

PETSMART  
Charities.



# Compassion Fatigue From Awareness to Action

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**LIFELEARN**  
ANIMAL HEALTH

# Compassion Fatigue

What is it?

What it is not?

What makes us vulnerable?

What does it look like?

What are the consequences?

How do we manage it?

How do we treat it?





What is it?

Awareness

# Compassion Fatigue

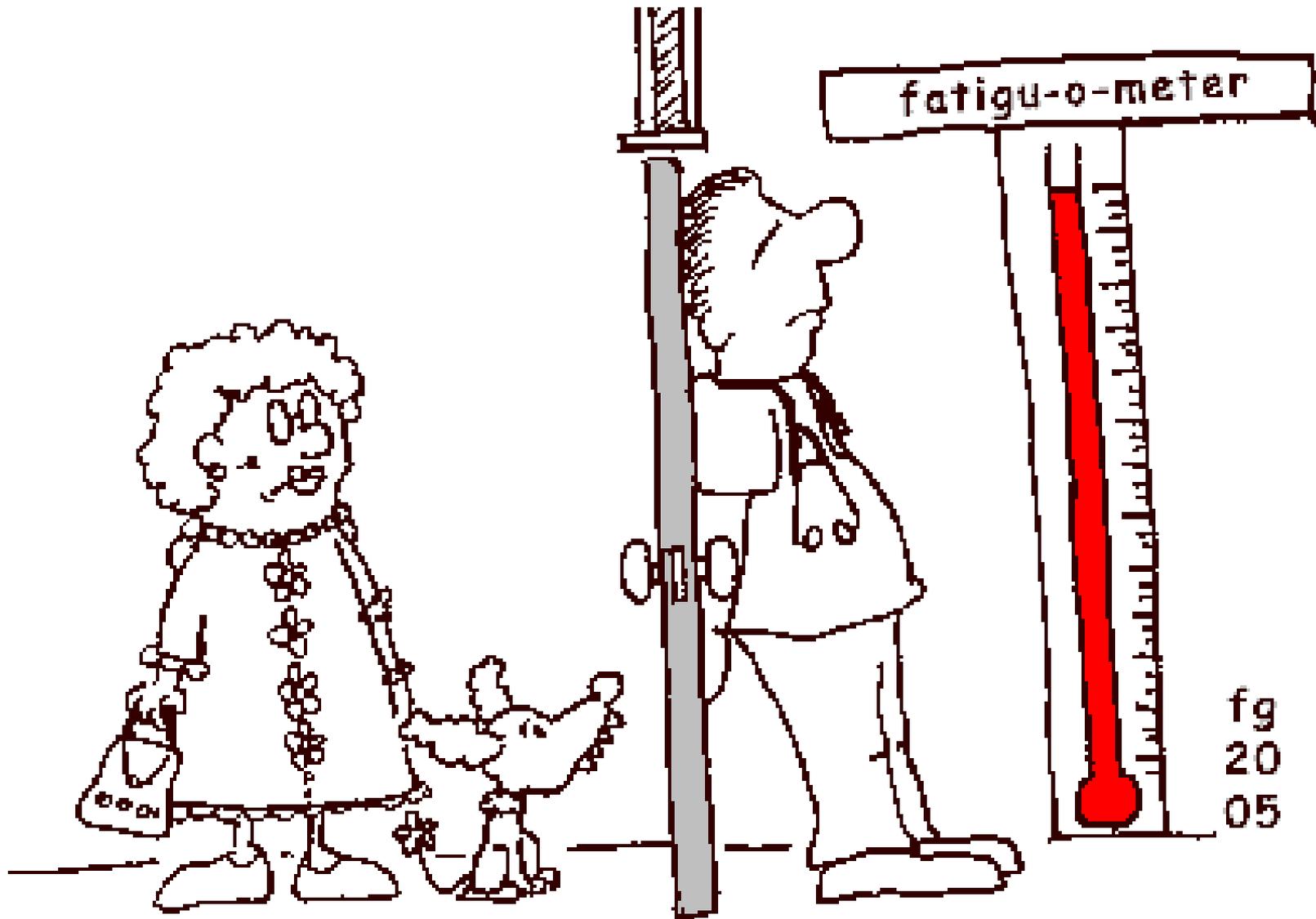
“The natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”

(Figley, *Treating Compassion Fatigue*, 2002)

# Compassion Fatigue

“The deep physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion that can result from working day to day in an intense caregiving environment.”

(Figley & Roop, *Compassion fatigue in the animal-care community*, 2006)

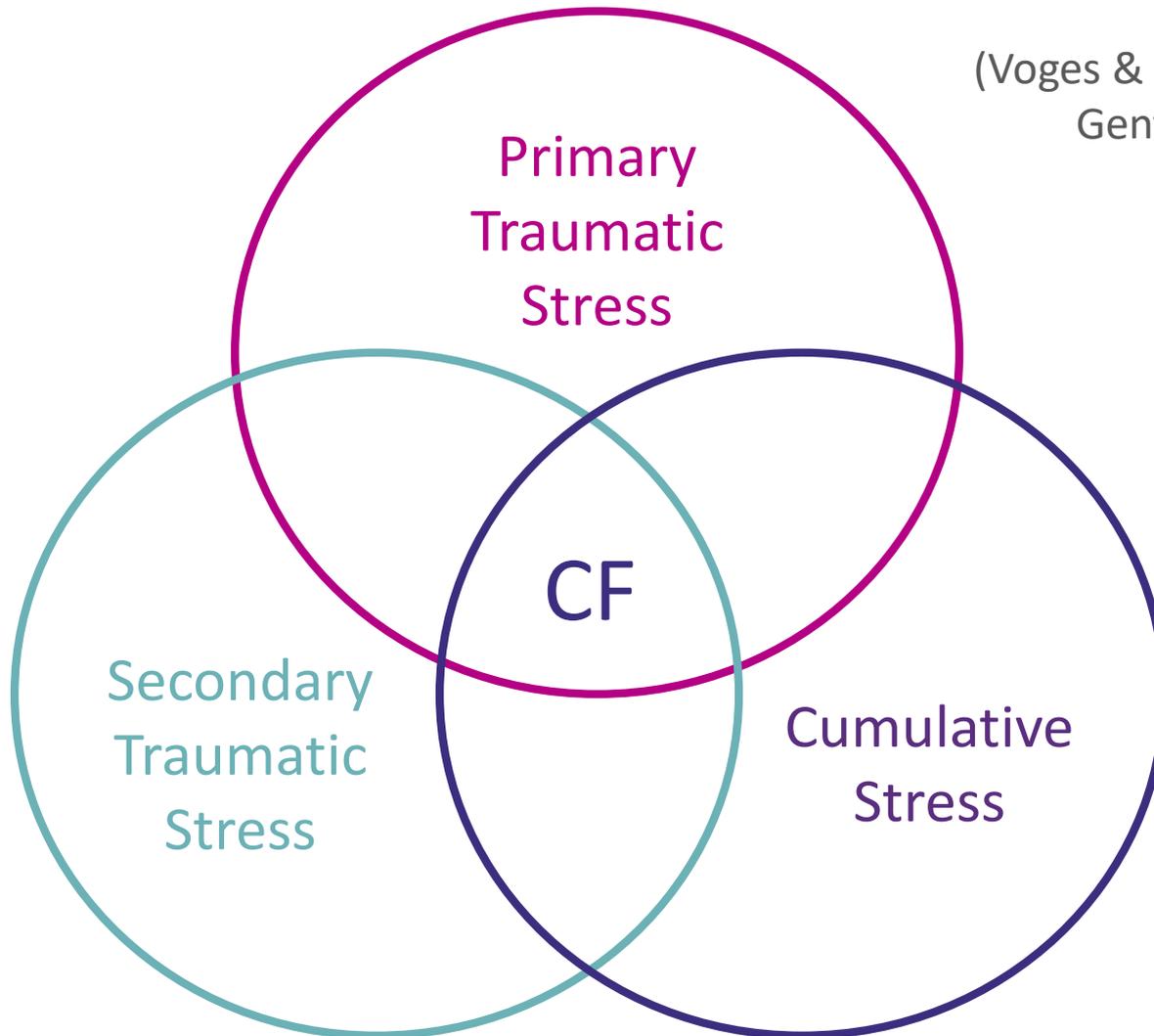


(Image courtesy of [franko@grrinninbear.com.au](mailto:franko@grrinninbear.com.au))



