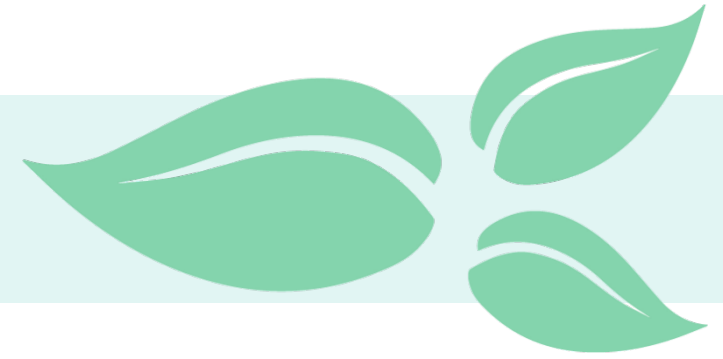


What feelings come up for this guy?



Now close your eyes and imagine...

Working Through CF:



- Acknowledging Compassion Fatigue
- Practicing Self-compassion
- Harnessing the skill of cognitive empathy
- Building resilience
- Increasing Compassion Satisfaction
- Regular check-in's

Acknowledging CF



Physical	Emotional	Work Related
- Headaches	- Mood swings	- Frequent use of sick days
- Digestive problems: diarrhea, constipation, upset stomach	- Excessive use of substances: nicotine, alcohol, illicit drugs	- Avoidance or dread of working with certain people
- Muscle tension	- Depression, anxiety	- Reduced ability to feel empathy
- Sleep disturbances	- Irritability	- Lack of joyfulness
- Fatigue	- Oversensitivity	
- Cardiac symptoms: chest pain/pressure, palpitations, tachycardia	- Memory issues, poor concentration, focus and judgment	
	- Anger and resentment	



Acknowledging CF



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

-Dr. Rachel Remen



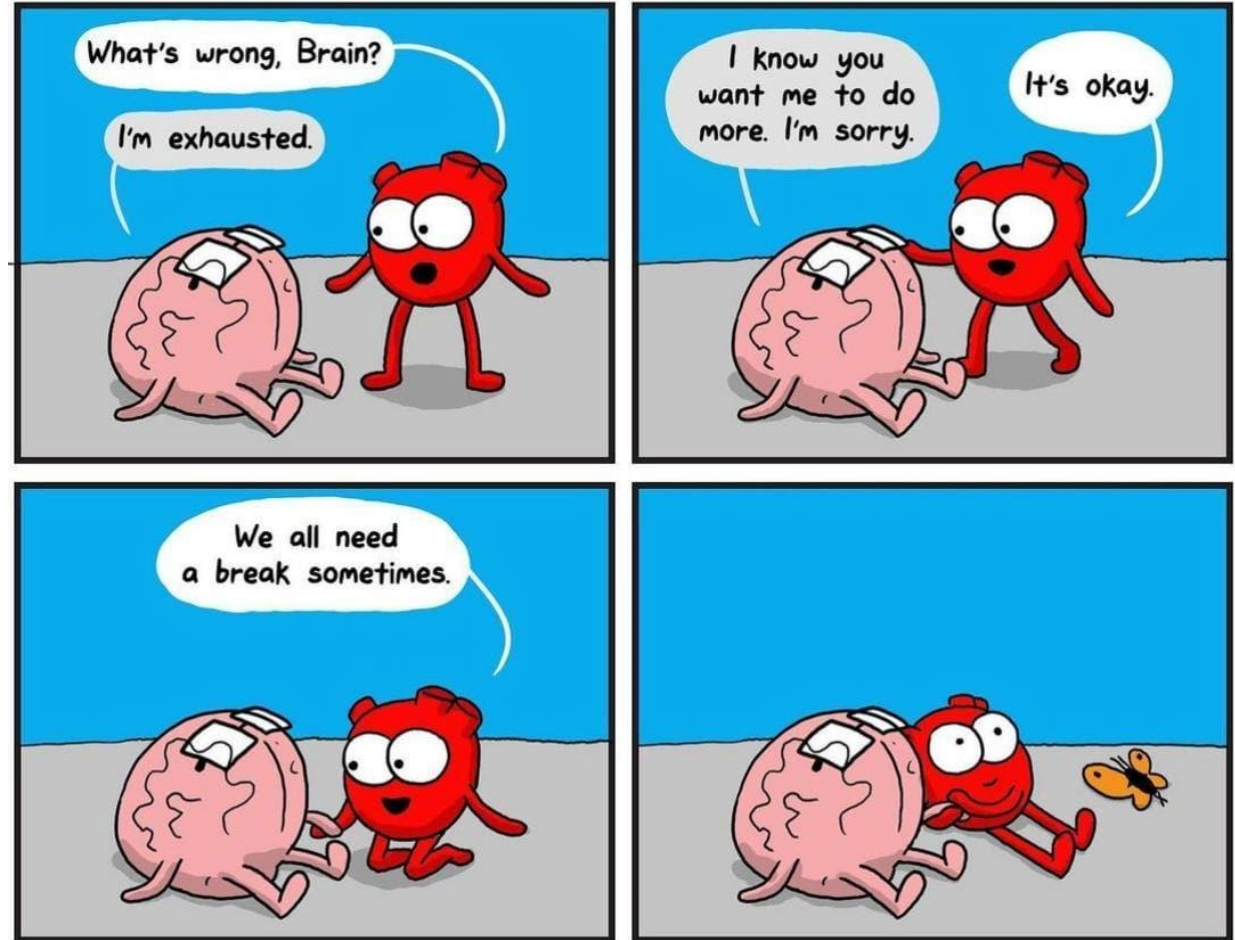
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Practicing Self-compassion



