

Compassion Fatigue: When Your Capacity Becomes Everyone Else's Resource

Some people become very skilled at noticing what others need.

They may have learned to:

- read the room quickly
- anticipate emotions
- prevent conflict
- keep others comfortable
- take responsibility when someone is upset

These skills can be strengths. The problem is when your brain starts sending the message, *if someone is upset, I need to fix it*. Learn how to care without losing yourself.

1. Notice the pattern

When someone else is upset, my brain says...

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I need to make this better. | ☐ I can't relax until they are okay. |
| ☐ I did something wrong. | ☐ Their feelings are my responsibility. |
| ☐ I need to figure out what they need. | ☐ They will be disappointed if I don't help. |
| ☐ Other: _____ | ☐ I am selfish if I focus on myself. |

2. What is my brain trying to protect?

My brain may be trying to prevent...

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Conflict | ☐ Feeling guilty |
| ☐ Rejection | ☐ Being seen as uncaring |
| ☐ Someone being angry with me | ☐ Someone experiencing pain |
| ☐ Feeling helpless | ☐ Losing connection |

3. Separate caring from responsibility

What belongs to me?

I can control:

- ☐ My words
- ☐ My actions
- ☐ My boundaries
- ☐ My support
- ☐ My honesty
- ☐ My choices

What belongs to them?

They are responsible for:

- ☐ Their emotions
- ☐ Their choices
- ☐ Their coping
- ☐ Their healing
- ☐ Their reactions
- ☐ Their decisions

4. Am I helping or rescuing?

Helping	Rescuing
I offer support	I take over
I listen	I try to remove their feelings
I ask what they need	I assume what they need
I care about their pain	I feel responsible for their pain
I respect their choices	I try to control the outcome

5. Practice a different response

Instead of *How do I make this feeling go away?* try *How can I be present with this feeling without taking ownership of it?*

Instead of *What do they need from me?* try *What do they need, and what do I have capacity to offer?*

Instead of *If they are upset, something is wrong.* try *someone can be upset and I can still be okay.*

6. Understand the need behind the emotion

What emotion comes up when I imagine not fixing this?

- ☐ Guilt
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Helplessness
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Anger

What does that emotion need from me?

7. Practice a different response

Instead of *How do I make this feeling go away?* try *How can I be present with this feeling without taking ownership of it?*

Instead of *What do they need from me?* try *What do they need, and what do I have capacity to offer?*

Instead of *If they are upset, something is wrong.* try *someone can be upset and I can still be okay.*