2015 Overcoming Compassion Fatigue with Self Compassion & Mindfulness: A Skill-Building Session

Fransing Daisy, Behavioral Health Educator/NW AETC

NO CONFLICTS OR RELATIONSHIPS TO DISCLOSE
Learning Objectives

1. Describe provider compassion fatigue
2. Identify skills applicable to enhancing provider self care and mindful care of patients
What is Compassion?

- Definition:

- “...a sensitivity to the suffering of self and others, with a deep commitment to try to relieve it”

- The Dalai Lama (1995)
• For someone to develop genuine compassion towards others, first she or he must have a basis upon which to cultivate compassion, and that basis is the ability to connect to one’s feelings and to care for one’s own welfare...Caring for others requires caring for oneself.

• (Dalai Lama, 2003, p. 125)
• What was the motivating factor for you to enter the nursing profession?
Compassion and Nursing Profession

• To date few studies have focused on nurses self compassion or the relationship between nurse self care and care for patients (Maben, et al, 2012)

• There has been some research on the impact of occupational stress, burnout and compassion fatigue on nurses
What is compassion fatigue?

• Can be burnout and include vicarious trauma

• Can escalate gradually & can be a product of cumulative stress

Szabo, B. (2006)
Characteristics of clinicians experiencing compassion fatigue

- Physical—chronic sense of exhaustion & fatigue, insomnia, headaches, significant change of appetite, physical agitation or retardation, frequent colds, sore throats
- Psychological—feel irritable, overwhelmed by volume & content of work
- Relationship with clients/patients—less empathic for others, feel numb for patients’ & families pain, more cynical about patient’s ability to change & to take responsibility for their problems
- Spiritual—less connected to personal spirituality
Characteristics that Increase Possibility of Compassion Fatigue

- Perfectionism
- Control issues
- Intense sense of responsibility
- Difficulty asking for help
- Unrealistic guilt
- Suppression or Magnification of Feelings
- Difficulty taking vacations without being “connected”
Self Compassion

- Compassion is the ability for providers to derive a sense of meaning & purpose from their work
- Compassion can help a provider alleviate fear & discomfort associated with the human condition—illness, pain, suffering
- It can be an important buffer in managing & transcending alterations in belief systems, & physiological or emotional reactions seen in compassion fatigue

Tyson, J. (2007)
Components of self compassion

- Three components:

- Kindness—
  - Treating self with understanding rather than with harsh self-judgment
  - Actively being supportive & caring towards ourselves

- Common Humanity—
  - Viewing our own experience as part of larger human experience
  - Remembering that as humans, we are not perfect, life is not perfect

- Being aware with intention—
  - Avoiding extremes of disconnection from or over-identification with painful feelings and thoughts
  - Being aware and experiencing life as it is right now, not just how we think it “should” be

Neff, Kristin
What is Mindfulness?

• “Keeping one’s consciousness alive to present reality......paying attention in a particular way on purpose in the present moment and non-judgmentally”

  • (Kabat-Zinn 2013)
Mindfulness

- Attempting to create:
  - Inner Calmness
  - Quieting of the mind---letting distraction recede
  - Letting go of tension and stress
• “The mindfulness teacher says that our minds are like puppies, when they stray we need to pull them back gently. But sometimes the puppy gets free from it's leash and you have to chase it, which is hard because it's really fast.”

• “During mindfulness today I felt like I was all stone. I was so still and heard so many noises I couldn't count them all. I was so aware of my surroundings, it's really hard to explain, it was really quite peaceful.
Heart of Mindfulness

• Breathing—foundation for the practice of mindfulness---awareness of the breath is the way of developing ability to relax into a deeper path of conscious awareness

• Sitting or walking mindfulness allows development of intentional awareness of the present moment with curiosity
Practice

- Comfortable sitting position
- Back straight and relaxed
- Both feet resting on the floor
- Hands in lap
- Relax eyes (closed or gaze at floor)
- Slow deeper breath
- Thoughts? Let them drift by, notice, and move back to breath
A Few Moments of Mindfulness
What might work for you?

- Recognize the symptoms of compassion fatigue
- Learn to be ok with asking for help
- Be aware of your current limitations with work, family, hobbies
- Take “3 minute time-out” during the day
- Consider short vacations (long weekends) and disconnect at least 2 times a year
- Work at changing small things that gnaw at you
- Distinguish between stressful aspects of your work or home life that you can change v/s those activities that are set in cement
References

• Figley, C. (2004). Compassion fatigue educator course workbook: An all-day training course. Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida & the Green Cross Foundation.
Mindfully Walking & Carrying
Questions?