

Caring Safely®

Reducing the negative impact of compassion and empathy:
The concepts

Charlene Richard B.S.W., M.S.W., RSW
Compassion Fatigue Specialist

Sustainable Caring

- You're now tracking your experiences throughout the day and learning what increases your well (input) and what decreases your well (output).
- Now we will review ways to help reduce the outputs that come with regularly providing compassionate care and empathizing with people who are in pain or at risk of harm.
- The way you empathize with people, and regulate your emotions, will impact your input (nourishment) and output.
- Learning how to empathize with people, and be around intense emotions, without absorbing those emotions, will help you maintain your well.
- If you don't know how to recognize and regulate your emotions, you will be susceptible to emotional hijacking and absorbing the emotions you encounter through the day.



CaringSafely2019©

www.CaringSafely.org

team@caringsafely.org

3



CaringSafely2019©

www.CaringSafely.org

team@caringsafely.org

4



Emotional Contagion

- What did you feel as you saw each of these facial expressions?
- How did your body respond to the happy laugh, the sad cry and the angry frown?
- Humans can catch emotions from other humans. Think of the types of movies or shows you enjoy watching and what emotions you feel as you watch them.

- Mirror Neurons: brain cells that reflect the activity of another's brain cells.
- You feel what they feel. If they are feeling fear, stress or anger and their stress response is triggered, you're likely to feel those emotions and trigger your nervous system as well.

(Rothschild, 2006)

What emotions are you exposed to?

What types of emotions are you exposed to at work?

How does it feel in your body – heart rate, breathing, tension, temperature, posture?

What does being around sadness feel like?

What does being around anxiety/fear feel like?

What does being around anger feel like?

Daily Tracking Sheet: Emotions

- One part of building resilience includes building awareness of how other people's emotions impact you throughout the day.
- Each day you are exposed to a range of emotions, from people in your personal and professional life.
- Track morning, afternoon, evening and night and see how your interactions with client's emotions, colleagues emotions, family/ friends emotions impact your emotions/body sensations/energy.

Personalize and Integrate with the Handout

Empathy

“Empathy allows us to relate to those in our care, to have a sense of what they are feeling. It also helps us put their experience into perspective, understanding how they are being affected by the incidents that we are trying to mediate” (Rothschild, 2006)

“Empathy is the visceral or emotional experience of another person’s feelings...an automatic mirroring of another’s emotions” (Seppala, 2013)



Unconscious Empathy

- Unconscious empathy is when you are empathizing with someone without being aware that you are actively empathizing.
- You’re not intentionally practicing empathy with awareness, you’re just automatically empathizing. Most caring people automatically empathize as part of their nature. They care about other humans and relate to them, which can lead to unconscious empathy.
- “Unconscious empathy is the mechanism of emotional infection” (Rothschild, 2006)
- The danger of unconscious empathy is that you don’t have control over the emotions you feel each day. Your emotions are at the whim of the people you are caring for, which can result in a rollercoaster of emotions each day. This is extremely taxing on the nervous system and can bring the well down quickly.

Conscious Empathy

- Fortunately for caring people there is another way to empathize. A way that is safer for you and still allows you to provide compassionate care, which is to practice conscious empathy.
- Conscious empathy means that you are mindful and present while empathizing. It means you know you are empathizing, while you are empathizing, and you are self-regulating while doing so.
- Conscious empathy is something you want to practice so you can related to the other person's experience, which will help you understand them and provide compassionate care, without automatically catching or absorbing those emotions without awareness.
- This means you will intentionally practice empathy while self-regulating to protect yourself from vicarious trauma and intense emotions.

(Rothschild, 2006)

Self-Regulation

- Regulating nervous system and one's behaviors/thoughts/emotions/impulses.
- Manage disruptive emotions you are experiencing as you are caring for people with intense emotions.
- Practicing self-regulation while empathizing with people will allow you to prevent emotional contagion, stay present to empathize with people, and potentially prevent or mitigate episodes of vicarious trauma.
- Particularly important for those who have a history of trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as the sympathetic branch of the nervous system may be more sensitive to triggers, which may lead to impulses and anxieties that come with the emotional reactivity of the stress response.

Practicing Safe Empathy

- “The better we take care of ourselves and maintain a professional separation from our clients, the more we will be in a position to be truly empathetic, compassionate and useful to them” (Rothschild, 2006).
- By practicing conscious empathy, and self-regulation, you’re able to achieve the benefits of empathy while preventing yourself from emotional hijacking and absorbing other’s emotions.
- The goal is to develop a regular practice of safe empathy for long-term sustainable caring.

Integrating the Concepts

For each of the concepts we reviewed, write out a definition that works for you.

You can also include a brief example or time you’ve experienced each.

Personalize and Integrate with the Handout