# Compassion Fatigue

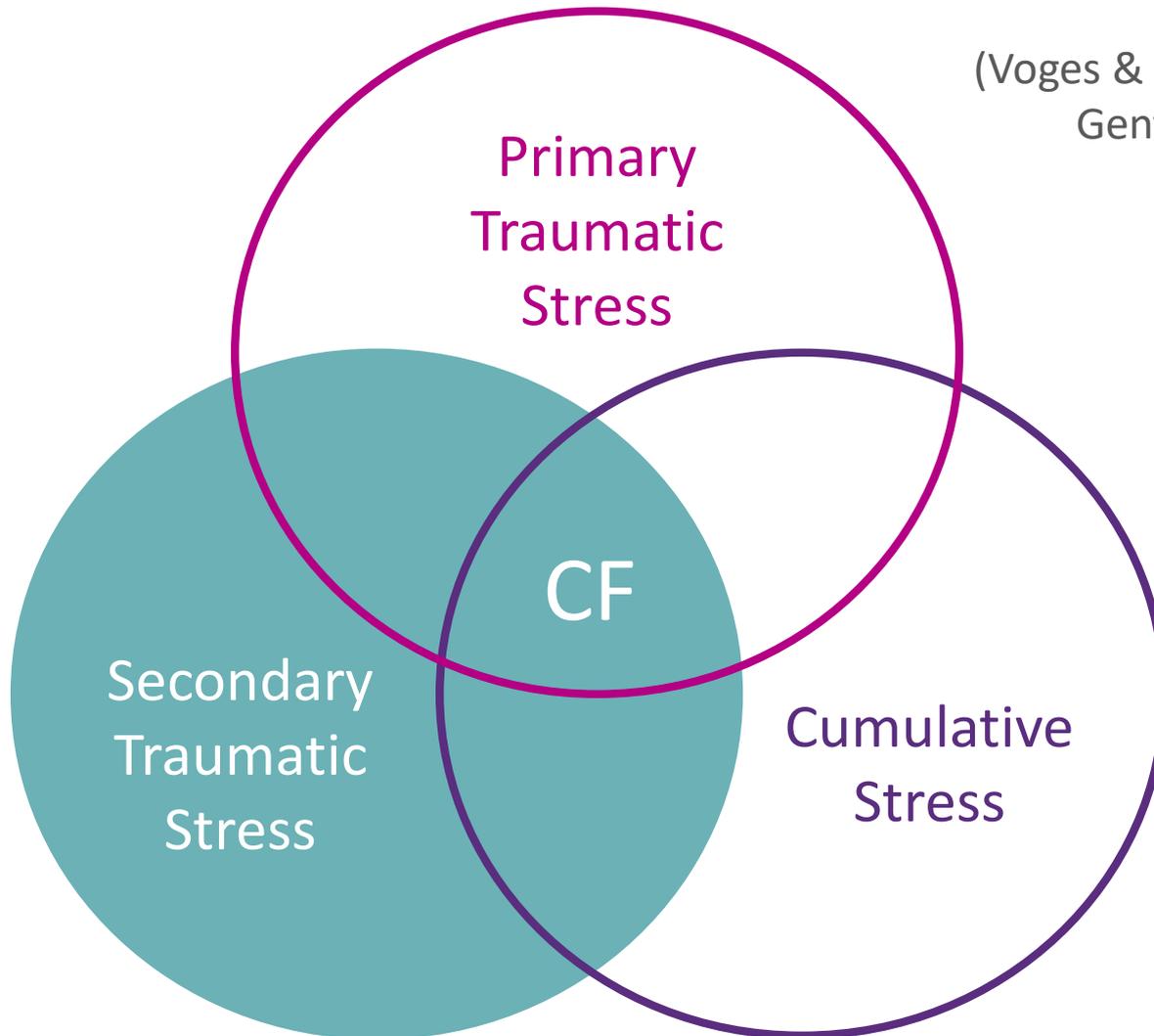
(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
Gentry, 2005)





# Compassion Fatigue

(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
Gentry, 2005)



Dealing with someone else's trauma, pain, and loss

- Animals
- Public
- Colleagues

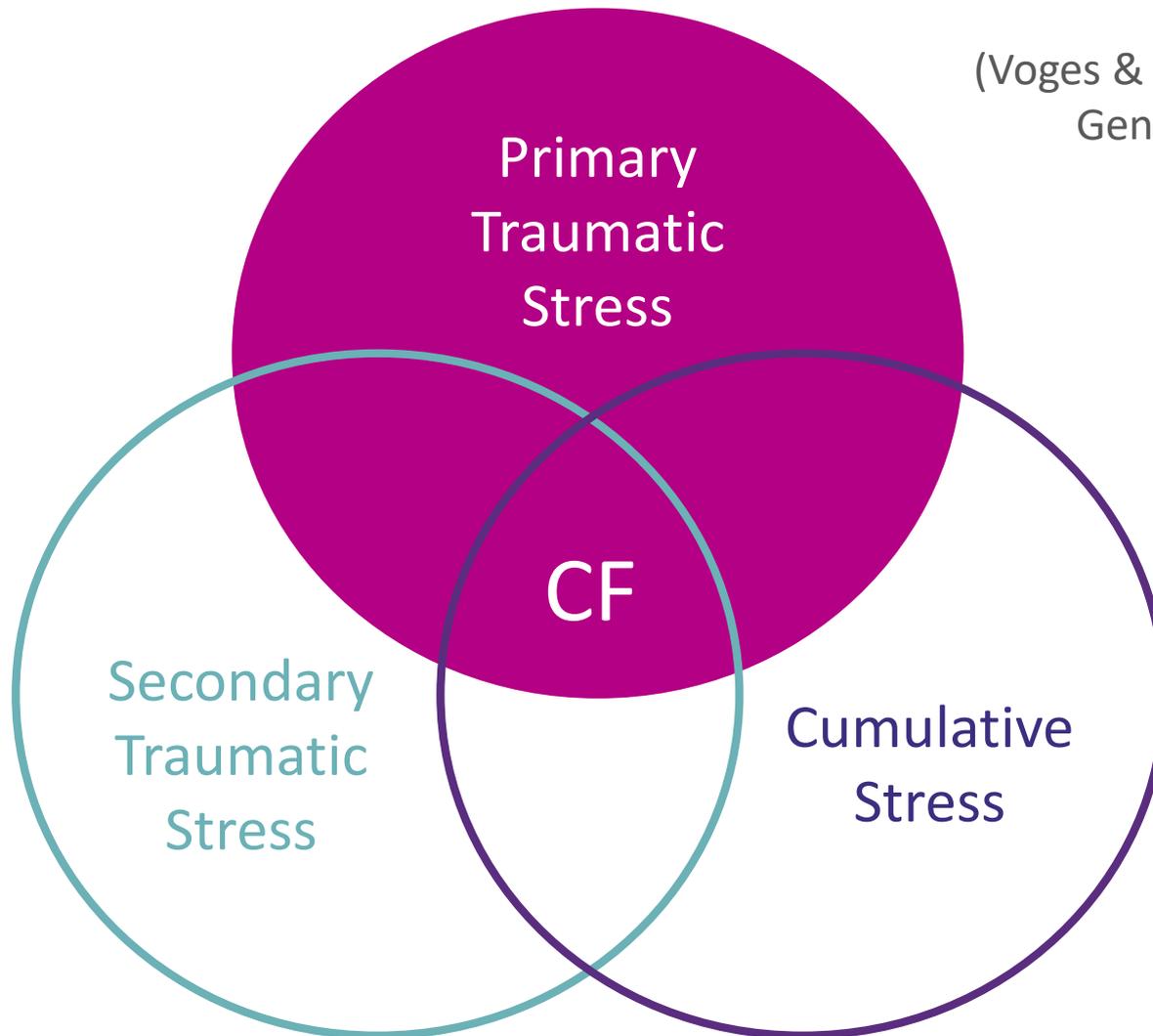


(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)



# Compassion Fatigue

(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
Gentry, 2005)



## Dealing with your own trauma, pain, and loss

- Death in the family (including the family pet)
- Separation/divorce
- Car accident
- Alcoholism/addictions
- Major disease diagnosis
- Mental illness
- Family violence