- Practicing Self-compassion
 - What is compassion
 - Accepting Personal Limits
 - Not comparing
 - Setting boundaries



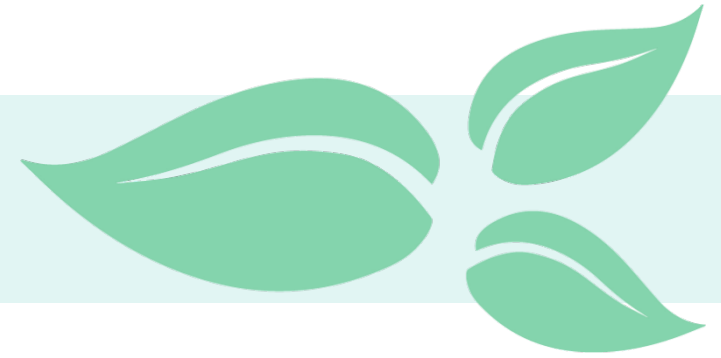
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theAwkwardYeti.com

ANS 12:2

INFORMED

Practicing Self-compassion

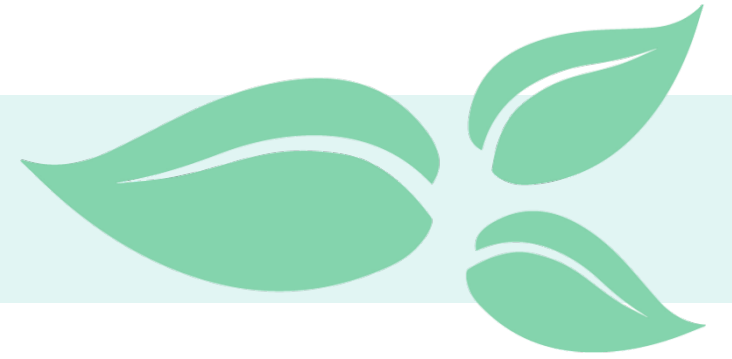


“**Compassion** is the tender readiness of the heart to respond to one’s own (or another’s) pain without despair, resentment, or aversion.”

