


Caring for Yourself & Others: Preventing Compassion Fatigue & Burnout in the Animal Services Sector

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Land Honouring

- I am grateful to currently be living on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & sel̓ilwítulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations
- We encourage you to learn more about the land you are living on by using the interactive map at <https://native-land.ca/>

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Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of self care, as well as what compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, vicarious trauma, and burnout are.
- Describe the risk factors and protective factors for vicarious trauma and burnout that are relevant within the animal services sector.
- Identify the signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout within yourself and others, enabling early recognition and appropriate responses.
- Learn effective strategies that allow you to prevent compassion fatigue and burnout, including low impact debriefing and focused empathy.
- Implement practical strategies you can implement for self care, considering the physical, psychological, emotional, and cultural impacts your work has on you and your team.

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Course Structure & Objectives

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Key Terms

Compassion fatigue

- The emotional exhaustion and reduced compassion that may result from chronically using empathy when helping those who are suffering. It is sometimes referred to as secondary traumatic stress.

Burnout

- Occupational burnout results from chronic work-related stress, with symptoms characterized by feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy.

Sources: Berzoff & Kita, 2010; Newell et al., 2016; Figley, 1995

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How is this related to a trauma-informed, culturally safe approach?

Why is this beneficial for both workers and people accessing services?

Sources: BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council, 2013; Bourassa, 2009

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Reflection

- What energizes you in your work?
- What do you feel you are doing well regarding self-care?
- What do you feel you are doing well regarding supporting your coworkers?
- What do you find draining or stressful in your work?
- How does stress impact your personal wellbeing, your behaviour, relationships, or performance?

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Professional Quality of Life: Compassion Satisfaction & Compassion Fatigue

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Researcher: Have you ever heard of the term compassion fatigue?

Participant: Oh, yeah.

Researcher: Is that something you feel like you've experienced with your work?

Participant: For sure... you always worry about the animals, right? 24/7... like I see enough, I see it repeats on the news, it repeats on social (media)... I just want to turn it off... a lot of my fatigue comes from that... because I deal with a lot of things on my own like when I do see a seizure or whatever, you know for five days I cry
- Animal services worker who identified as White

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“ Researcher: “Is there anything in place right now, any policies or anything in place right now? So if someone was feeling burnt out or having compassion fatigue and they dealt with something particularly difficult at work. Are they able to take a mental health day or... does any direction about that come from leadership? Or is that a place that has room for improvement?”

Participant: “Yeah, there’s definitely room for improvement for sure. Not to my knowledge, I don’t think we could just take a mental health day or a lieu day, I think we would have to take a sick day and whether or not we disclosed what it was about obviously is up to us... and I wouldn’t really say leadership really makes that obvious or makes it known or really provides other alternatives, maybe because they’re also still trying to figure it out. I’m not quite sure.”

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“ I think it’s important to talk about... I think we hide how bad our mental health is in the organization.”

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Experiences of Vicarious Trauma, Burnout, & Compassion Fatigue

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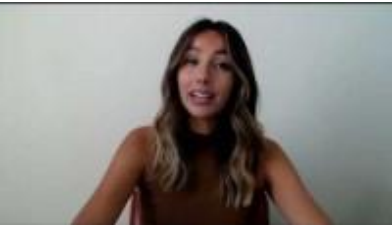
How Animal Services Workers Have Been Impacted



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Experiences of Burnout in the Animal Services Sector



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Signs, Risk Factors, & Protective Factors

SIGNS OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitivity to violence• Feeling disconnected• Feeling low energy or tired• Withdrawing from others
RISK FACTORS OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Own history of trauma• Workload or overwork• Seeing a lot of neglect, abuse, or hardship
PROTECTIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing training and professional development• Close connections with team• Looking after own personal issues

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Reflection

- Can you think of any other potential signs of vicarious trauma, risk factors, and protective factors?
- What do you notice about yourself regarding the risk, protective factors and signs of vicarious trauma?
- What resources and supports do you have available to you to help protect you?

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Self-Care

- Self-care consists of activities we do on a regular basis to look after our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Self-care ideally includes activities that we practice regularly, and that look after the physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, social, and vocational selves. These activities are different for everyone, and wellness practices vary across cultures and may emphasize different foods, activities, or prayer.

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Reflection

Think about your own self-care practices, and reflect on the following questions:


- On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being really strong, how satisfied are you with your self-care?
- What makes you feel your best?
- What else could you do that might help you to heal or recharge?

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Break Time!

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Connection & Low-Impact Debriefing

INCREASED SELF-AWARENESS

Identify your emotional state you have had or are having during? Have a source of a job or work with you and state if it helps you better you mentally and internally when you work with your colleagues. How have you been able to do so for your colleagues and yourself?

FAIR WARNING

When you will be in a meeting, please inform your colleagues about the meeting. Giving your colleagues a heads up about the meeting helps them prepare. This is a good practice!


CONSENT

When you are planning meeting, please ask for consent. This can be as simple as saying, "I am planning a meeting for the next day. Is this okay?" or "I am planning a meeting for the next day. Would you like to join?" or "I am planning a meeting for the next day. Would you like to join?"

LOW IMPACT DISCLOSURE

When you are in a meeting, please disclose your state of mind. This can be as simple as saying, "I am feeling a bit stressed today. I am planning a meeting for the next day. Would you like to join?" or "I am feeling a bit stressed today. I am planning a meeting for the next day. Would you like to join?"

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Focused Empathy

HOW CAN WE PRACTICE 'TURNING OFF' EMPATHY?

1 Take breaks and 'check out' of the stress (e.g., listen to a podcast, watch an engaging video)

2 If you're driving, you may want to put on some music, or call someone (hands-free of course!)

3 Practice box breathing or even pull over and call someone

4 Be alone for a little while

1 Work on a different task

2 Have a ritual for when you stop or start work (e.g., have a marker on a landmark on the commute home where you mentally leave work, once you pass it)

3 Get out of an adversarial mindset (e.g., on and them, me against others) by finding areas of mutual interest (e.g., growing plants, snack foods)

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Safety Plans & the Stress Response Cycle

- A safety plan can provide us with a ready-made option for responding in stressful situations, so we don't have to think too much about it when we're in a situation.
- "The good news is that stress is not the problem. It's how we deal with stress—not what causes it—that releases the stress, completes the cycle, and ultimately, keeps us from burning out. You can't control every external stressor that comes your way."

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Activity: Creating a Safety Plan

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Reflection

- What are the most important things you learned in this workshop?
- What is working well for you that you want to continue doing?
- What is one thing you intend to carry back with you?
- What changes might you think about making to support yourself, your people you serve, or your colleagues in managing stress?
- What is something you commit to doing differently?

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Thank you!

Contact: sareeta@vancooverhumanesociety.bc.ca

Please scan the QR code to share your feedback with us via our short survey.



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