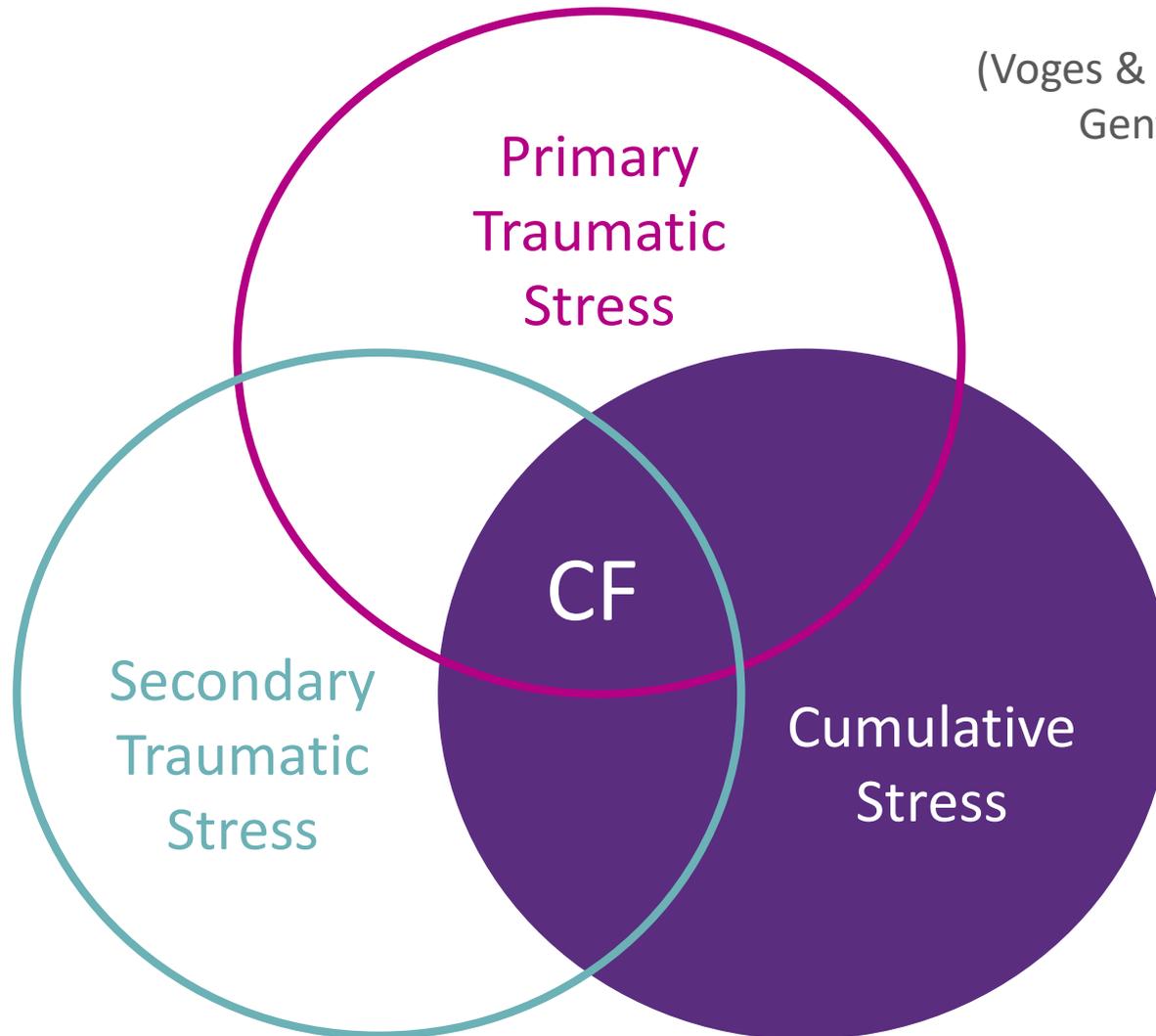
(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)





# Compassion Fatigue

(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
Gentry, 2005)



# Cumulative Stress

## Professional Stress

- Intense workplace demands and stress
- Unmet expectations
- Inability to achieve work-related goals
- Powerlessness
- Long hours
- Staff discord
- Boredom with routines

## Personal Stress

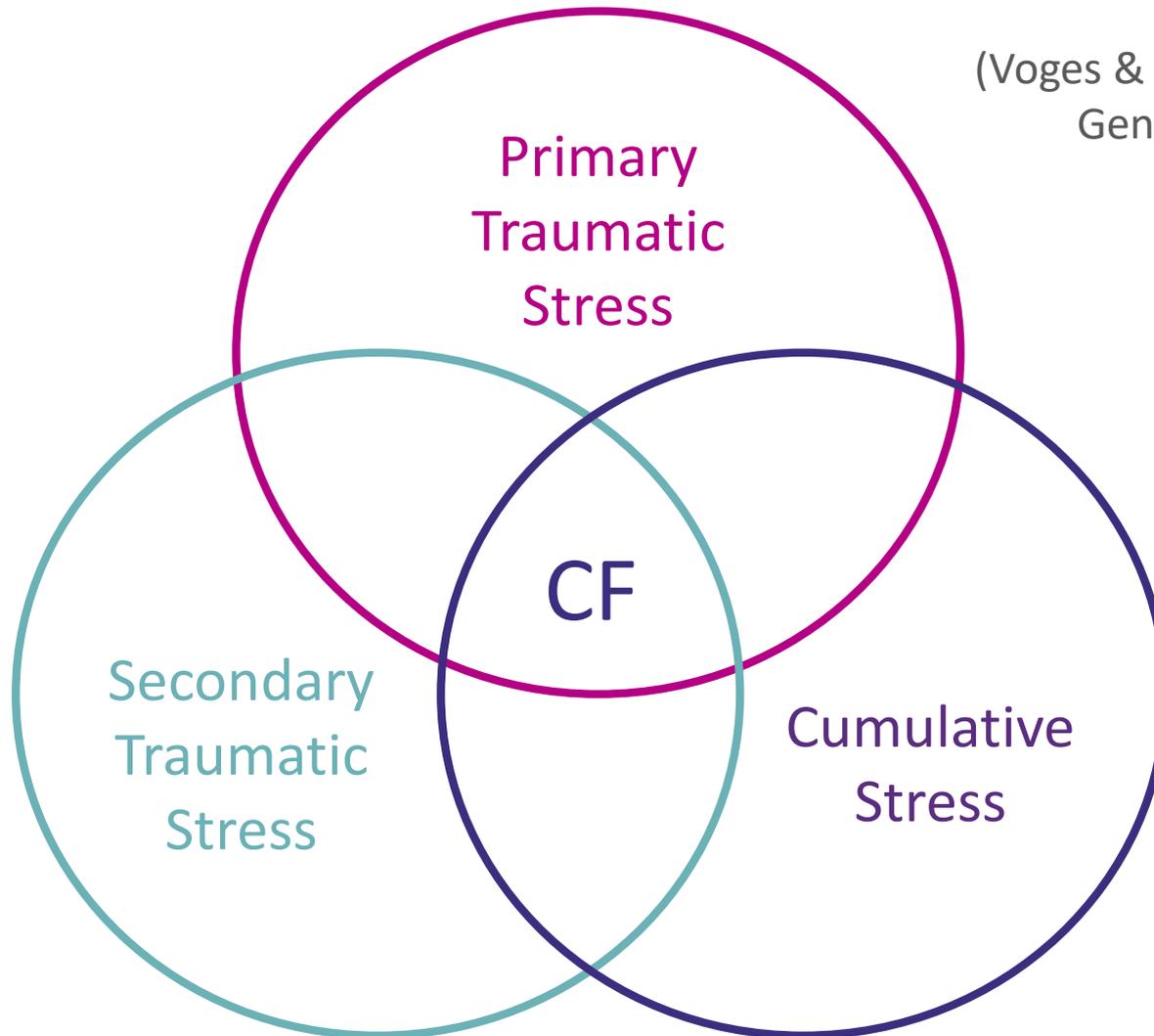
- Intense family demands and stress
- Family conflict
- Personal health problems
- Financial concerns
- Housing difficulties
- Social isolation

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)



# Compassion Fatigue

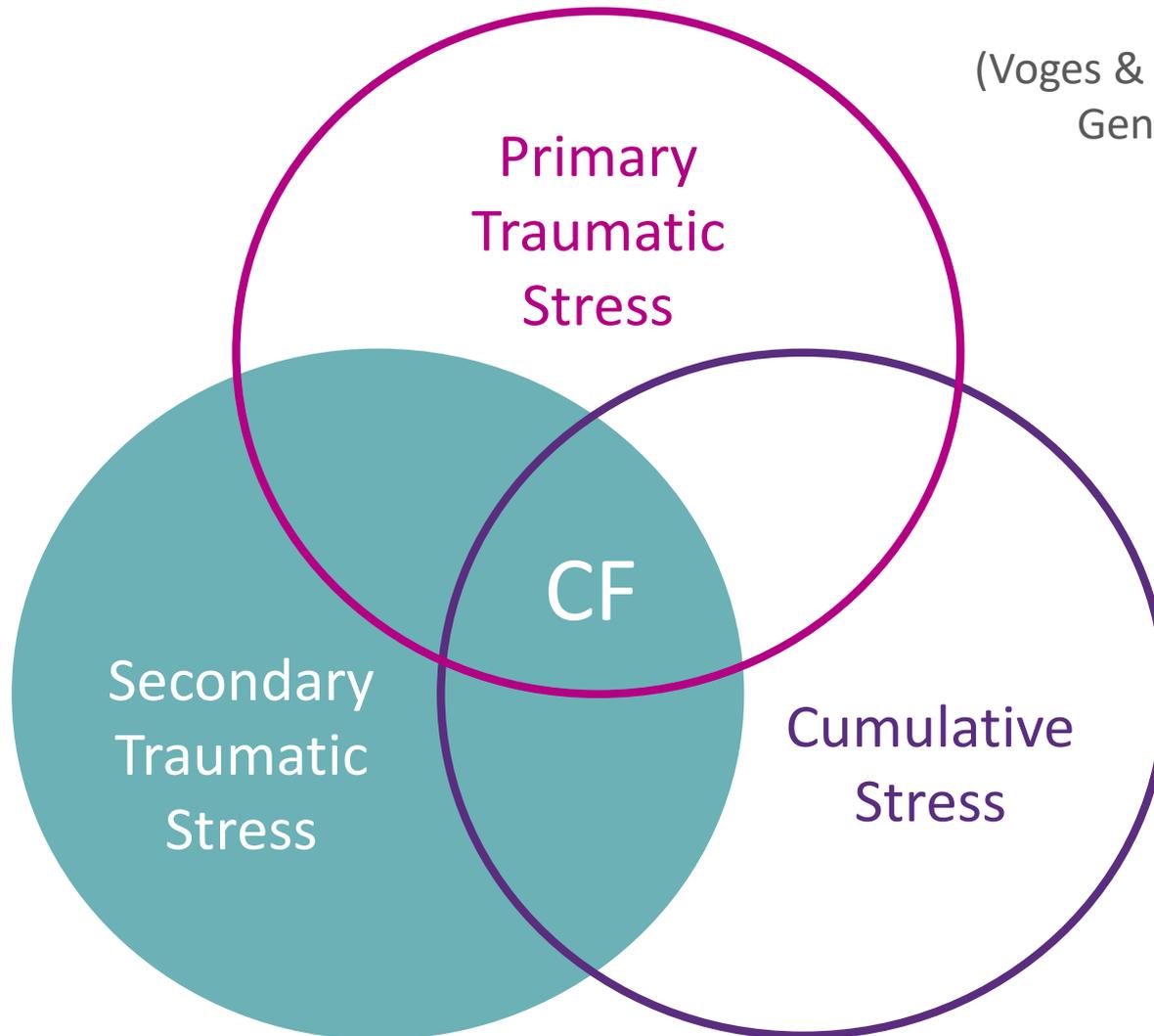
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# Compassion Fatigue

