

Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County
2107 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
(239) 258-3450
www.swfjac.org

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The JAC Perspective



The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.

Free drug testing kits are available at the JAC 24 hours a day for parents to use with their youth.

Law enforcement should call ahead to

**258-3461
or 258-3471**

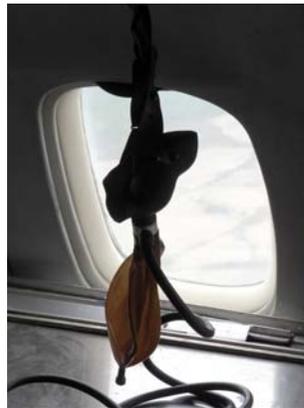
when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC or to confirm that a youth is eligible for a civil citation.



The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Put Your Own Mask on First

With good reason airline flight attendants remind passengers before every flight that, if oxygen masks should be needed, parents should put their own mask on first before assisting their child. The helper has to have his/her own needs met before being able to help others. So is it true for those who work with people who have experienced physical or emotional trauma. This also can include many people who work in the juvenile justice field or who work with at-risk youth and their families. Many at-risk youth and their families experience difficult and often chronic problems. More have experienced trauma than the general population. It can be an emotionally draining experience to work with some of them. All of us have something akin to an emotional gas tank that periodically needs to be refueled. Working in a helping capacity where one is frequently exposed to stories of trauma, victimization, physical pain and/or difficult or chronic needs, combined with the everyday stress and strain of one's own life, can have the cumulative effect of draining ones emotional gas tank. It can begin to take its toll on one's own psyche. It can result in "compassion fatigue," sometimes also called secondary traumatic stress. If left unaddressed compassion fatigue can lead to troubled relationships, depression, and stress related illnesses. Compassion fatigue is especially a hazard among those working with trauma victims, health care and mental health professionals, and first responders.



Anyone who is in a field in which they work with difficult populations or they listen to peoples' stories of fear, pain, and suffering is at risk. Individuals who are overly conscientious, perfectionist, and self giving are also more at risk. Symptoms of compassion fatigue can be similar to those of post traumatic stress disorder. This can include having

physical ailments, such as, headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, or frequent colds. One can have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, have an exaggerated startle response, become easily frustrated or irritated, or develop a negative or cynical attitude about the world. (See *symptoms on page 2.*) If not dealt with a negative attitude associated with compassion

fatigue can have a detrimental effect both professionally and personally. The first step in dealing with compassion fatigue is to educate oneself on its symptoms and its risks. The second step is to learn to manage its symptoms. Individuals who do care giving work need to develop self care and stress reduction strategies that help them routinely refuel their emotional gas tank. It is important for them to learn what works for them and what doesn't. This can vary between individuals. (See *examples of strategies on page 2.*) Once one is aware of the symptoms of compassion fatigue it is important to periodically assess oneself for it. If one's emotional gas tank is running low it is important to take positive action to change that. If recognized and managed early recovery can occur (Continued page 2)

Put Your Own Mask on First (cont.)

quickly. When the warning signs of compassion fatigue are ignored it can be detrimental to one's emotional and physical health. Remember, if your own emotional needs are not dealt with you can't be there emotionally for the people you work with (students, patients, clients, victims, etc.). If you aren't able to be there emotionally for the people you work with, then you probably can't be there for your spouse, significant other, children, and friends. When it comes to helping others, remember to put your own oxygen mask on first... and breathe deeply.

When compassion fatigue is not dealt with within an organization it can result in chronic absenteeism, high turnover rates, and friction between employees.

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

- Reduced ability to feel empathy and compassion for others.
- Easily frustrated or irritated.
- Prone to anger.
- Hypersensitivity or insensitivity to emotional material.
- Physical symptom, such as, nausea, headaches, recurrent colds, gastrointestinal problems.
- Often feels emotionally or physically exhausted.
- Regularly wakes up tired and struggles to get to work.
- Has a reduced sense of personal accomplishment or meaning in his/her work, feels work is pointless.
- Feels anxious or a vague sense of dread.
- Feelings of apathy.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Starts avoiding others, withdraws socially and emotionally from others, becoming isolated.
- Becoming emotionally detached and feeling numb.
- Has bottled up emotions.
- Has difficulty separating work from personal life.
- Poor self care.
- Nightmares, sleeplessness.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Compulsive behaviors (e.g. gambling).
- Negative or cynical attitude about the world.
- Decrease in job productivity.
- Increased absenteeism.
- Problems in personal relationships.
- Feelings of incompetency and self doubt.
- Feelings of powerlessness.
- Feeling overwhelmed.
- Feeling that the resources and supports available for doing one's care giving work are chronically outweighed by the demands.

Strategies for Preventing and Healing from Compassion Fatigue

- Discover what helps you recharge emotionally (and what doesn't).
- Make emotional recharging a part of your routine.
- Do something fun.
- Learn to use relaxation techniques.
- Take vacation time.
- Spend quality time with those you love.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get adequate rest.
- Take steps to simplify your life.
- Don't try to be all things to all people.
- Ask for help.
- Engage in recreational activities and hobbies you enjoy.
- Set boundaries between your personal and professional life, learn to unplug from work,
- Accept that successful outcomes are not always achievable.
- Maintain a diverse network of social supports.
- Talk to someone else who understands compassion fatigue and is supportive.
- Take time to heal from the effects of care giving work when needed.
- Engage in prayer, meditation, being one with nature or whatever gives you a sense of peace.
- Seek out professional assistance, if needed, to help you implement changes in your life.