“**Compassion** is the daily practice of recognizing and accepting our shared humanity so we treat ourselves and others with loving kindness as we take action in the face of suffering”

–Brene’ Brown

Practicing Self-compassion



Accepting personal limits
(Aka: Self-acceptance)

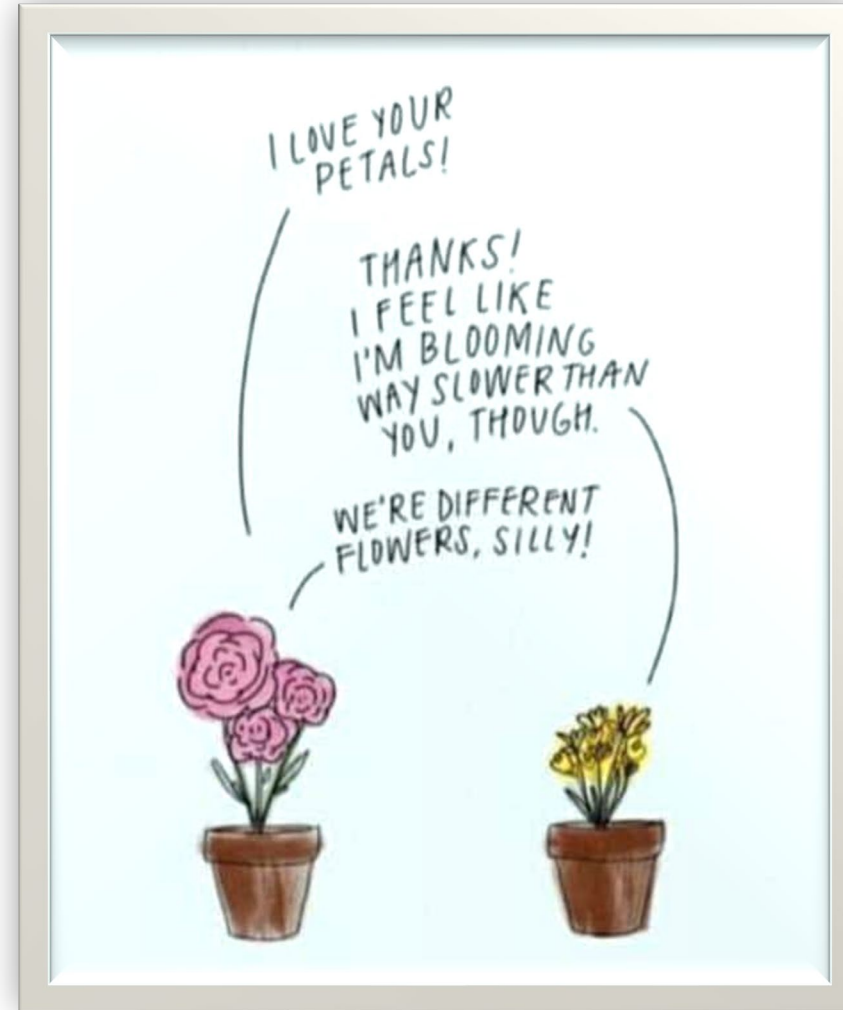


Practicing Self-compassion



Each of us was uniquely created.
(Ps 139:13)