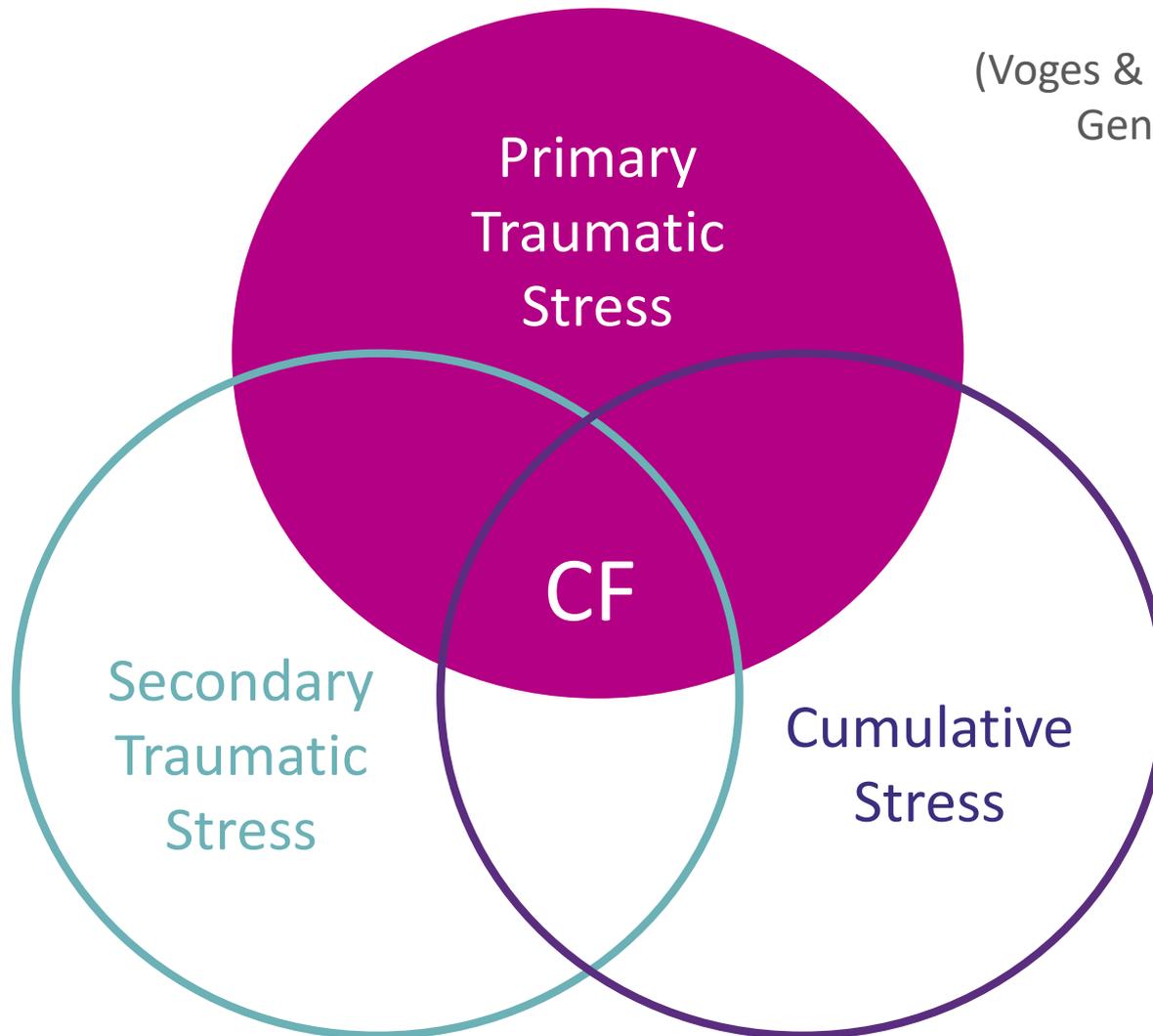
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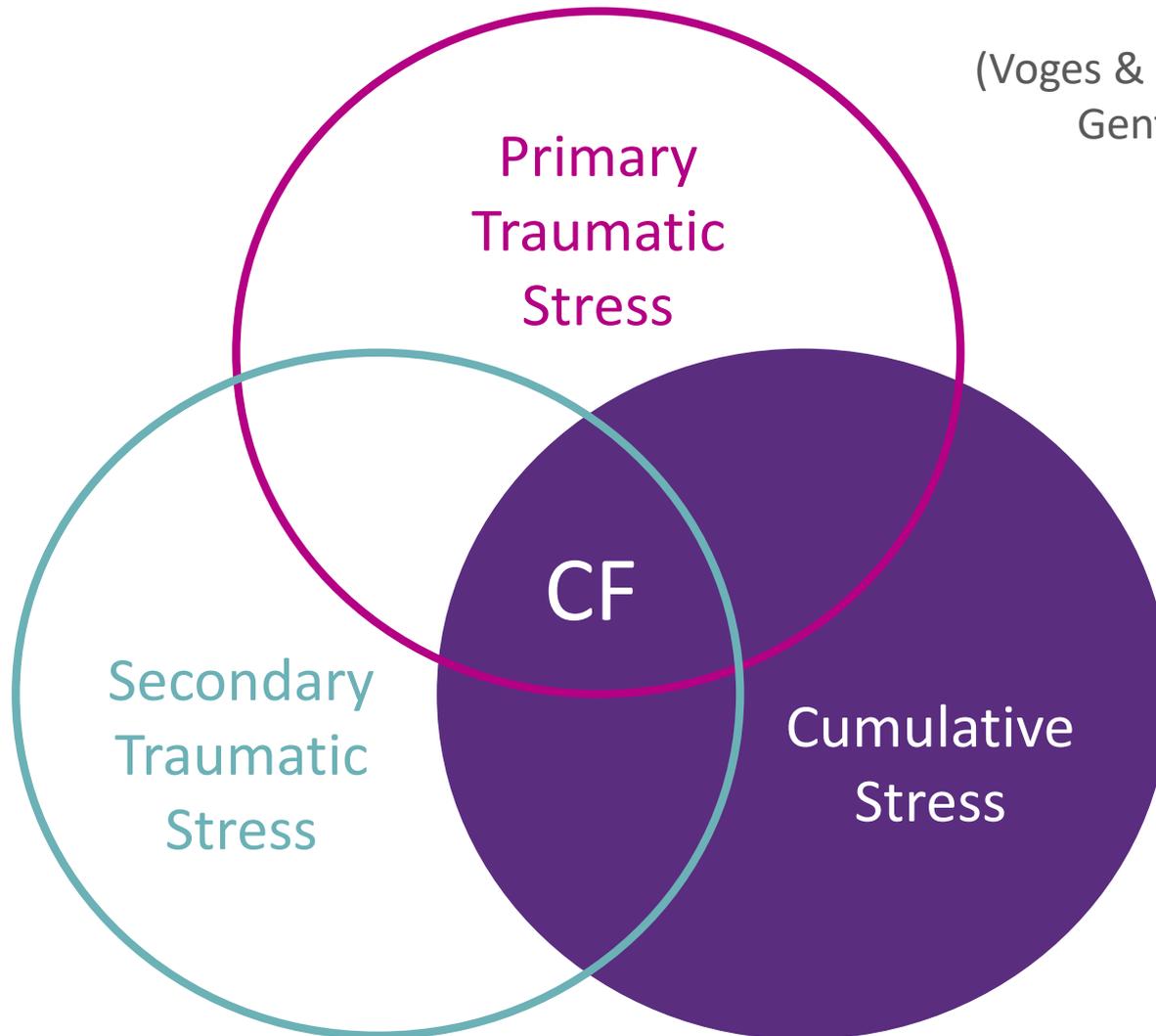
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