

Section 12: Managing Stress and Practicing Self-Care

- Learn the dynamics of stress how it can impact your personal and professional life.
- Learn about burnout, secondary trauma and compassion fatigue.
- Learn tips, strategies and resources for creating, maintaining and restoring balance between your personal and professional life.
- Learn about the Professional Quality of Life Measure, a free-self-assessment to gauge your positive and negative experiences within your professional life.

“You can’t pour from an empty cup.” -Anonymous

Assuming a leadership role in your local association is a huge responsibility. It’s no secret that you’ll devote countless hours to improving the lives of your members and their students while advocating for public education. Adding to the challenge is the fact that you may find it difficult to “turn off” or “tune out” the work of the association to take time for yourself. When this happens, stress sets in.

It is important to note that stress is a natural human reaction to challenge. Stress can be beneficial for our bodies get the energy, motivation, and brain boost needed to accomplish a task or run a marathon.

However, as with many things in life, there should always be a balance. There is a difference between having a healthy amount of stress and challenge within your work, and feeling overwhelmed, disengaged and burned out due to the amount of stress in our lives. Throughout this section you will find tips, strategies and resources for creating, maintaining or restoring balance.

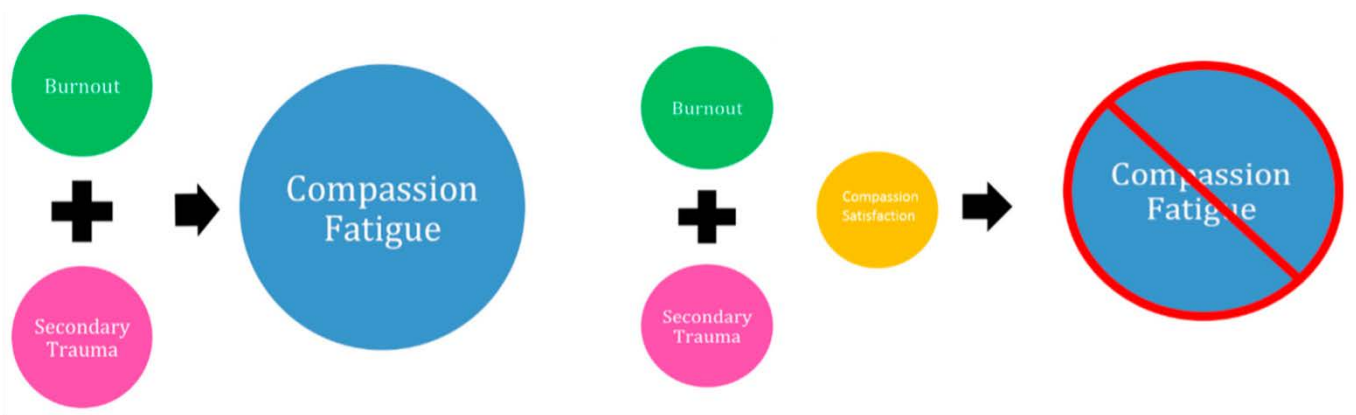
Recognizing Signs of Stress, Burnout, Secondary Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

Some of the work-related stress in education may include working long hours, not being able to set boundaries, and having a high amount of work responsibilities. This may lead to feeling ineffective, overwhelmed, and unsupported by administrators or colleagues. Stress can take a toll on your physical, emotional and mental health. Stress can affect your physical health with weight loss or gain, body aches, gastrointestinal disorders, hair loss and more unwanted symptoms. Emotional stress may include feeling trapped, feeling hopeless, disengaging from your job, and having negative verbal outbursts or “snapping” at students and colleagues. Stress can impact your mental health through prolonged sadness, anxiety, decrease in self-efficacy and may lead to an overindulgence of alcohol. If left unchecked, work-related stress can lead to **Burnout**.