“Comparison is the thief of joy.”
- Theodore Roosevelt



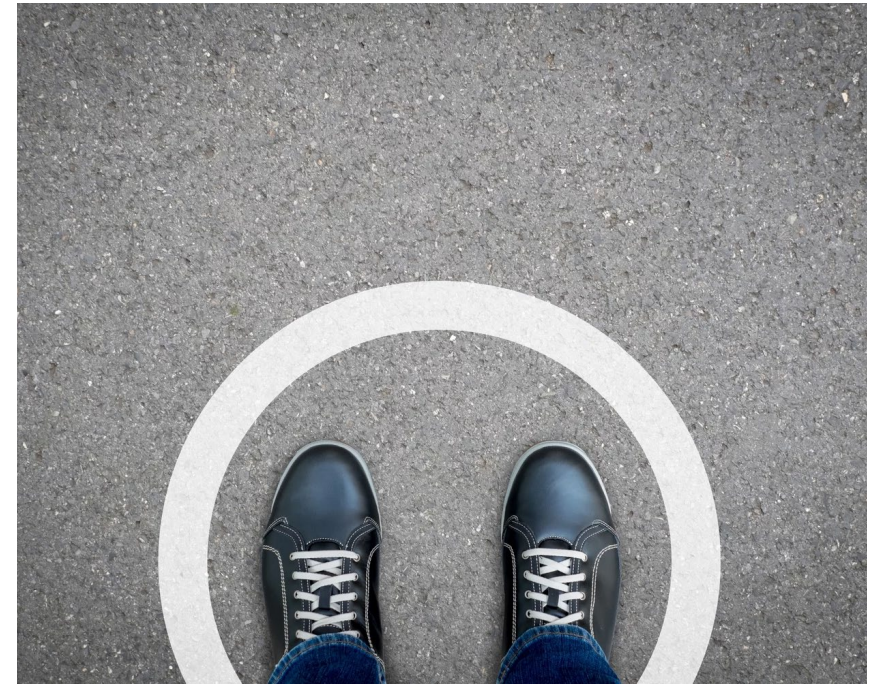
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Practicing Self-compassion



- “**Boundaries** are a prerequisite for compassion and empathy.”
- “We cannot connect with someone unless we are clear about where we end and they begin. If there’s no autonomy between people, then there’s no compassion or empathy, just enmeshment.”



-Brene Brown



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Can you name areas where you want to strengthen boundaries?

How does this demonstrate compassion (for yourself or others)?

Types of Boundaries

Physical Boundaries

protect my personal space & body



Emotional Boundaries

protect my thoughts & feelings



Verbal Boundaries

protect how we speak & what we discuss



Time Boundaries

protect how I spend my time



Work Boundaries

protect my limits in the workplace



Spiritual Boundaries

protect my values & what I believe in



Financial Boundaries

protect my finances & assets

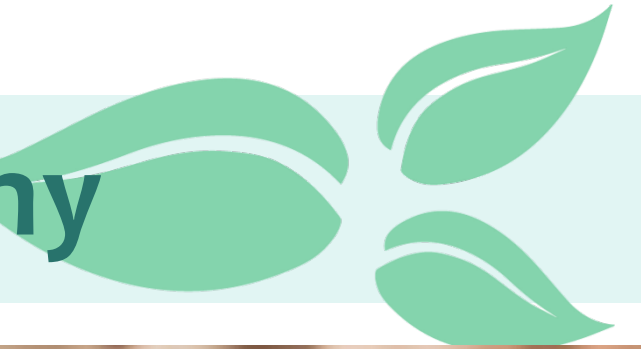


Sexual Boundaries

protect my safety & preferences



Harnessing Cognitive Empathy



- Empathy is a skill.
- How we choose to express empathy is also a boundary.
- Cognitive empathy
- Affective empathy



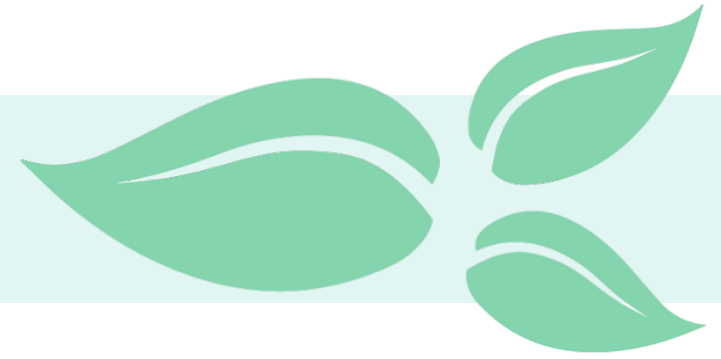
Harnessing Cognitive Empathy



- Cognitive empathy
 - Perspective taking
 - *Understanding* what someone is feeling; NOT feeling if for them
- Affective empathy
 - Feeling something along with the person who is struggling.