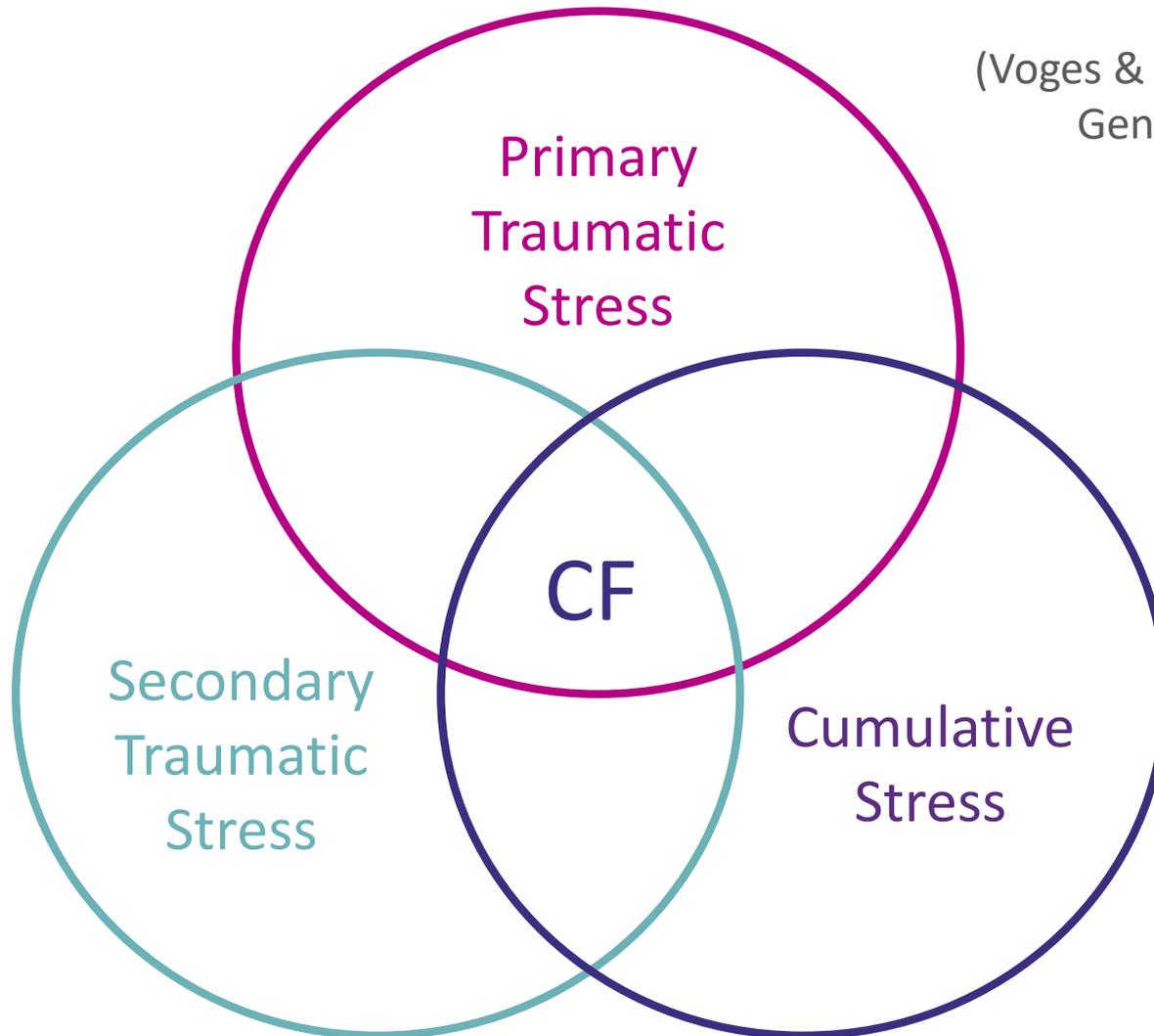
(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
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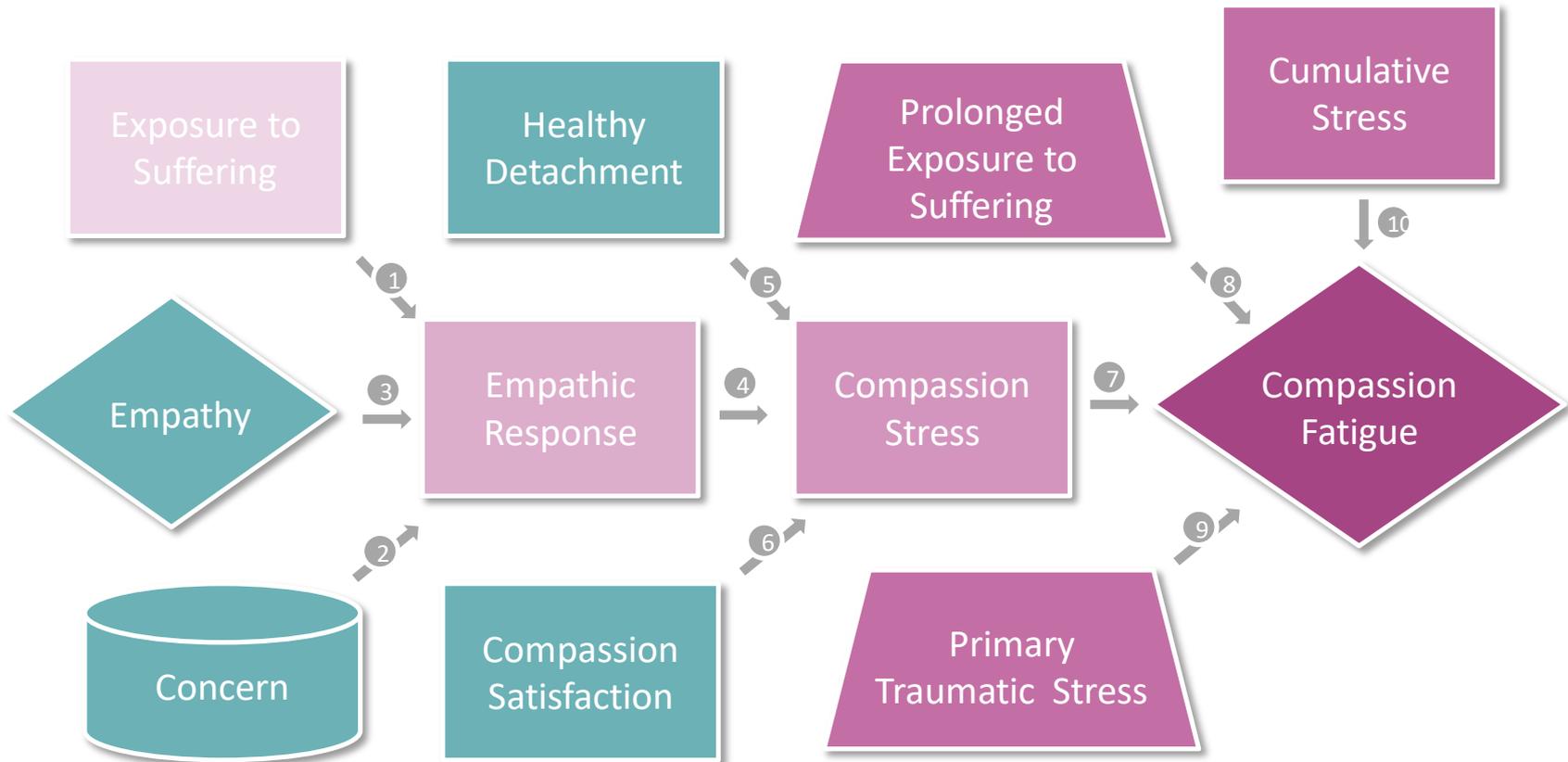


