Developing a Healing-Centered Self-Care Practice

Competency

Educators will develop a healing-centered self-care practice as a preventative measure for compassion fatigue and or burn out.

Key Method

Educators create and apply healing-centered, self-care practices to address the effects of secondary traumatic stress.

Method Components

What is Trauma?

According to the Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, trauma "results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening." These events, and a person's response to them, can lead to lasting adverse effects on how they function—impacting their mental, physical, social, emotional, and or spiritual well-being. Traumatic experiences can include abuse, neglect, sudden separation from a loved one, poverty, racism, discrimination, violence, war, natural disasters, and more. Traumatic experiences can also include other forms of social oppression, such as sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, etc.

Historical trauma is also a part of the broader definition of trauma. It is loosely defined by the cumulative harm to a group caused by a historical event (such as genocide, violent colonization, slavery) and whose effects impact multiple generations.

Children who experience trauma can enter your class believing that the world and even school is a scary place and that trusting others is risky. Some children may be most impacted by racism and other forms of oppression through their experiences in schools that have policies and practices that overwhelmingly harm students of color, LGBTQ+ and other historically marginalized groups.

The impact of traumatic experiences is so significant that they can hinder the brain's normal development. This causes behavioral, emotional, academic, and other developmental changes that a person who has not experienced a traumatic event is far less likely to have. Seemingly simple things—a facial expression, one's proximity, or tone of voice—may trigger memories of a painful event. This can lead to various reactions, including aggression, isolation, perfectionism and more.

While research shows that trauma affects one in four children, evidence suggests that with supportive educators and a healing-centered school community, students can learn, achieve and begin to heal.

Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue

Secondary traumatic stress:
According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2021) secondary trauma is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another person.

Compassion fatigue:
According to the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project (https://compassionfatigue.org/index.html (20201), "Compassion fatigue is a broadly defined concept that can include emotional, physical and spiritual distress in those providing care to another." This can occur as a result of a one-time exposure or can be due to a "cumulative" level of trauma.

Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Over time, supporting students who are experiencing trauma can take a mental and physical toll on educators. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms below, it is time to take a step back, develop healthy self-care strategies, and reach out to others (your employer, family, friends and/or a professional) for support.

- Feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and drained
- Feeling numb or detached
- Increased irritability and impatience
- Angry outbursts that are uncharacteristic of your behavior
- Cynicism and hopelessness
- Heightened anxiety
- Difficulty planning activities and lessons for your learning environment
- Difficulty sleeping

- Headaches or gastrointestinal issues
- Intense feelings, intrusive thoughts, or dreams that don't lessen over time, about students' trauma

Secondary Traumatic Stress: Prevention & Intervention

Often, educators may not know they are experiencing secondary traumatic stress or the associated risk factors. Awareness of the signs and signals of secondary traumatic stress can be the first step toward getting needed support. Risk factors such as having your own (unresolved) traumatic experience; being isolated; or having insufficient training and support to meet the demands of the job can contribute to secondary traumatic stress. Resources such as the *Professional Quality of Life Survey* (found in the resources section) can give educators insight into whether or not they are experiencing secondary traumatic stress.

Although secondary traumatic stress is a common experience among many educators, they don't often seek or receive enough support from school and district leaders.

In many communities, there is a stigma attached to mental and emotional health concerns. As educators, we are natural "helpers" and want to care for others. Often this comes at the expense of our own mental health. Educators may be embarrassed to ask for extra support when they need it, or feel like they are supposed to handle various situations on their own.

When helping students who experience significant challenges, it is important to remember the airplane analogy: *In case of an emergency, remember to put your oxygen mask on first before helping others put on theirs*. These are some suggestions you can use to practice self-care.

Self-Care Strategies

To show up and be fully present for your students, you need to take excellent care of yourself. Feeling healthy, strong and well-rested can increase your resilience and equip you to handle the daily stress of working in schools. Consider these self-care strategies:

- Find someone to talk to, like a therapist, a spouse, or a trusted friend
- Increase your movement and/or make time for daily exercise. Be sure to check with a doctor before starting any new exercise regimen.
- Eat properly and focus on adding healthy foods to your diet rather than using a deprivation model of dieting.
- Develop and practice good sleep habits. Start by creating a nighttime routine and stick to a sleep schedule that allows you to increase the quantity and quality of your rest. Don't be afraid to seek out professional support if you are suffering from insomnia or other sleeping problems.