Building Resilience



Resilience → the ability to recover or adjust easily



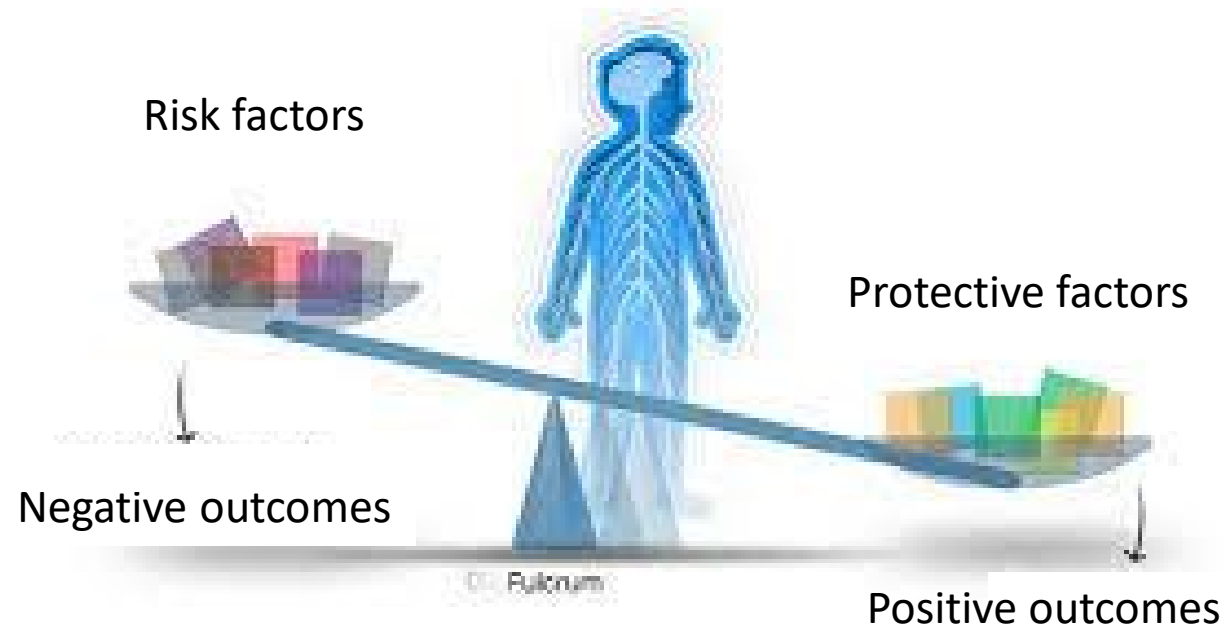
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Building Resilience



What will happen if you add one more block to the left side?
Can a positive outcome be sustained?



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Building Resilience



- Risk factors:

- Financial instability
- ACE'S
- Biology
- Family disruption
- Job instability
- Burnout
- Unstable relationships
- Inability to meet basic needs
- Illness



- Protective factors:

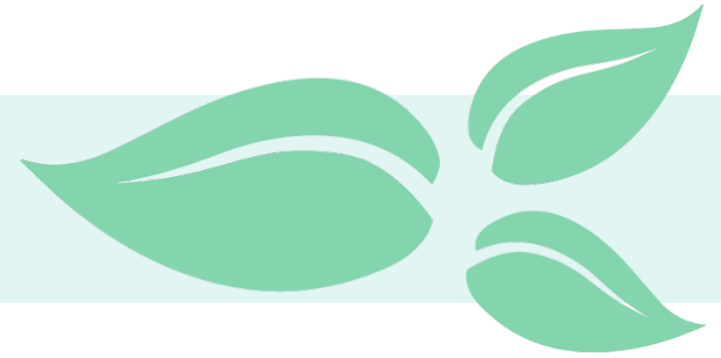
- Supportive family
- Social support network
- Self-efficacy
- Good physical health
- Self-care practices
- Vacation / time off
- Adequate sleep
- Sense of fulfillment
- Faith
- Therapy