# Compassion Fatigue

(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
Gentry, 2005)



# Compassion Fatigue



(Compassion Stress and Fatigue Model, Figley, 1995)



What is it not?

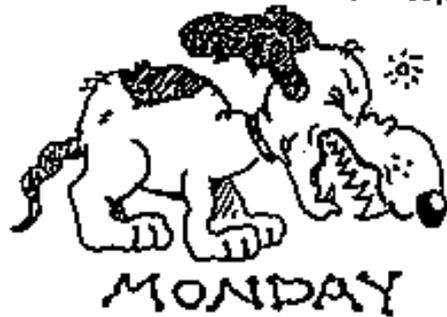
Awareness

# TYPICAL WORK WEEK



SUNDAY

Don't speak  
to me!!



MONDAY

God, get me  
through this day!



TUESDAY

Life is slowly  
seeping back  
into my  
body!



THURSDAY

Anticipation!



FRIDAY



SATURDAY



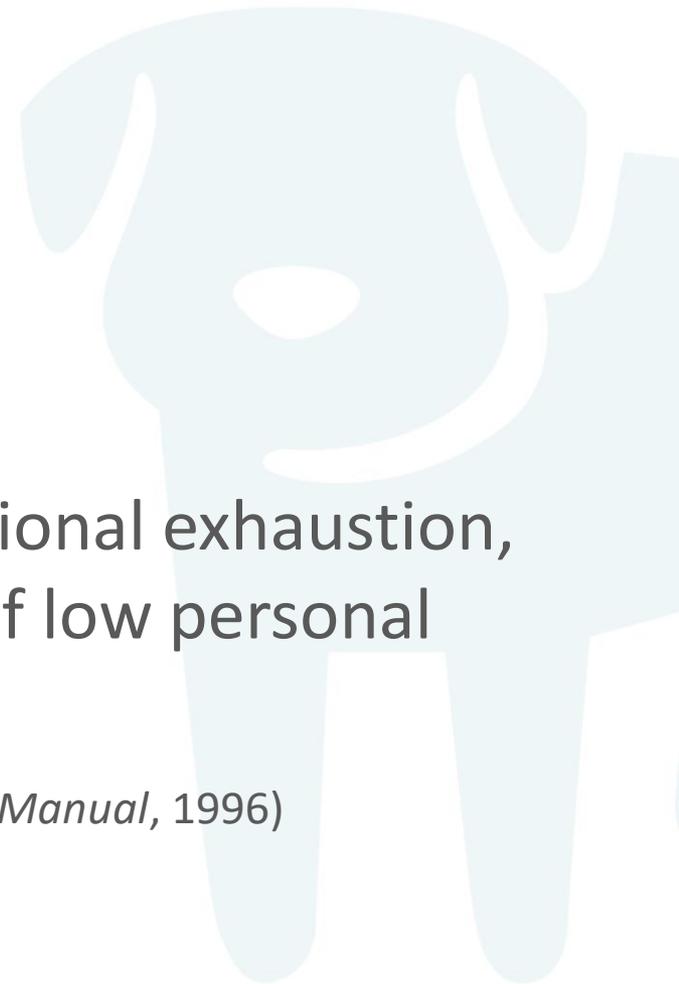
PLEASE LET ME DIE!

WEDNESDAY

# Burnout

“A psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment.”

(Maslach et al, *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual*, 1996)





# Burnout

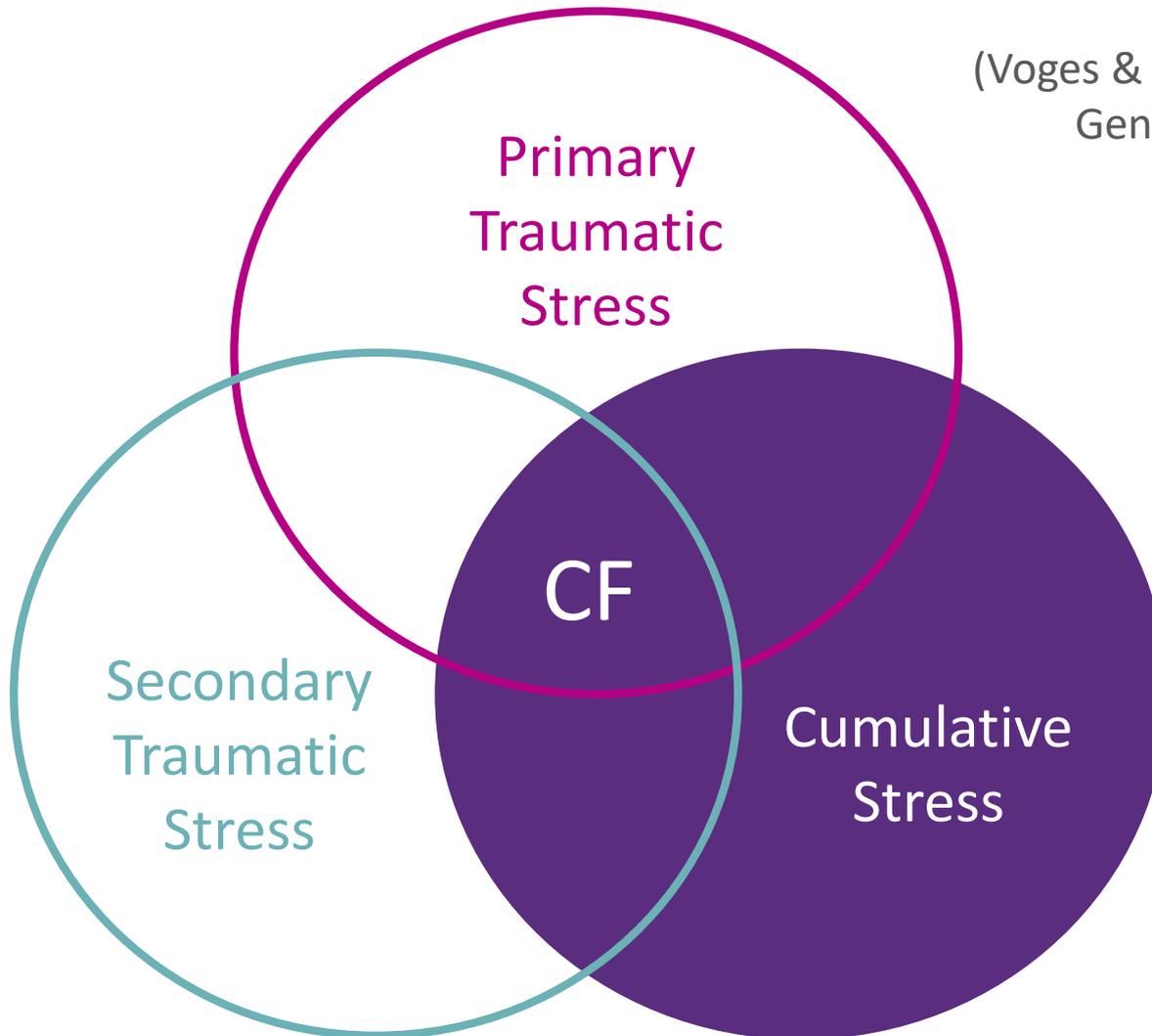
- Arises from work-related stress  
(excessive, prolonged, and unrelieved stress)
- Driven by organizational concerns,  
policies, procedures, and bureaucracy
- The consequence of a disconnection between the  
individual's expectation around role performance  
and the organization's structure to support the role
- A cumulative and sometimes unconscious process
- Treatable (but may require changing jobs/careers)

(Pines & Aronson, *Career Burnout*, 1988)



# Compassion Fatigue

(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
Gentry, 2005)



# Cumulative Stress

## Professional Stress

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- Powerlessness
- Long hours
- Staff discord
- Boredom with routines

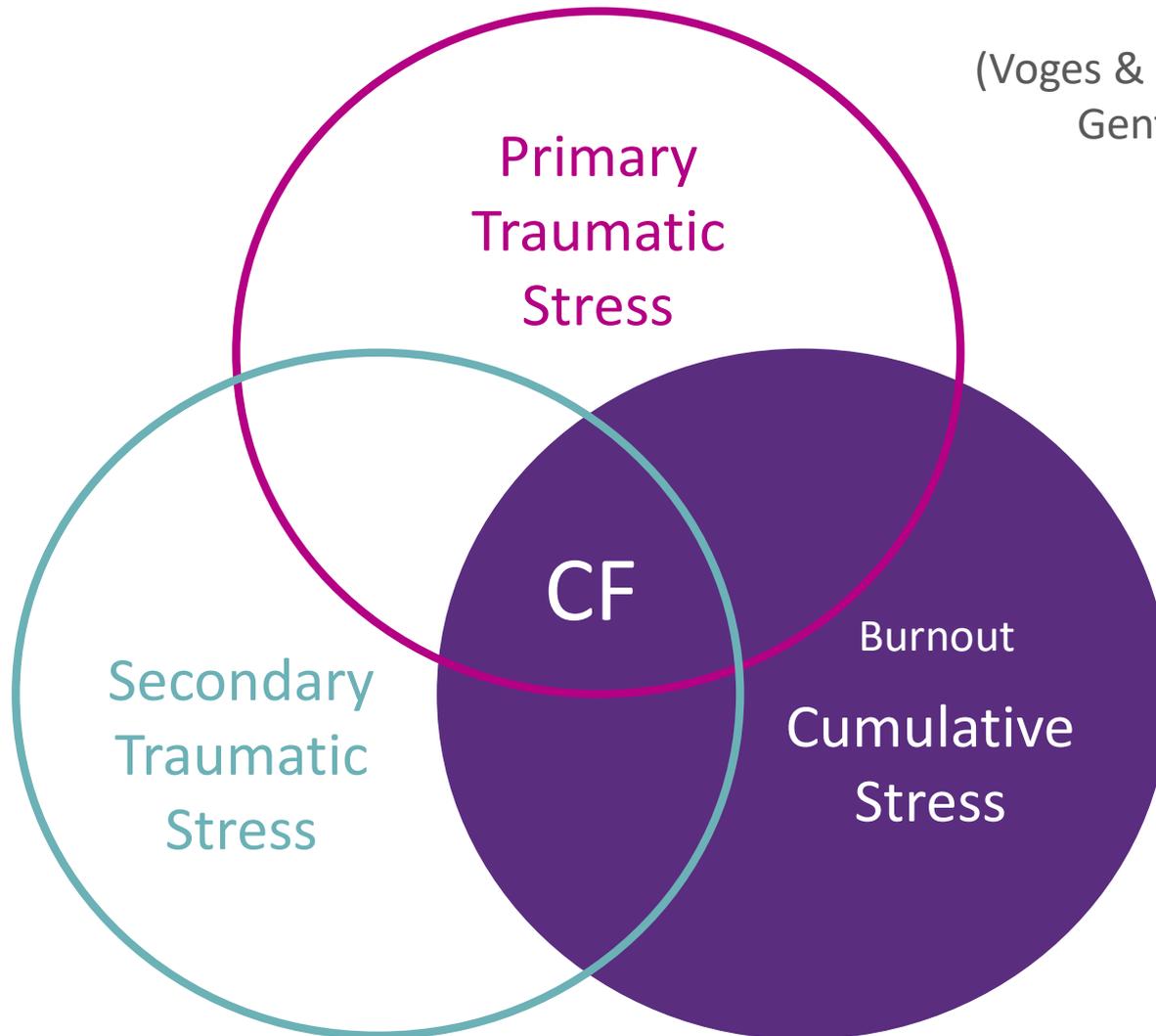
## Personal Stress

- Intense family demands and stress
- Family conflict
- Personal health problems
- Financial concerns
- Housing difficulties
- Social isolation