- Take a “mental health day” every once in a while. Use this time off and away from school to take care of yourself. Take yourself on a date or just rest, even though you may be tempted to use your mental health day to catch up on chores at home or work responsibilities.
- Develop interests outside of education. Hobbies can add a great deal of quality to your life. They can give you a creative outlet, introduce you to new people, and help you develop a healthy work-life balance.
- Identify what’s important to you and make time for it. Put this time on your calendar. Protect this time and ask your friends and family to support you with this.
- Use self-affirming statements and daily mantras to bolster your self- esteem and stay focused on what is important.
- Create boundaries between your work day and your personal life. Set times to begin and end your work day.
- Create rituals to begin and end your day, or to signal transitions between your work life and your personal life.
- Practice setting boundaries and saying “no”

In addition to the steps you can take for yourself, there are steps our employers/organizations can take to promote self-care of all staff. Some of these organizational strategies include:

- Providing appropriate supervision/support
- Having a structure to debrief crisis events
- Providing psychoeducation and training
- Promoting and prioritizing self-care for all staff
- Making counseling resources available
- Creating opportunities for staff team-building

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing your awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. The most common benefits of mindfulness include decreased stress, enhanced ability to deal with illnesses, increased self-compassion, and improved mental health. When you find your mind and thoughts triggering negative feelings, frustration, and anxiety, you may find it helpful to try mindfulness activities like these:

- Meditation
- Breathing exercises
- Setting a daily intention
- Check in with yourself (multiple times a day)
- Mindful eating

Reallocation or sharing of job responsibilities
If work overwhelms you, don't be afraid to think creatively about how to seek support and/or a new approach to your work. Here are a few tips:

1. Reach out to your teammates and troubleshoot ways to share and collaborate to make the work load more manageable. For example, lesson planning as a team, compartmentalizing instruction, or team teaching.
2. If your work or the environment at work makes you unhappy, search for new opportunities. Keep in mind that the new and healthier position or assignment you seek may exist within your school or district.
3. Create a one-year, three-year and five-year plan. Map your actions to attain your goals. Stay focused on those goals and avoid distractions.
4. Write a weekly reflection and discuss what went well, what you want to change, where you need help, and what you want to keep doing to ensure a healthy work-life balance.
5. Spend time to plan for the week ahead and then stick to it, allowing for some flexibility.

Fostering a Professional Network of Support
You should not feel like you need to be completely alone in your work. While the nature of teaching can be very isolating and the time you have to interact with other adults can be extremely limited, you can help prevent feeling isolated and to fulfill your cravings for adult company by fostering or connecting with an existing professional network. Some ideas to get started:

- Join a virtual community of educators
- Find an experienced mentor-teacher, instructional coach, or educator
- Attend social events with colleagues
- Foster relationships with your colleagues
- Get involved with your association or union
- Join a professional organization
- Co-plan or co-teach

Acknowledge and gain support for your own past traumas.

Adults who have unresolved traumas are at a higher risk for compassion fatigue and/or secondary traumatic stress. If this is your situation, it is important to get support and work on healing from those experiences.

Managing Your Own Trauma

As educators, we can become overwhelmed with the issues and problems that our students might bring to school. That is why it is important for you to take care of yourself and avoid compassion fatigue, burn out and or secondary trauma. You should practice self-care strategies and know when and how to seek support from family, friends, and or professionals. In some cases, it may also be helpful to assess your own history of trauma and consider how it may be triggered while trying to

take care of others. If this happens, please see the resources below for additional support. Also, remember this familiar airplane adage: *In case of an emergency, remember to put your oxygen mask on first before helping others.* These are some suggestions you can use to practice self care:

Addressing Triggers in the Moment	Long-Term Care
• Breathing exercises • Yoga • Mindfulness activities • Journaling • Taking time away • Taking media breaks	• Cultivate and maintain healthy relationships • Attend workshops on social emotional skills • Journaling • Therapy • Developing a regular mindfulness and meditation practice

Supporting Rationale and Research

Cocker, F. M., & Joss, N. (2017). Compassion Fatigue Among Healthcare, Emergency And Community Service Workers: A Systematic Review. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. https://doi.org/10.1037/e510112017-001
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4924075/

Compassion Fatigue and Teachers. Enriching Students. (2020, September 3). https://www.enrichingstudents.com/compassion-fatigue-and-teachers/.

M. Shelley Thomas, Shantel Crosby. “Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools Across Two Decades: An Interdisciplinary Review of Research - M. Shelley Thomas, Shantel Crosby, Judi Vanderhaar, 2019.” *SAGE Journals*, journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0091732X18821123.