Additionally, those who work in helping professions such as teachers, counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals and other educational support staff can experience **Secondary Traumatic Stress** due to working with or being aware of traumatic events or situations involving people that they seek to help. This is especially important as a local leader who will be tasked with listening to, supporting, and advocating on the behalf of members who may be in crisis. Local leaders who are often exposed to the trauma of students or members or are in contentious bargaining campaigns are likely to experience some amount of secondary traumatic stress.

Unresolved symptoms of burnout and secondary trauma can lead to **Compassion Fatigue**. Compassion fatigue is feeling physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted and depleted by all of the negative aspects of working in a helping profession. Experiencing compassion fatigue can lead to depression, frustration, isolation, disinterest in pleasurable activities and reluctance to go to work. People experiencing long periods of compassion fatigue typically end up quitting their job and leaving the profession.

However, not all aspects of working in a helping profession such as public education are negative. There are many positive aspects of working in the education field, in which people feel joy, satisfaction, and fulfilled in their roles. This may include helping students get to school, getting them a good meal, and making sure they are physically healthy. Satisfaction may include having a direct or indirect role that supports students' personal, social, emotional and academic needs such as eliminating barriers to help them be successful. This is called **Compassion Satisfaction**. As a leader, you may feel empowered, excited with lots of **Compassion Satisfaction** because to have the opportunity to make positive changes in your educational community.



It is important to periodically assess the amount of burnout, secondary trauma, compassion, fatigue, and compassion satisfaction that you feel in your work life. This can be done by taking a professional quality of life survey. The **PROQOL** is a free survey that measures compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue. A copy in English is available at the end of this section. There are free downloadable versions in other languages, and an online assessment available at <https://www.PROQOL.org>. The website also features a variety of free resources and handouts that can be shared on how to improve overall well-being; including tips of meditation, better sleep, meditation, focused breathing, mindfulness, and setting boundaries.

As a leader, it is important to identify and manage areas of negative stress by creating a work and life balance. It is also important to share this information and resources with colleagues and members.

Strategies for Creating a Work & Life Balance

Work & Life Balance: According to Mental Health America, it can be challenging and feel nearly impossible to create and maintain a work- life balance. Most of us are trying to juggle family responsibilities, manage relationships and find time to pursue personal interests and goals. In our daily struggles to balance our personal needs and professional duties we find our stress levels spiking with increases in irritability. **Approximately 1 in 4 people would describe themselves as “Super Stressed”.** Again, some stress is healthy for motivation and creativity. Yet, chronic stress can increase our chances for **Compassion Fatigue** or a heart attack. The goal is to identify practices, habits and develop routines to minimize negative stress and create opportunities for **Satisfaction**. The professionals at Mental Health America share some researched and practical techniques that may help many people start the journey to better health (<https://mhanational.org/work-life-balance>).

Strategies for Work

- **Set Manageable Daily Goals.** We feel a sense of accomplishment when we can realistically set and meet goals. Create a “to do” list, and prioritize the essential tasks. Find ways to collaborate or consult with others for the items that are more challenging or time consuming.
- **Time Management.** Avoid procrastination. Divide larger projects into smaller tasks. Reward yourself for completing the small tasks with a 5-minute break and cup of your favorite coffee. .
- **Advocate for Yourself.** We are often asked to take on more roles and add additional duties to our already jam-packed schedules. Can something be taken off your plate? Are you able to receive additional compensation or additional time to complete projects?
- **Take Mindful Lunch.** Create moments to reset and refuel by eating your lunch distraction free.
- **Modify Your Environment.** Whether your work space is a classroom, desk, bus or office, there are ways to add photos, music or other small decorations that will provide a sense of peace and calm during the day.
- **Set a Time to End.** You have a contractual time and wage. Try not to volunteer extra hours and service. It can lead to burnout and resentment. You are also only showing your supervisor that you can do more work with less resources.
- **Give Yourself Grace.** No one’s perfect! Do the best you can. Be okay with making and learning from mistakes.