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)

# Compassion Fatigue

(Voges & Romney, 2003;  
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# Cumulative Stress

## Professional Stress

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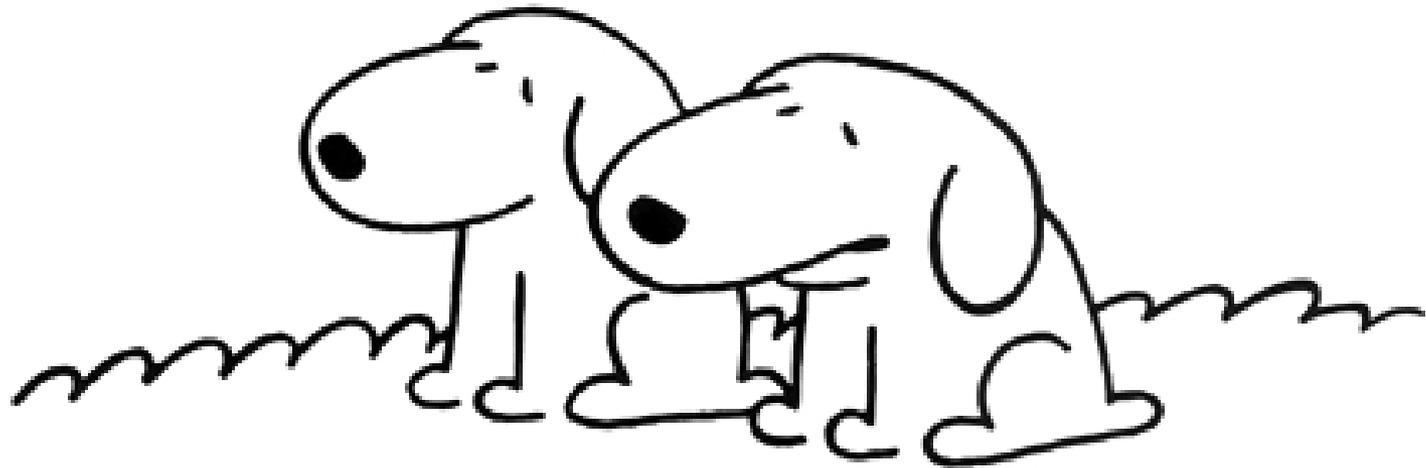
- Intense family demands and stress
- Family conflict
- Personal health problems
- Financial concerns
- Housing difficulties
- Social isolation

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)

# Depression

“A common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. It causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities, leads to a variety of emotional and physical problems, and can decrease a person’s ability to function at work and at home.”

(American Psychiatric Association, 2017)



*C. Barzotti*

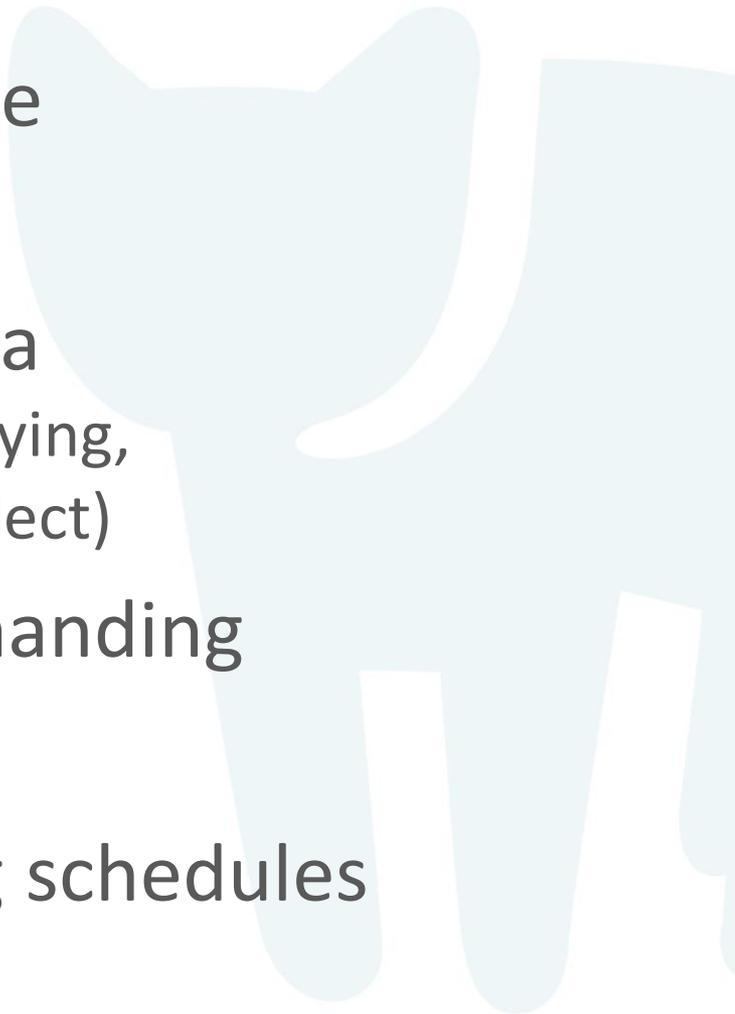
“I hope I never lose my sense of wonder.”



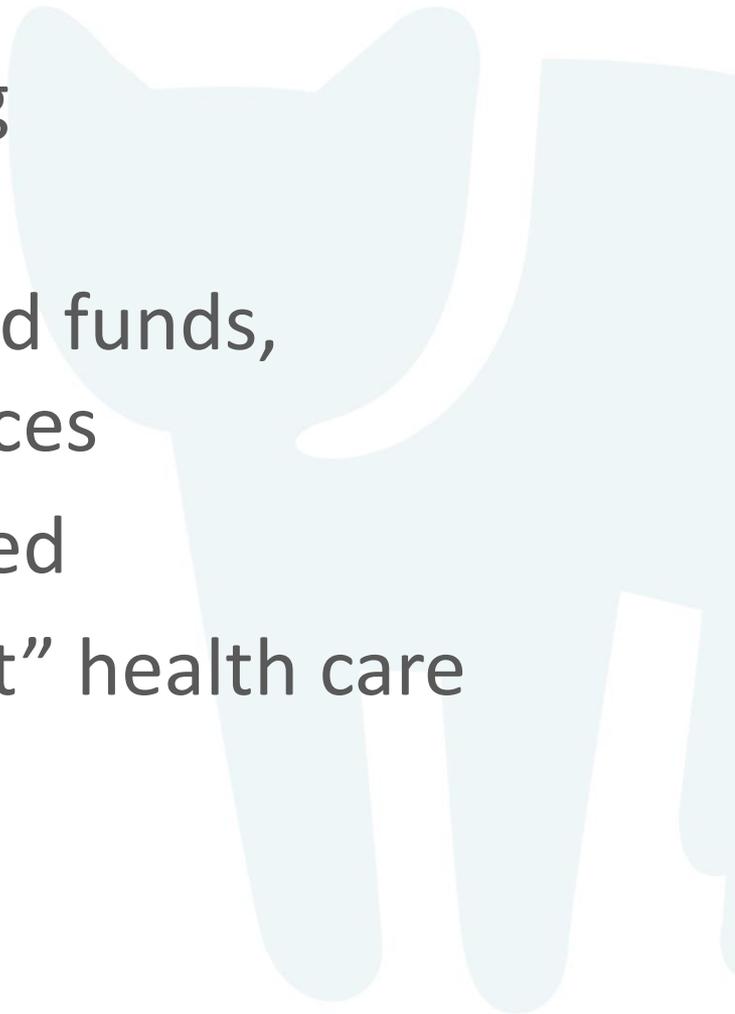
What makes us  
vulnerable?

Awareness

# Our Vulnerabilities

- We are compassionate people
  - We are “animal lovers”
  - We deal with issues of trauma  
(accidents, illness, disease, death, dying,  
loss, homelessness, abuse, and neglect)
  - Our work is emotionally-demanding
  - We work long hours
  - We have hectic and changing schedules
- 
- A light blue silhouette of a cat and a dog is positioned on the right side of the slide. The cat is in the foreground, and the dog is behind it, both facing left.

# Our Vulnerabilities

- We feel the pressure of rising public expectations
  - We often operate with limited funds, with needs exceeding resources
  - Animal care is economic-based
  - We provide “basket-to-casket” health care
  - We engage in euthanasia
- 
- A light blue silhouette of a cat and a dog is positioned on the right side of the slide. The cat is in the foreground, and the dog is behind it, partially obscured. The silhouette is simple and stylized, with no facial features or fur details.



What does it  
look like?