Ziaian-Ghafari, N., & Berg, D. H. (2019). Compassion Fatigue: The Experiences of Teachers Working with Students with Exceptionalities. *Exceptionality Education International*, *29*(1). https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v29i1.7778

Resources

Addressing Trauma in Educational Settings

Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools Across Two Decades: An Interdisciplinary Review of Research - M. Shelley Thomas, Shantel Crosby, Judi Vanderhaar, 2019

Secondary Trauma

Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Taking Care of Yourself

Support for Teachers Affected by Trauma

20 Warning signs of compassion fatigue

Caregivers, what you can do when you feel too tired to care

'I Didn't Know It Had a Name': Secondary Traumatic Stress and Educators | NEA.

Prevention & Intervention

Preventing Compassion Fatigue: Caring for Yourself

50 Self-Care Ideas for Teachers

Self-Care for Teachers

Self-Care for Teachers of Traumatized Students

5 ways to overcome compassion fatigue in K-12 education, February 2, 2021

Bullet Journal

Resources to help you submit your artifacts:

Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)

Creative decks to use for a one-of-a-kind presentation

How to design a presentation that will wow your audience - 99designs

How to Create a Photo Essay: Step-by-Step Guide With Examples - 2021

Wikihow-How to make a photo essay

Photo Essays — Excelsior College OWL

Helpful Resources for Managing Triggers

Managing Your Triggers Toolkit

Steps for Managing Your Emotional Triggers

Steps to Dealing with Negative Triggers

Emotional Triggers and What to Do About Them

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and be proficient for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

(400–600 words)
Please use the suggested word count as a guide to answer the following contextual questions. This will help our assessor understand your current context for working on this micro-credential.

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

Before you begin, please take this survey: Assess your level of secondary traumatic stress (See: the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)(*do not turn in your results. You will analyze your findings in Part Two*).

1. What background information is important to know and understand the context of your learning environment or teaching assignment? Consider grade level, subject area, any relevant cultural information, and special considerations about student characteristics. Be mindful not to reveal any confidential information about a student.
2. How are your current roles and responsibilities impacting you emotionally, physically and behaviorally?

3. Are you at risk of experiencing secondary trauma or compassion fatigue? How do you currently respond to the affects of secondary trauma or compassion fatigue?
4. What healing-centered practices support your work?
5. What do you wish to gain from earning this micro-credential?

Passing: Response provides reasonable and accurate information that justifies the reason for choosing this micro-credential to address specific needs. A learning goal that describes what they hope to gain from earning this micro-credential needs to be clearly stated.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit these three artifacts as evidence of your learning.

**Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

Artifact 1: Professional Quality of Life Scale & Analysis (300–500 words)

Make sure you have completed the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) before continuing, and then, analyze your results. (Note: please replace the term "client" in this document, with "student.")

1. Analyze your results (from Part One—the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) (do not turn in the scale), revealing only as much personal information as you feel comfortable doing. Consider:
    a. What are your initial reactions to your Professional Quality of Life Scale results?
    b. What current and past situations may be the source of traumatic stress and or compassion fatigue?
    c. How might personal traumatic stress and or compassion fatigue impact your professional and personal life?
2. How do your coping strategies impact your stress levels?
3. How do your coping strategies impact your teaching and student learning?

Artifact 2: Resources
Create a list of at least nine resources to help you prevent and or cope with secondary trauma and/or compassion fatigue. This will be a highly personal list. Use the ideas in the *Method Components Section* (pages 1–4 of this course) to help you get started. You may wish to use a three-column table. Your list should include:

- Description of resources
- Active links to resources
- Explanation of how each resource will help you

See Example Below

Description	**Link**	**How it will Help**
Learn Bullet Journal (video)	*https://bulletjournal.com/ Bullet Journal Learn*	*Using a bullet journal to keep track of my goals, intentions, schedules, and responsibilities. This kind of organization will help me to lower my stress and stay focused on what is important.*
Guided Meditation (video)	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mr9BBk-IYiQ*	*This meditation video is short and I can do this at the end of the day to help me transition from work to home.*
Zentangle (website)	*https://zentangle.com/*	*Since I enjoy art, I am going to learn how to use zentangling to relax and meditate.*
Seven-day Yoga Practice (playlist)	*https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFr6eAcUWqfDJABrA9pzM4O5Rku0ssQLN*	*I want to start an exercise program to help me feel stronger and more fit. This yoga playlist is a good place to start.*

Artifact 3: Self-Care Activities

Choose 3-5 healing-centered self-care activities from the list you created in artifact two and for each activity you should include:

- Amount of time to be spent on the activity
- Full description of the activity
- Why you choose this activity
- How this activity will help you prevent and/or intervene with compassion fatigue.

