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Ageing Well

WP3/ A1- Activity 2

Module F: Compassion Fatigue and the Importance of
Self-Care

Institute of Development (IoD)

Lesson Plan 1: Understanding Compassion Fatigue





Overview of the module

This module provides caregivers with a thorough understanding of compassion fatigue, including its definition, symptoms, risk factors, and its effects on both personal and professional aspects of their lives. Through experiential activities, caregivers will learn to identify signs of compassion fatigue, reflect on their own experiences, and recognize the importance of self-awareness in managing caregiving responsibilities. The module aims to raise awareness and build knowledge, empowering caregivers to recognize the onset of compassion fatigue early and take proactive steps to mitigate its impact. By the end of this lesson, participants will gain clarity on what compassion fatigue is, how it differs from burnout, and why understanding it is crucial for their well-being and effectiveness in caregiving roles.

Objective:

To educate caregivers about the concept of compassion fatigue, including its definition, symptoms, risk factors, impact and to promote self-awareness, self-compassion and early recognition of compassion fatigue.

Duration: 60 minutes in total (including all activities)

Activities:

1. Introduction to Compassion Fatigue (12 minutes)
2. Experiential Exercise on Recognizing Compassion Fatigue (12 minutes)
3. Risk Factors Discussion (18 minutes)
4. Case Study Analysis (18 minutes)

Materials needed:

For Activity 1: Video link, Whiteboard, Markers.

For Activity 2: Symptom checklist worksheet



For Activity 3: Presentation slides.

For Activity 4: Reflection journals, pens.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of this lesson, participants will:

- o Understand the concept of compassion fatigue and its symptoms.
- o Identify common risk factors for compassion fatigue.
- o Reflect on personal experiences and recognize the importance of self-compassion in managing caregiving responsibilities.
- o Develop initial strategies to recognize and address compassion fatigue early.

List of sources and references related to the activity:

Figley, C. R. (2002). *Compassion fatigue: Psychotherapists' chronic lack of self-care*.

Psychotherapy in Practice, 58(11), 1433-1441.

Smith, P. L., & Moss, S. B. (2009). Compassion fatigue in caregivers of elderly people. *Ageing & Mental Health*, 13(3), 350-358.



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Activity 1: Introduction to Compassion Fatigue



ACTIVITY 1: Introduction to Compassion Fatigue

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

This activity introduces caregivers to the concept of compassion fatigue through a video presentation and guided discussion. Compassion fatigue refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by caregivers, often leading to decreased empathy and effectiveness. Recognizing the symptoms of compassion fatigue is crucial for caregivers to maintain their well-being and effectiveness. The video serves as an entry point, presenting the signs, symptoms, and impact of compassion fatigue on caregivers. Following the video, participants will engage in reflective discussions, helping them relate the information to their personal experiences and caregiving roles.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- Define compassion fatigue and recognize its symptoms.
- Encourage self-reflection to help caregivers identify early warning signs.
- Foster a supportive environment for caregivers to share experiences and strategies.
- Highlight the importance of self-care and support systems in managing compassion fatigue.

Materials Needed:

- Laptop/tablet with internet access and projector (for playing the video)
- Whiteboard or flip chart with markers



- Notebooks or papers and pens for note-taking
- **Worksheet 1:** “Recognizing Compassion Fatigue” – includes a checklist of symptoms, self-reflection questions and prompts. Using Worksheet 1 helps participants understand the concept of compassion fatigue, recognize its symptoms, and reflect on personal experiences, aligning with the goal of promoting self-awareness and early recognition.

Duration of the activity: 12 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Video Presentation**

Play the short video on compassion fatigue: [Video Link](#). Use subtitles if available or find a similar video in the participants’ local language if needed.

- Ask participants to take notes on any symptoms, behaviors or emotions mentioned in the video that resonate with them.

Step 2: **Initial Reactions and Note-Taking**

- After the video, allow participants a couple of minutes to reflect and jot down any symptoms or reactions they personally relate to from the video.
- Prompt: Encourage them to consider specific caregiving situations that may have triggered similar feelings or reactions.

Step 3: **Small Group Discussion**

Divide participants into small groups (3-4 people per group).

Discussion Prompts:



- “What symptoms of compassion fatigue mentioned in the video resonate with you?”
- “How might recognizing these symptoms help you manage your caregiving role?”
- “Have you experienced any of these symptoms in your caregiving work? If so, how did you handle it?”

Facilitator’s Role: Circulate among the groups, providing guidance and encouraging open discussion.

Step 4: **Large Group Summary and Key Takeaways**

- Reconvene as a whole group.
- Instruction: Ask each group to share one key insight or common theme that emerged in their discussion.
- Facilitator’s Role: Record these points on the whiteboard to reinforce learning and create a visual summary.
- Tip: Summarize insights by connecting them to the next steps, which involve recognizing early signs and implementing strategies to address compassion fatigue.