Strategies for Home

- **Unplug.** Give your mind a break from the overstimulation of technology. Take a break from work emails, social media and television. Enjoy a quiet hobby such as reading, knitting, baking or meditating. Try cutting out all electronics at least 45-minutes before bed for better quality sleep.
- **Get Active.** Find ways to incorporate exercise into your daily routine. Go for a walk with the dog, do 5-minutes of stretches in the morning or try a structured group activity such a yoga, line dancing, pickle ball or kick-boxing.
- **Use Clean Fuel.** Strive for healthy meals with fruit, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats. Minimize consumption of processed foods or foods high in fat or sodium. Avoid overindulgence in alcohol or smoking cigarettes.
- **Connect with Friends and Family.** Find time to reconnect with friends and family regularly. Call someone that you haven’t spoken with in a while and catch up. Get together with others outside your job for dinner, a movie or a fun game of Monopoly.
- **Use Your Wellness Benefits.** Participate in the wellness activities sponsored by your health insurance or promoted by your school district or educational setting. Reach out to your Employee Assistance Program for other financial, social, emotional or mental health supports.
- **Seek Professional Help If You Need It.** Break the Stigma. Your Mental Health Matters. We are not able to control every situation in our lives. There will be times when the stress of it all becomes too much for us to manage on our own. Speak with a therapist, counselor or other mental health professional for tips, resources and support.

PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE (PROQOL)

COMPASSION SATISFACTION AND COMPASSION FATIGUE (PROQOL) VERSION 5 (2009)

When you [help] people you have direct contact with their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you [help] can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences, both positive and negative, as a [helper]. Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these things in the *last 30 days*.

1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Very Often

- _____ 1. I am happy.
- _____ 2. I am preoccupied with more than one person I [help].
- _____ 3. I get satisfaction from being able to [help] people.
- _____ 4. I feel connected to others.
- _____ 5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.
- _____ 6. I feel invigorated after working with those I [help].
- _____ 7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a [helper].
- _____ 8. I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a person I [help].
- _____ 9. I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I [help].
- _____ 10. I feel trapped by my job as a [helper].
- _____ 11. Because of my [helping], I have felt "on edge" about various things.
- _____ 12. I like my work as a [helper].
- _____ 13. I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the people I [help].
- _____ 14. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have [helped].
- _____ 15. I have beliefs that sustain me.
- _____ 16. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with [helping] techniques and protocols.
- _____ 17. I am the person I always wanted to be.
- _____ 18. My work makes me feel satisfied.
- _____ 19. I feel worn out because of my work as a [helper].
- _____ 20. I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I [help] and how I could help them.
- _____ 21. I feel overwhelmed because my case [work] load seems endless.
- _____ 22. I believe I can make a difference through my work.
- _____ 23. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of frightening experiences of the people I [help].
- _____ 24. I am proud of what I can do to [help].
- _____ 25. As a result of my [helping], I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.
- _____ 26. I feel "bogged down" by the system.
- _____ 27. I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a [helper].
- _____ 28. I can't recall important parts of my work with trauma victims.
- _____ 29. I am a very caring person.
- _____ 30. I am happy that I chose to do this work.

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YOUR SCORES ON THE PROQOL: PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE SCREENING

Based on your responses, place your personal scores below. If you have any concerns, you should discuss them with a physical or mental health care professional.

Compassion Satisfaction _____

Compassion satisfaction is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well. For example, you may feel like it is a pleasure to help others through your work. You may feel positively about your colleagues or your ability to contribute to the work setting or even the greater good of society. Higher scores on this scale represent a greater satisfaction related to your ability to be an effective caregiver in your job.

