

Vicki was a social worker working within a private agency in upstate NY. She truly enjoyed helping her clients see through their struggles and prided herself on her ability to connect deeply. She had been working with trauma survivors for sometime when she began to notice changes in herself. She was spending hours on Facebook in the evenings and started to feel resentful of the seemingly carefree lives of others she saw online. At work she had started to work through her lunch hour and felt angry and irritated at her coworkers who left the office for lunch. During sessions with clients, she found herself directing the conversation away from their traumatic stories for fear she couldn't handle another. Sometimes she interrupted them just to avoid hearing the pain they were about to share. She wondered if she was still "cut out" for this work.

The agency where Vicki worked was a tight knit group of social workers and they met for staff meetings every Wednesday afternoon to debrief, seek support and sometimes counsel each other. They had also begun introducing a different self-care practice every week to ensure everyone was taking care of themselves. But Vicki had stopped participating in the meetings claiming she couldn't afford to take time away from her clients.

Vicki was suffering from compassion fatigue and it had begun to affect her work, her relationship with her colleagues as well as her workplace. Luckily one of her colleagues recognized the signs of compassion fatigue and approached Vicki. She was able to institute a self-care plan and found her way back to the love of being a social worker. Because of her experience she now leads the initiative within her agency to ensure all her colleagues are self-monitoring for compassion fatigue and practicing diligent self-care to ensure their ability to continue to help others.

How compassion fatigue impacts an organization:

- substandard level of care
- absenteeism
- high turnover
- lack of teamwork
- team conflict
- low morale
- increased cynicism, blaming and complaining
- erosion of customer loyalty and satisfaction
- reputation at risk
- poor quality control
- deterioration of the organization's mission