

Supporter Fatigue

**You're not alone.
We're here to support.**

There is no timeline for grief. Knowing there are supports and resources available can give hope as you move through your grief.

Burnout

Affects you physically, emotionally, and can cause changes in your behaviour. You may notice you are getting sick and/or experiencing headaches more than before, feeling overwhelmed, and/or experiencing reduced satisfaction in your tasks (school, work, caregiving, etc.).

Symptoms can include:



Physical Changes

- Increased exhaustion and/or physical weakness.
- Sleep difficulties.
- Increased headaches.
- Increased stomach-related concerns.
- Increased illness - colds and/or flu.



Emotional Changes

- Increased irritability, anxiety, and/or depression.
- Increased feelings of guilt and/or sense of hopelessness.
- Feeling numb, detached, or unappreciated by others.



Changes in Your Behaviour

- Increased aggression, insensitivity, carelessness, negative view, defensiveness, substance use.

It is human nature to want to support others when they are in emotional pain; this is the case when someone we know is grieving. Without hesitation, most will reach out to offer comfort, often providing ongoing care with little awareness of how hearing stories of grief may impact their own overall well-being.

This is not to say that we should shy away from reaching out, but to highlight that as a supporter, you can be at higher risk when you are immersed/spending extended amounts of time with a person who is intensely grieving.

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Compassion Fatigue

Can appear without warning and is your body's response to experiencing intense, extended periods of compassion stress or exposure to someone's suffering.

Compassion fatigue affects you physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Along with symptoms of burnout, you may notice the following changes:



Physical Changes

- Increase or decrease in appetite and/or weight change.
- Increased drug, alcohol, or tobacco use.
- Exhaustion and/or inability to fall asleep.
- Experience more headaches, body tension, stomach upset, pounding heart, muscle aches, and/or developing rashes.
- Increased illness such as colds.
- More accident prone, grinding your teeth, restless, foot-tapping, and/or finger drumming.



Emotional Changes

- Increased feelings of anxiety, worry, frustration, low mood, and/or depression.
- Mood swings, irritability, bad temper, and/or nervous laughter.
- Have thoughts that “no one cares” and/or easily discouraged.
- Experience crying spells and/or feel little joy.



Mind Health (Mental Health) Changes

- Increased forgetfulness, confusion, poor concentration, racing thoughts, and/or spacing out.
- Low productivity, negative attitude and self-talk, increased boredom, and/or dulled senses (taste, smell, sight, etc.).



Social and Relationships

- Increased isolation, hiding from others, intolerance, nagging, and/or lashing out.
- Increased feelings of loneliness, distrust, and/or resentment.
- Lowered sex drive, lack of intimacy, fewer contacts with friends, clamming up, and/or using or taking advantage of people.



Spiritual

- Feelings of emptiness, doubt, bitterness, mistreatment, and/or indifference.
- Loss of meaning, loss of direction, and/or needing to “prove” yourself to others.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies typically occur automatically and address emotional stressors we experience. However, during times of

burnout or compassion fatigue, our known strategies may not be as effective. This does not mean that we begin to ignore what is happening within us, instead we look to adjust our approach to coping.

Below are strategies that may be effective for you:



Physical Care

- Make time to exercise, even if you feel like you don't have the time. Walk in your neighbourhood or when you go to a store or work, park further away from the building.
- Complete large full body stretching activities: Tensing and releasing large muscle groups when you wake up and before bed.
- Rest during typical sleeping hours, even if you feel you can't fall asleep.
- Be aware of your eating routine. Prepare meals ahead of time to reduce missed meals; have healthy snacks readily available and eat often if you have little appetite.
- Drink water; limit caffeine (especially close to typical hours of sleep/rest).
- Avoid alcohol and/or drugs.



Emotional Care

- Talk to others (in-person) outside of your caregiving/support role.
- Allow yourself to cry when you need to.
- Be aware of what your emotions are telling you: Take time to step away for a moment.
- Find humour (when you have a break from your caregiving/support role).
- Use journalling as a way to express and release your current emotions.
- Release with sound: Scream or sing loudly when alone, not directly at someone.



Social and Spiritual Care

- Accept invitations to spend time with others, including those who are not connected to this specific grief.
- Stay connected with your friends and/or family.
- Surround yourself with supportive people.
- Be OK with saying “no” to maintain balance.
- Take time for solitude to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and your own grief journey.
- Find ways to meet your unique spiritual connection: Visit places of worship, meditate, spend time close to nature, read spiritually uplifting books, or watch meaningful and inspiring movies.
- Accept offers of help; ask for help.
- Keep things simple; only do what is necessary. Take time off from other responsibilities (i.e. work) if that is an option for you.
- Be gentle to yourself, don't fault yourself for feeling confused.