Worksheet 1

RECOGNIZING COMPASSION FATIGUE

Write or describe any symptoms of compassion fatigue you identify in yourself, when they first appeared and how they may affect your caregiving role.

When did you first notice these symptoms?

Symptom Checklist

- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Emotional Numbness
- ☐ Lack of Motivation
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

In what caregiving situations do these symptoms tend to arise?

How do you think compassion fatigue has impacted your caregiving responsibilities or your well-being?



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Activity 2: Experiential Exercise on Recognizing Compassion
Fatigue



ACTIVITY 2 Experiential Exercise on Recognizing Compassion Fatigue

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Caregiving can often lead to stress and compassion fatigue, making self-care essential for maintaining well-being and effectiveness. This activity focuses on teaching practical self-care techniques, emphasizing mindfulness, time management and emotional regulation. Participants will learn how to integrate these strategies into daily routines to prevent burnout, enhance resilience and promote long-term caregiving success.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- Encourage self-reflection to identify personal signs of compassion fatigue.
- Increase awareness of the physical and emotional impacts of caregiving.
- Promote understanding of how specific caregiving situations may contribute to compassion fatigue.
- Set the foundation for developing proactive coping strategies.

Materials Needed:

- Yoga mats or comfortable seating for meditation
- Audio equipment for guided mindfulness exercises
- **Worksheet 2:** “Self-Assessment for Compassion Fatigue” (includes a checklist of symptoms, reflective prompts, and a section on caregiving triggers).
- Pens or pencils for participants.



Duration of the activity: 12 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Introduction to Self-Assessment**

Instruction: Briefly introduce the concept of self-assessment for compassion fatigue.

Explain that the worksheet helps caregivers identify symptoms they may be experiencing and how these might be linked to their caregiving roles.

Facilitator's Note: Emphasize that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers; this is a personal exercise to encourage reflection and self-awareness.

Step 2: **Self-Assessment Worksheet Completion**

- o Distribute the “Self-Assessment for Compassion Fatigue” worksheet with a checklist of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue to each participant.
- o Instructions for Participants
 - Complete the symptom checklist by marking any physical, emotional, or behavioral symptoms that resonate with them (e.g., exhaustion, detachment, irritability).
 - Reflect on specific caregiving situations that may have contributed to these feelings.

Facilitator's Role: Encourage honesty and confidentiality. Assure participants that their reflections are for personal insight and growth.

Step 3: **Small Group Sharing** (optional)



- o Invite participants to share a key insight they noted during the self-assessment (if they feel comfortable).
- o Suggested Sharing Prompts:
 - “What was one symptom on the list that surprised you?”
 - “How might understanding these symptoms change your approach to self-care?”

Facilitator’s Role: Ensure that sharing remains voluntary and that participants feel safe discussing their experiences.

Step 4: **Closing Reflection and Transition to Next Activity**

- o **Instruction:** Thank participants for their honesty and encourage them to keep the worksheet as a personal reminder.
- o **Facilitator’s Note:** Transition to the next activity by mentioning that recognizing these symptoms is only the first step and that upcoming activities will focus on building strategies to manage and prevent compassion fatigue.



Worksheet 2

SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Write or describe any symptoms of compassion fatigue you identify in yourself, when they first appeared and how they may affect your caregiving role.

When did you first notice these symptoms?

Symptom Checklist

- ☐ Increased Irritability
- ☐ Emotional Numbness
- ☐ Lack of Motivation
- ☐ Feeling drained
- ☐ Difficulty Empathizing
- ☐ Isolation, Detachment
- ☐ Fatigue, headaches, tension
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐
- ☐

What caregiving situations tend to trigger these symptoms?

How do you feel physically and emotionally during and after these situations?



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Activity 3: Risk Factors Discussion



ACTIVITY 3 Risk Factors Discussion

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Compassion fatigue does not occur in isolation; it is often influenced by various risk factors, including work overload, lack of support and personal vulnerabilities. In this activity, participants will explore common risk factors for compassion fatigue through an interactive presentation and small group discussions. Understanding these factors allows caregivers to become more aware of potential triggers in their work environments and personal lives, empowering them to take preventive actions. This activity also introduces self-compassion as a valuable tool for managing and mitigating the impact of these risk factors.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- Identify key risk factors contributing to compassion fatigue in caregiving roles.
- Promote self-awareness of individual triggers and vulnerabilities.
- Encourage the use of self-compassion as a proactive strategy to cope with identified risk factors.
- Foster supportive peer interactions to share coping strategies and insights.

Materials Needed:

- **Presentation Slides:** "Risk Factors for Compassion Fatigue" (covering work overload, lack of social support and personal vulnerability).
- Whiteboard or flip chart with markers.
- **Worksheet:** "Identifying My Risk Factors" – includes sections on personal,



environmental and work-related risk factors.

- Pens or pencils for participants.