If you are in the higher range, you probably derive a good deal of professional satisfaction from your position. If your scores are below 23, you may either find problems with your job, or there may be some other reason—for example, you might derive your satisfaction from activities other than your job. (Alpha scale reliability 0.88)

Burnout _____

Most people have an intuitive idea of what burnout is. From the research perspective, burnout is one of the elements of Compassion Fatigue (CF). It is associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing your job effectively. These negative feelings usually have a gradual onset. They can reflect the feeling that your efforts make no difference, or they can be associated with a very high workload or a non-supportive work environment. Higher scores on this scale mean that you are at higher risk for burnout.

If your score is below 23, this probably reflects positive feelings about your ability to be effective in your work. If you score above 41, you may wish to think about what at work makes you feel like you are not effective in your position. Your score may reflect your mood; perhaps you were having a “bad day” or are in need of some time off. If the high score persists or if it is reflective of other worries, it may be a cause for concern. (Alpha scale reliability 0.75)

Secondary Traumatic Stress _____

The second component of Compassion Fatigue (CF) is secondary traumatic stress (STS). It is about your work related, secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events. Developing problems due to exposure to other’s trauma is somewhat rare but does happen to many people who care for those who have experienced extremely or traumatically stressful events. For example, you may repeatedly hear stories about the traumatic things that happen to other people, commonly called Vicarious Traumatization. If your work puts you directly in the path of danger, for example, field work in a war or area of civil violence, this is not secondary exposure; your exposure is primary. However, if you are exposed to others’ traumatic events as a result of your work, for example, as a therapist or an emergency worker, this is secondary exposure. The symptoms of STS are usually rapid in onset and associated with a particular event. They may include being afraid, having difficulty sleeping, having images of the upsetting event pop into your mind, or avoiding things that remind you of the event.

If your score is above 41, you may want to take some time to think about what at work may be frightening to you or if there is some other reason for the elevated score. While higher scores do not mean that you do have a problem, they are an indication that you may want to examine how you feel about your work and your work environment. You may wish to discuss this with your supervisor, a colleague, or a health care professional. (Alpha scale reliability 0.81)

WHAT IS MY SCORE AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

In this section, you will score your test so you understand the interpretation for you. To find your score on **each section**, total the questions listed on the left and then find your score in the table on the right of the section.

Compassion Satisfaction Scale

Copy your rating on each of these questions on to this table and add them up. When you have added them up you can find your score on the table to the right.

- 3. _____
- 6. _____
- 12. _____
- 16. _____
- 18. _____
- 20. _____
- 22. _____
- 24. _____
- 27. _____
- 30. _____

Total: _____

The sum of my Compassion Satisfaction questions is	And my Compassion Satisfaction level is
22 or less	Low
Between 23 and 41	Moderate
42 or more	High

Burnout Scale

On the burnout scale you will need to take an extra step. Starred items are "reverse scored." If you scored the item 1, write a 5 beside it. The reason we ask you to reverse the scores is because scientifically the measure works better when these questions are asked in a positive way though they can tell us more about their negative form. For example, question 1. "I am happy" tells us more about

- *1. _____ = _____
- *4. _____ = _____
- 8. _____
- 10. _____
- *15. _____ = _____
- *17. _____ = _____
- 19. _____
- 21. _____
- 26. _____
- *29. _____ = _____

Total: _____

The sum of my Burnout Questions is	And my Burnout level is
22 or less	Low
Between 23 and 41	Moderate
42 or more	High

You Wrote	Change to
	5
2	4
3	3
4	2
5	1

the effects of helping when you are *not* happy so you reverse the score

Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale

Just like you did on Compassion Satisfaction, copy your rating on each of these questions on to this table and add them up. When you have added them up you can find your score on the table to the right.

- 2. _____
- 5. _____
- 7. _____
- 9. _____
- 11. _____
- 13. _____
- 14. _____
- 23. _____
- 25. _____
- 28. _____

Total: _____

The sum of my Secondary Trauma questions is	And my Secondary Traumatic Stress level is
22 or less	Low
Between 23 and 41	Moderate
42 or more	High

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