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Compassion Satisfaction



Compassion Satisfaction: A degree of fulfillment, sense of purpose, and satisfaction derived from working as a care provider

This may involve:

- positive feelings toward colleagues
- feeling good about contributions to the work environment
- gratification from caregiving
- existential significance

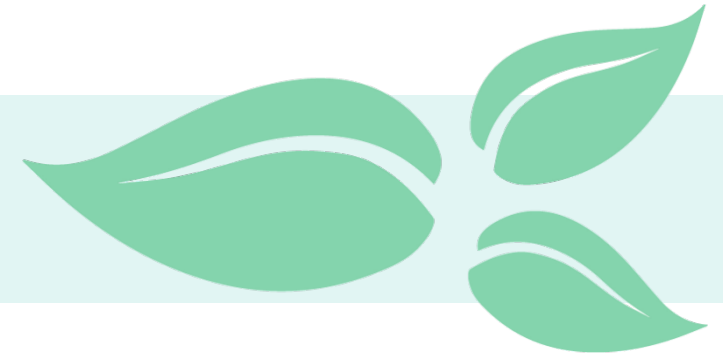


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(AVMA, 2022)

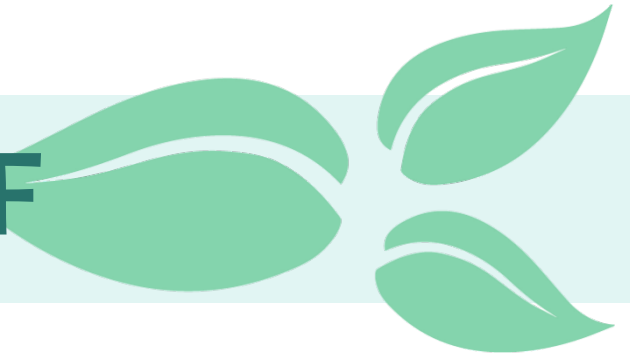


Compassion Satisfaction



- Compassion satisfaction adds to our resilience
- How can compassion satisfaction be increased?
 - With clients/patients?
 - With co-workers?
 - With how you are contributing?
 - Existentially?
- Paradoxically, the same work that provides compassion satisfaction can also lead to compassion fatigue

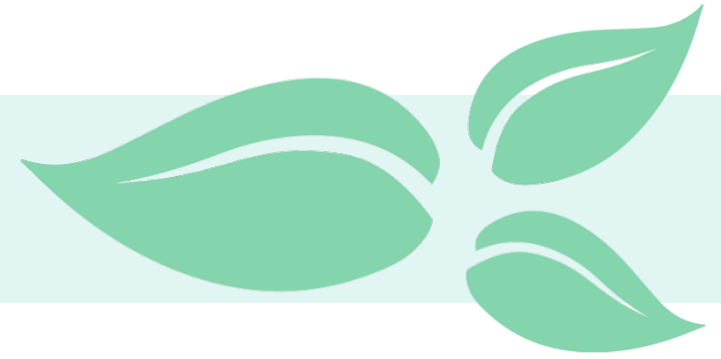
Compassion Satisfaction & CF



Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) assessment

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/wellbeing/assess-your-wellbeing>

