



The National **Long-Term Care**  
**Ombudsman** Resource Center



**OFFICE HOUR**

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LAST WEDNESDAY OF  
EVERY MONTH



*Setting Boundaries and Preventing Burnout*

April 29, 2026

# Welcome

- ▶ This call is being **recorded**.
- ▶ Use the **chat feature or raise your hand** for questions for the speakers.
- ▶ **Links** to slides and resources will be provided in the chat.

# Agenda

- ▶ Compassion, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout Basics
- ▶ Setting Boundaries – Individual Interactions and Daily Work
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Questions and Discussion

# Compassion and Compassion Fatigue

## ▶ Compassion is...

- ▶ The feeling of sorrow or concern for another coupled by the desire to alleviate the suffering.

## ▶ Compassion fatigue...

- ▶ Is emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.
- ▶ Can occur due to one stressful experience or can be due to a “cumulative” level of trauma.

## ▶ Signs of Compassion Fatigue

- ▶ Can emerge suddenly
- ▶ Existential/spiritual effects: overarching meaninglessness, worthlessness, hopelessness
- ▶ A sense of isolation from supporters, hypervigilance or fear
- ▶ Symptoms often disconnected from real cause

# Burnout

- ▶ Is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that occurs when we feel overwhelmed by too many demands, too few resources, and too little recovery time.
- ▶ Burnout occurs over time, rather than in response to one event.
- ▶ **Signs of Burnout**
  - ▶ Gradual physical, mental, emotional erosion due to long-term involvement in emotionally demanding or unfulfilling situations:
    - ▶ Exhaustion: physically, mentally drained
    - ▶ Depersonalization: feeling hardened or numb
    - ▶ Achievement Void: reduced accomplishment, satisfaction.



*What are some of your warning signs of burnout or compassion fatigue?*

# ▶ Resilience = Protection

## ▶ Defined as:

- ▶ The ability of something to return to original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc.
- ▶ The ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

# ▶ Resilience Skills

## ▶ Self-Awareness

- ▶ Physical, emotional
- ▶ Technical
- ▶ Existential

## ▶ Self-Regulation

- ▶ Boundaries
- ▶ Values Clarification
- ▶ Arousal Management

## ▶ Self Care



# Setting Boundaries

*Individual Interactions and General Work Performance*

# Keep in Mind...

- ▶ **You often speak with people in their lowest point:**

- ▶ New to long-term care
- ▶ Anxious/scared
- ▶ In pain
- ▶ Sick
- ▶ Angry
- ▶ Feel Wronged
- ▶ Feel guilty
- ▶ Frustrated with the system

- ▶ **Remember to:**

- ▶ Use reflective listening.
- ▶ Discuss the role of the LTCOP.
- ▶ Determine their motivation by asking them what outcome they are seeking.
- ▶ Be clear about what you can and cannot do.
- ▶ Inform them that your next step will be speaking with the resident.

# Frequent Callers

## What happens?

- ▶ Share their life story (more than once).
- ▶ Often share things not related to the issue.
- ▶ Hard for you to end the conversation.
- ▶ Take a lot of your time during each conversation.

## Why?

- ▶ They need someone to talk to.
- ▶ May be lonely.
- ▶ May feel that no one believes them.
- ▶ Or they try to wear you down until you agree.

# Strategies

- ▶ Try to understand the reason.
- ▶ Let them know you have other obligations.
- ▶ Try to set a limit.
- ▶ Try to focus the conversation.
- ▶ Steer back to the purpose.

# Interrupt to focus

- ▶ I really need to ask . . .
- ▶ Let me interrupt you for just a moment . . .
- ▶ I think we need to focus on . . .
- ▶ Can we get back to . . .
- ▶ It would really help me to know more about . . .

# Take Some Control

- ▶ Provide minimal responses.
  - ▶ Feedback encourages talking
- ▶ Offer a set amount of time up front.
- ▶ Try to connect them with others who can listen.
- ▶ Establish ground rules.
  - ▶ “There are three issues here, let’s start with...”
- ▶ Concentrate on one issue at a time.
- ▶ Redirect the conversation back to that issue.

# Ending the Conversation

- ▶ I know you are busy, so I'll let you go now.
- ▶ I need to get started on this right away, so I am going to run.
- ▶ May I call you tomorrow after I have done some research?
- ▶ I have another call holding.
- ▶ I hate to run, but my 3:30 appointment is waiting.

# ▶ Even with Frequent Contact...

- ▶ Listen with an open mind.
- ▶ Ask probing questions.
- ▶ Identify individual's goal and maintain focus.
- ▶ Is there a new issue that you can address.
- ▶ Is there a change in circumstances.
- ▶ Is the underlying problem still unresolved.
- ▶ Refer to other resources, as needed.

# ► Angry or Aggressive Behavior

- Impatient
- Rushed
- Cold
- Loud
- Show authority
- Name droppers
- Demand action
- Mad
- Loud
- Screaming
- Cursing
- Insulting
- Distrustful
- Argumentative

# Strategies

- ▶ Be assertive, not aggressive.
- ▶ If your voice is soft, raise it slightly.
- ▶ Be direct and to the point.
- ▶ Don't take it personally.
- ▶ Let them vent.
- ▶ Empathize without committing to agreement.
- ▶ If they get louder, you get softer.
- ▶ Avoid becoming defensive.
- ▶ Use "I" phrasing instead of "you" phrasing.
- ▶ Take responsibility for what you can do.
- ▶ Encourage them to use that energy in other ways (e.g., contact their legislator, join a citizen advocacy group, join Consumer Voice).

