

# Compassion Fatigue: Connection to Trauma, Stages and Assessments

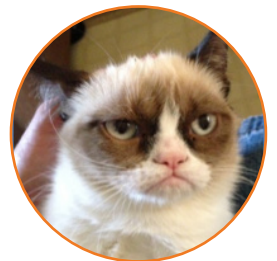
## Section 3

### Compassion Fatigue Cycle *(adapted from work of Eric Gentry, PhD 2012)*



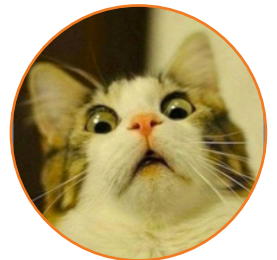
**Zealot / Idealist** — We are committed, involved, and available... Ready to problem solve... Ready to make a difference... We willingly put in extra hours... Our enthusiasm overflows... We volunteer... We are willing to go the extra mile and often do so without prompting.... "I'll do that!!"

**Irritability** — We begin to see the imperfect nature of the systems and people around us... We distance ourselves from students, parents, coworkers and friends... We talk unfairly about the challenges of colleagues and students/parents ... The use of humor is sometimes strained... We daydream or become distracted when students are speaking with us... Oversights and mistakes begin to occur. We may notice our anger, cynicism, diminished creativity, and sadness.



**Withdrawal** — We are unable to embrace the complexity of the problems... We lose our ability to see students as individuals or they become irritants... Complaints may be made about our work and we might have problems in our personal life... We are tired all the time... We no longer wish to talk about work and may not even admit to what we do... We neglect our family, our coworkers, our students and ourselves... Our shield gets thicker and thicker to block our emotions. We may experience difficulty empathizing and feeling to numb to other's pain.

**Zombie** — Our hopelessness turns to anger... We get angry at our coworkers if they dare question us... Others become incompetent or ignorant in our eyes... We work in a silo... We have no time for humor or fun... We may have a sense that we can't ever do enough, an inflated sense of importance related to our work, hyper-vigilance/ sleeplessness, or a sense of persecution.



**Renewal vs. Pathology** — If we have not addressed this cycle earlier, we come to a fork in the road where we either continue deeper into compassion fatigue to a place of burn-out and victimization (overwhelmed, leaving the profession, changing positions and repeating the cycle, somatic illness) or we take a turn towards maturation and renewal (hardiness, resiliency, transformation).

The good news is that at any stage in the cycle, one can learn skills and mindsets that change the trajectory towards compassion satisfaction and proactively address our ways of being to avoid compassion fatigue and, when it does arise, address it early with confidence and support. It is beneficial to begin by getting a sense of the starting place for ourselves.