Check-in Regularly

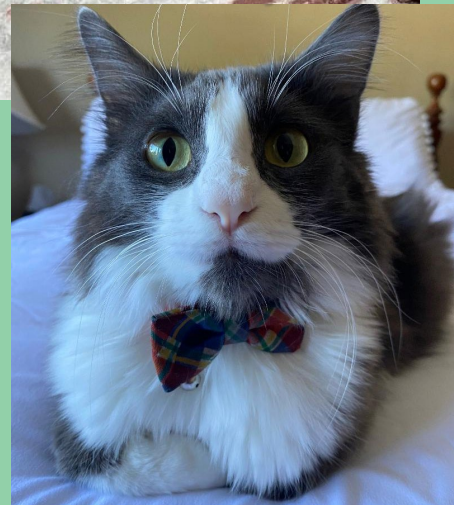
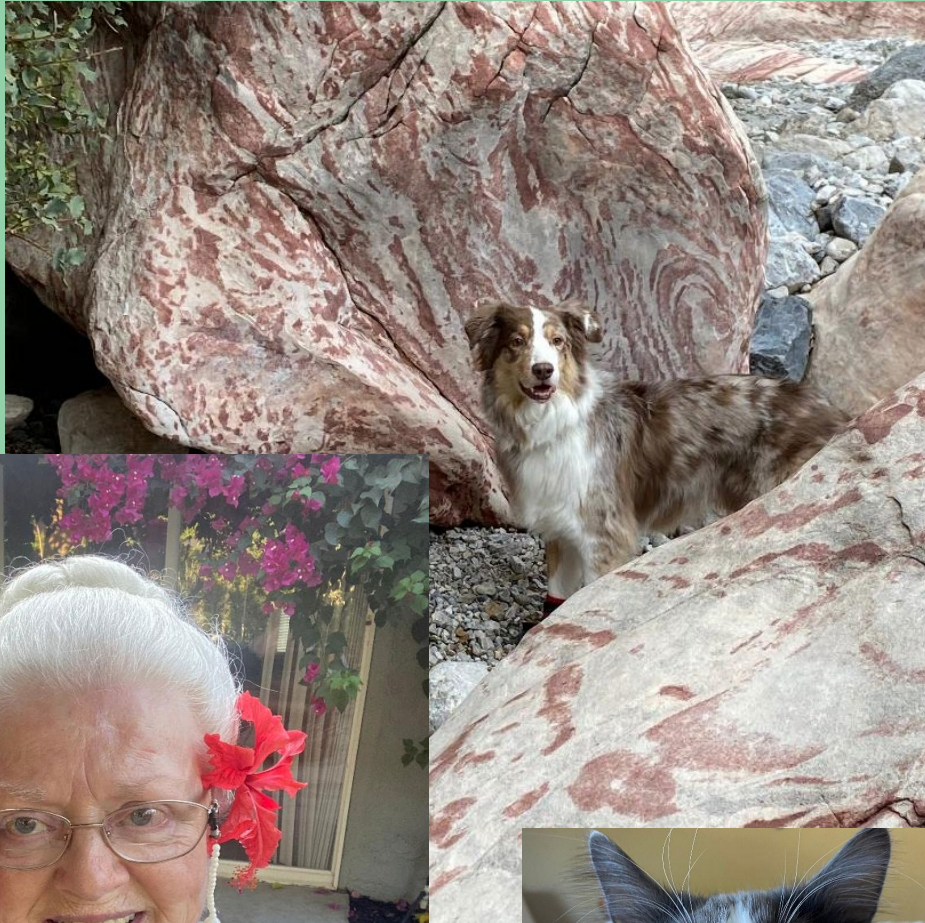


- With yourself
- With your staff
- Self-surveys
- Watch for signs of CF among your staff
 - Make space to share grief (communicate)
 - Promote teamwork (collaborate)
 - Create a supportive/encouraging environment
 - Encourage self-care (lead by example)
 - Share resources (educate)



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*“Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind
That you may be able to test and approve
what the will of God is,
his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”*

-Romans 12:2

Sources



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- Brown, Brene. (2021). *Atlas of the heart: Mapping meaningful connection and the language of human experience*. Random House
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Sources



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- Polachek, A. & Wallace, J. (2018). The paradox of compassionate work: a mixed-methods study of satisfying and fatiguing experiences of animal health care providers. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, 31(2), 228-244.



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