# Take A Break

- ▶ Let them know you need to step away briefly.
- ▶ Gather your thoughts.
- ▶ Give them a chance to cool off.
- ▶ Come back with a strategy.

# Ask for Help

- ▶ I checked with \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ Ask a colleague.
  - ▶ Different eyes and ears
  - ▶ Cooled off
- ▶ Refer to your supervisor or State Office.
  - ▶ Real authority

“

**How do you set boundaries in your daily work and/or for program management?**

# How to Set Boundaries When it is ALL Important?

- ▶ Setting boundaries helps set expectations.
- ▶ The process of setting limits and honoring your boundaries is the healing behavior you can give to yourself.
- ▶ Having clear boundaries keep our relationships with internal and external partners healthy.
- ▶ Knowing when to refer someone to another entity is important.

# Just Say No

- ▶ Saying NO
  - ▶ Supports your priorities.
  - ▶ Gives you more time, energy, and resources to become better at your priorities.
  - ▶ Enables others to step up, so you are supporting their professional growth.
  - ▶ Protecting you so you can perform at your best with the limited time and resources available.

# Hacks for Establishing (and Maintaining) Boundaries

- ▶ Identify your MUST do, GOOD to do, NICE to do tasks on a regular basis.
- ▶ YOU are NOT a first responder, so stop acting like one.
  - ▶ Follow your state policies for response time.
- ▶ Don't share your personal information.
- ▶ Don't put your work email on your personal phone.
- ▶ Block out time on your calendar for specific activities (e.g., documentation, responding to emails, making calls, utilize "Focus Time").
- ▶ Turn off notifications on your computer/phone (e.g., emails).
- ▶ **What are YOUR hacks?**

# Hacks for Resilience

- ▶ Identify your external stressors and limit your intake (e.g., breaking news alerts).
- ▶ Set up rewards for accomplishing a task (e.g., chocolate, quick cat video, dance, walk).
- ▶ Set a timer to focus, then take a break and move.
- ▶ Celebrate ALL wins (and you define the “win”).
- ▶ Create a folder for the good moments.
- ▶ Do something new for fun.
- ▶ Set goals for enjoyment (e.g., annual reading goal, learning a new hobby).
- ▶ Take time off monthly (e.g., full day, half day).
- ▶ Talk to someone.
- ▶ **What are YOUR hacks?**



Questions?

# ► And Credit Goes To...

- *Helping Difficult Clients* - David Godfrey, ABA, and Sherry Culp, Kentucky LTCOP (Consumer Voice Conference, 2010)
- *Compassion Fatigue in the Time of COVID-19: Helping Ourselves to Help Others* Dr. Sheri Gibson (NORC webinar, 2020)
- *Maintaining and Setting Boundaries* – Kelly Richards, IL State Ombudsman, 2023 SLTCO Conference

# NORC Resource

## Taking Care of You

- ▶ Stress and Self-Care
- ▶ Tips for Self-Care
- ▶ Create a Self-Care Plan
- ▶ Program Management Considerations
- ▶ Resources



## Taking Care of You

By the very nature of Ombudsman program work, you may be subjected to compassion fatigue, burnout, or individual trauma. We have provided brief information about these and encourage you to use resources provided by Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) or other reputable health organizations. Do not hesitate to seek assistance from family, friends, faith communities, co-workers, employers, and mental health providers if you are struggling.

**Compassion Fatigue** is emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events. Compassion Fatigue can occur due to one stressful experience or can be due to a "cumulative" level of trauma.

**Burnout** is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that occurs when we feel overwhelmed by too many demands, too few resources, and too little recovery time. Burnout occurs over time, rather than in response to one event. Signs of burnout may be physical or emotional exhaustion, fatigue, insomnia, forgetfulness, impaired concentration, increased illness, loss of appetite, anxiety, depression, or anger.

**"Individual trauma"** results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's function and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." SAMHSA HRSA Center for Integrated Health Services.

**Trauma-informed care** is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma (review this [fact sheet](#) for additional information). Recognition of the role of trauma in our lives is very important.

### Stress and Self-Care

The following information describes emotions you may experience, provides reminders for self-care, and guidance for seeking assistance. We encourage self-awareness and self-screening for indicators.



#### Typical Reactions to Stress May Include

- Anxiety, worry, or fear
- Concern about being able to care for others
- Uncertainty or frustration
- Loneliness
- Anger
- Boredom and frustration
- Uncertainty or ambivalence
- Sadness
- Feelings of grief and loss
- Desire to use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Symptoms of depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

# Additional Resources

- ▶ **Professional Quality of Life ([ProQOL](#)) – FREE Measure, Manual, Training Slides, Self-Care Tools, and printable pocket card**
- ▶ [Drowning in Empathy: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma](#) (TEDxSanAntonio)
- ▶ [University of Southern California \(USC\) Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work](#)
- ▶ [Self-Care Wheel](#)
- ▶ [Self-Care Assessment](#)
- ▶ [Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue \(CSF\) Test](#)
- ▶ [Compassion Fatigue Self-Test](#)



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# Connect with us!

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