You can use one of the following formats to share your information.

- 5–10 photo essay with captions
- 5–10 presentation slides with visuals and captions
- Choice Board with captions (at least 12 choices)

- "If Then" statements. Create a matrix, or flowchart as a decision-making tool.

Artifact 4: Self-Care Routine
(300–500 words)
Develop an ongoing plan of care that is based on your newly created resource. Your plan should include:

- What are you going to do?
- What do you hope to achieve by doing this?
- How will you hold yourself accountable to use your newly defined resources and tools?
- A schedule, calendar, or checklist that highlights when you will integrate your self-care practices into your daily/weekly/monthly routines.
- How will you evaluate and adjust your activities if they are not supporting you?

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	**Basic**	**Developing**
Artifact 1: Professional Quality of Life Scale & Analysis	Analysis includes all of the following elements: -Initial reactions to your Professional Quality of Life Scale results. -Current and past situations that may be the source of compassion fatigue -How traumatic stress and/or compassion fatigue may influence your professional and personal life? -Coping strategies that can affect your stress levels. -Coping strategies that can impact	Analysis includes some of the following elements: -Initial reactions to your Professional Quality of Life Scale results. -Current and past situations that may be the source of compassion fatigue -How traumatic stress and/or compassion fatigue may influence your professional and personal life? -Coping strategies that can affect your stress levels. -Coping strategies that can impact your teaching and	Analysis is missing most of the following elements: -Initial reactions to your Professional Quality of Life Scale results. -Current and past situations that may be the source of compassion fatigue -How traumatic stress and/or compassion fatigue may influence your professional and personal life? -Coping strategies that can affect your stress levels. -Coping strategies that can impact your teaching and your student's learning.

	your teaching and your student's learning.	your student's learning.	
Artifact 2: Resources	List includes at least nine resources And all of the following information for each resource: -Resources are connected to personal needs -Link to resource -Description of resource -Explanation of how the resource will help	List includes at six to eight resources And or some of the following information for each resource: -Resources are connected to personal needs -Link to resource -Description of resource -Explanation of how the resource will help	List has less than six resources And or most of the following information for each resource is missing: -Resources are connected to personal needs -Link to resource -Description of resource -Explanation of how the resource will help
Artifact 3: Self-Care Activities	Artifact includes all of the following: -Three to five healing-centered self-care activities -Amount of time to be spent on the activity -Full description of the activity -Why you choose this activity	Artifact includes some of the following: -Three to five healing-centered self-care activities -Amount of time to be spent on the activity -Full description of the activity	Artifact is missing most of the following: - Three to five healing-centered self-care activities -Amount of time to be spent on the activity -Full description of the activity

	-How this activity will help you prevent and or intervene with compassion fatigue.	-Why you choose this activity -How this activity will help you prevent and or intervene with compassion fatigue.	-Why you choose this activity -How this activity will help you prevent and or intervene with compassion fatigue.
Artifact 4: Self-Care Routine	Plan includes all of the following: -What are you going to do? -What do you hope to achieve by doing this? -How will you hold yourself accountable to use your newly defined resources and tools? -A schedule, calendar, or checklist that highlights when you will integrate your self-care practices into your daily/weekly/monthly routines. -How will you evaluate and adjust your activities if they are not supporting you?	Plan includes some of the following: -What are you going to do? -What do you hope to achieve by doing this? -How will you hold yourself accountable to use your newly defined resources and tools? -A schedule, calendar, or checklist that highlights when you will integrate your self-care practices into your daily/weekly/monthly routines. -How will you evaluate and adjust your activities if they are not supporting you?	Plan is missing most of the following: -What are you going to do? -What do you hope to achieve by doing this? -How will you hold yourself accountable to use your newly defined resources and tools? -A schedule, calendar, or checklist that highlights when you will integrate your self-care practices into your daily/weekly/monthly routines. -How will you evaluate and adjust your activities if they are not supporting you?

Part 3 Reflection

(600–800 words)
Use the word count as a guide to write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:

How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

1. How has this process affected your current habits, routines and practices that address the effects of your compassion fatigue?
2. What do you plan to change that will impact your future learning environment?
3. Based on your artifact creation and learning in this micro-credential, what are anticipated impacts on your professional- and public life-balance?

Passing: Reflection provides evidence that this activity has had a positive impact on both educator practice and student success. Specific examples are cited from personal or work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.