Duration of the activity: 18 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Interactive Presentation on Risk Factors

Instruction: Begin with a brief [presentation](#) outlining common risk factors for compassion fatigue, such as:

- Work overload: Demanding caregiving roles and insufficient time off.
- Lack of social support: Isolation or limited access to supportive networks.
- Personal vulnerabilities: High empathy levels, perfectionism, or past experiences that heighten sensitivity to stress.

Facilitator's Role: Present each risk factor with practical examples relevant to caregiving (e.g., “work overload” might include extended shifts with little rest).

Visual Aid: Use slides to highlight key points and examples, and ask participants to consider which factors they relate to most.

Step 2: Small Group Discussion

Instruction: Divide participants into small groups (3-4 people) and provide each group with prompts to discuss.

Discussion Prompts:

- “Which risk factors feel most relevant to you in your caregiving role?”
- “How do you think these factors contribute to compassion fatigue?”
- “What strategies have you found effective in managing these risk factors?”



Facilitator's Role: Rotate among groups to guide discussion and ensure engagement. Encourage sharing of practical experiences and ideas for managing risk factors.

Step 3: **Worksheet Completion: Identifying My Risk Factors**

Distribute the “Identifying My Risk Factors” worksheet to each participant.

Instructions for Participants:

- Reflect on the presentation and group discussion, then complete the worksheet by identifying which risk factors affect them personally.

Facilitator's Tip: Remind participants that this exercise is for self-awareness and that they can revisit the worksheet in the future to reflect on changes.

Step 3: **Large Group Sharing and Wrap-Up (Optional)**

Instruction: Invite a few volunteers to share one risk factor they noted and a potential strategy they'd like to try for managing it.

Facilitator's Note: Summarize key insights from the discussions, connecting them to the importance of ongoing self-care and self-compassion in caregiving roles.



Worksheet 3

IDENTIFYING MY RISK FACTORS

Complete the worksheet by identifying which risk factors affect you personally.

Personal Risk Factors

- ☐ High empathy
- ☐ Perfectionism
- ☐ Sensitivity
- ☐

Work-related risk factors

- ☐ Extended work hours
- ☐ Demanding workload
- ☐
- ☐

Environmental Risk Factors

- ☐ Isolation
- ☐ Lack of support at work
- ☐
- ☐

How can I practice self-compassion in response to these risk factors?



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Activity 4: Case Study Analysis



ACTIVITY 4: Case Study Analysis

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

This activity provides caregivers with a single, realistic case study to explore compassion fatigue in caregiving roles. By analyzing the case, participants can identify signs of compassion fatigue, recognize contributing factors, and discuss the role of self-compassion as a strategy for managing these challenges. Through group discussion and personal reflection, participants will explore practical ways to incorporate self-compassion into their caregiving, promoting resilience and well-being.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- Analyze a specific case study to understand compassion fatigue symptoms and risk factors.
- Reflect on how self-compassion could help in managing compassion fatigue.
- Develop personal strategies for coping with compassion fatigue through self-compassion.

Materials Needed:

- **Case Study Handouts:** “Maria’s Story” (detailed case study about a caregiver experiencing compassion fatigue).
- Whiteboard or flip chart with markers.
- Pens or pencils for participants.

Duration of the activity: 18 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Introduction to the Case Study**



Instruction: Introduce “Maria’s Story,” explaining that it represents a realistic caregiving scenario where compassion fatigue may arise. The exercise will help participants explore compassion fatigue and self-compassion in caregiving.

Facilitator’s Note: Emphasize that the goal is to reflect and learn from Maria’s experience in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.

Step 2: **Reading the Case Study**

Distribute the case study handout, “Maria’s Story,” to each participant.

Instruction for Participants: Read the case carefully, noting any symptoms of compassion fatigue and risk factors.

Case Study: Maria’s Story:

Maria has been a caregiver for an elderly relative with dementia for the past three years. As the demands of caregiving increase, Maria begins to feel exhausted, both physically and emotionally. She often skips her own meals, loses sleep due to worry, and finds herself becoming irritable with her family. Although she is aware that she needs to take care of herself, Maria feels guilty when she tries to take a break. Over time, she becomes more withdrawn from friends and family, feeling isolated and overwhelmed by her caregiving responsibilities.

Step 3: **Group Discussion and Analysis**

Instruction: Facilitate a large group discussion to analyze the case study. Encourage participants to share insights on the symptoms and risk factors they identified.



Discussion Prompts:

- “What signs of compassion fatigue do you observe in Maria’s experience?”
- “What specific risk factors might contribute to her feelings of exhaustion and isolation?”
- “In what ways could self-compassion help Maria cope with these challenges?”

Facilitator’s Role: Use the whiteboard to summarize key points from the discussion, such as common symptoms (e.g., physical and emotional exhaustion) and risk factors (e.g., isolation, guilt).

Infographic 1

Compassion Fatigue: Symptoms and Consequences