Awareness



# Symptoms

## Intrusive Thoughts

- Unwanted and unwelcomed memories and ruminations
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares



## Constrictive Efforts

- Active efforts to avoid the thoughts, feelings, and activities that repeatedly remind you of the pain, suffering, and loss

## Hyperarousal

- Sleep disturbances
- General anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Exaggerated startle rxn
- Agitation and irritability
- Hypervigilance



# Symptoms

- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Lethargy, physical and emotional exhaustion
- Somatization and hypochondria
- Skepticism, cynicism, embitterment, and resentment
- Mood swings, anxiety, irrational fears, depression, suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Anger and irritability
- Disrupted world view, negative self-image
- Hypersensitivity or insensitivity to emotional material
- Problems with intimacy and in personal relationships
- Increasing personal and professional isolation
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)



# Symptoms

- Memory loss, forgetfulness
- Loss of efficiency and reliability
- Impaired ability to make decisions, indecision, inappropriate judgement
- Unpredictable work habits and patterns
- Absenteeism – missing work, taking many sick days
- Sleeping difficulties
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Diminished sense of enjoyment of career
- Dread of working with certain animals and people, and in certain situations
- Feeling professional helplessness

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)



What are the  
consequences?

Awareness



# Consequences

## Physical and Mental Health

- Physical ailments such as headaches, gastrointestinal upsets, and chronic pain and fatigue
- Psychiatric conditions such as mood disorders (e.g. anxiety and depression), eating disorders, dissociative disorders, personality disorders, and addictions (e.g. smoking, alcohol, and gambling)

## Professional Competence and Success

- Poor interpersonal relationships
- Compromised animal care

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)



# Consequences

## Vocational Direction and Development

- Engage in premature job changes
- Drop out of animal welfare

*“Compassion fatigue has driven both promising and seasoned professionals out of their professions entirely, permanently altering the direction of career paths.”*

(Mitchener & Ogilvie, *JAVMA*, 2002)

## Organizational Welfare

- Spreads “as a contagion” to pan-systemically – and detrimentally – affect hospital climate and outcomes

(Mathieu, *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook*, 2011)



How do we  
manage it?

Action

# Healthy Self Care

“Nourish your body, mind and spirit  
to sustain and maintain  
your personal and professional life.”

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



# Healthy Self Care

- Take daily walks
- Embrace spirituality
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Exercise and participate in sports
- Interact with children and animals
- Pursue any passions you might have
- Get in touch with nature and the outdoors
- Volunteer and contribute to your community
- Schedule time to simply relax and read or play
- Cultivate interests, activities, and hobbies beyond work



# Healthy Self Care

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**Veterinary Social Work**  
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## Tips

- Take stock “What’s on your plate?”
- Think of ways to take better care of yourself
- Find time for yourself every day – rebalance your workload
- Delegate - learn to ask for help at home and at work
- Have a transition from work to home
- Learn to say no (or yes) more often
- Assess and adjust your trauma inputs
- Consider working fewer hours



(Mathieu, *Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Compassion Satisfaction*, 2007)



# Boundaries



**Pity:**  
I acknowledge  
your suffering.

**Sympathy:**  
I care about  
your suffering.

**Empathy:**  
I feel your  
suffering.

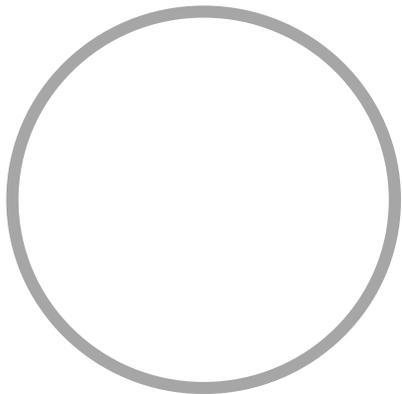
**Compassion:**  
I want to relieve  
your suffering.

**Engagement**

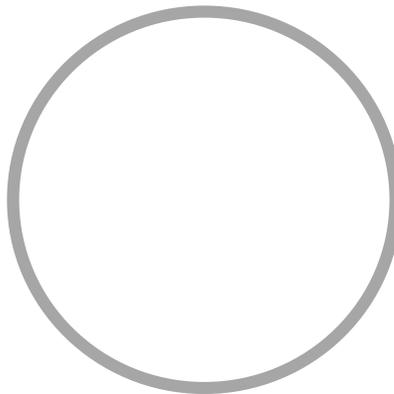


# Boundaries

**You**



**Other**



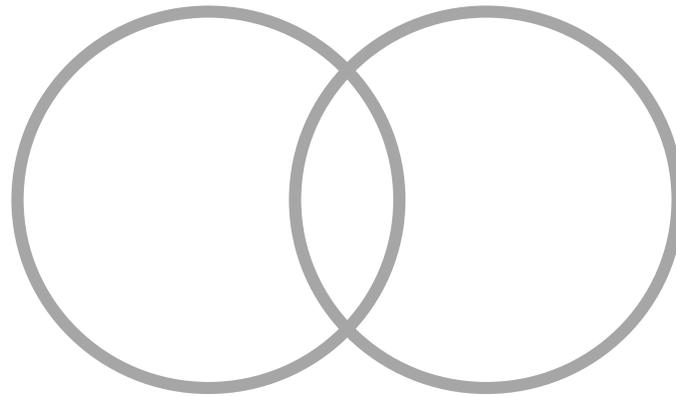
(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011;  
Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)



# Boundaries

You

Other



The capacity to share the feelings of others  
“Feeling *with*”

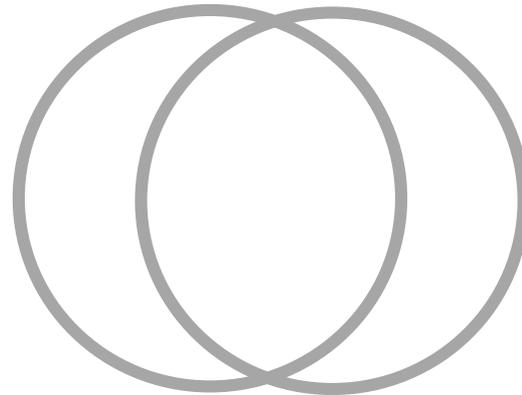
Empathy is the *first* step in building social connection

(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011;  
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# Boundaries

YouOther



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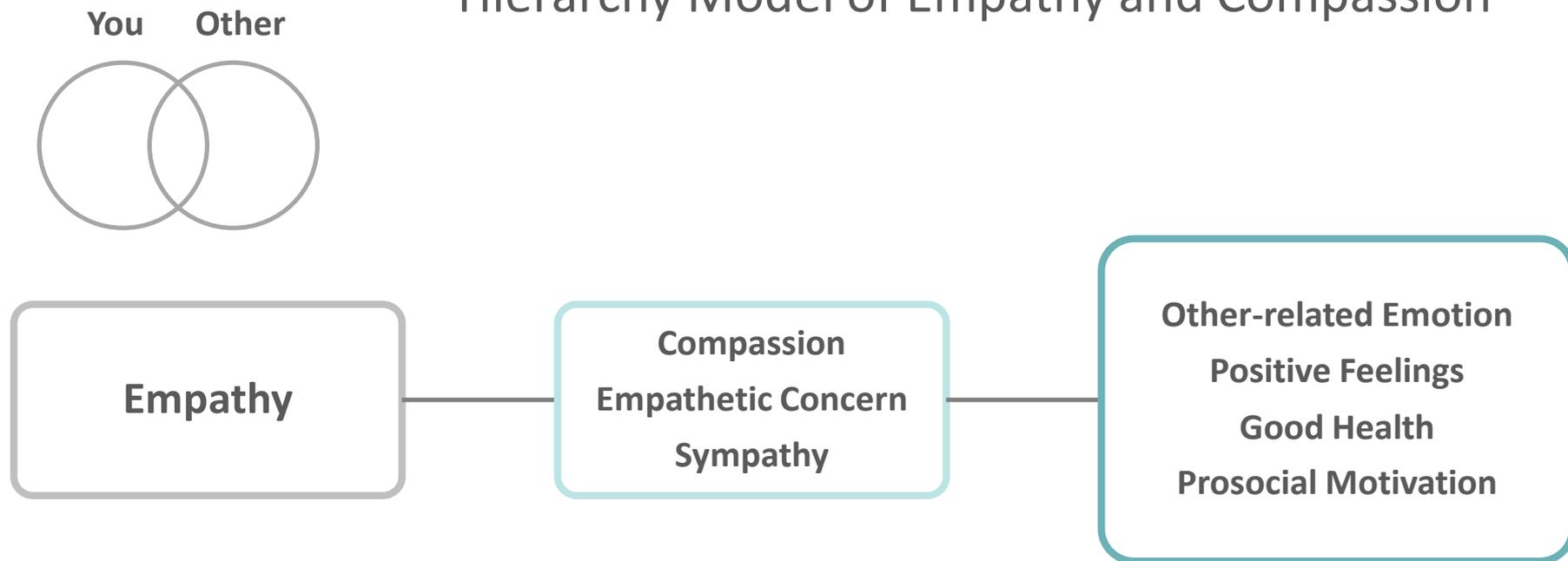
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# Boundaries

## Hierarchy Model of Empathy and Compassion

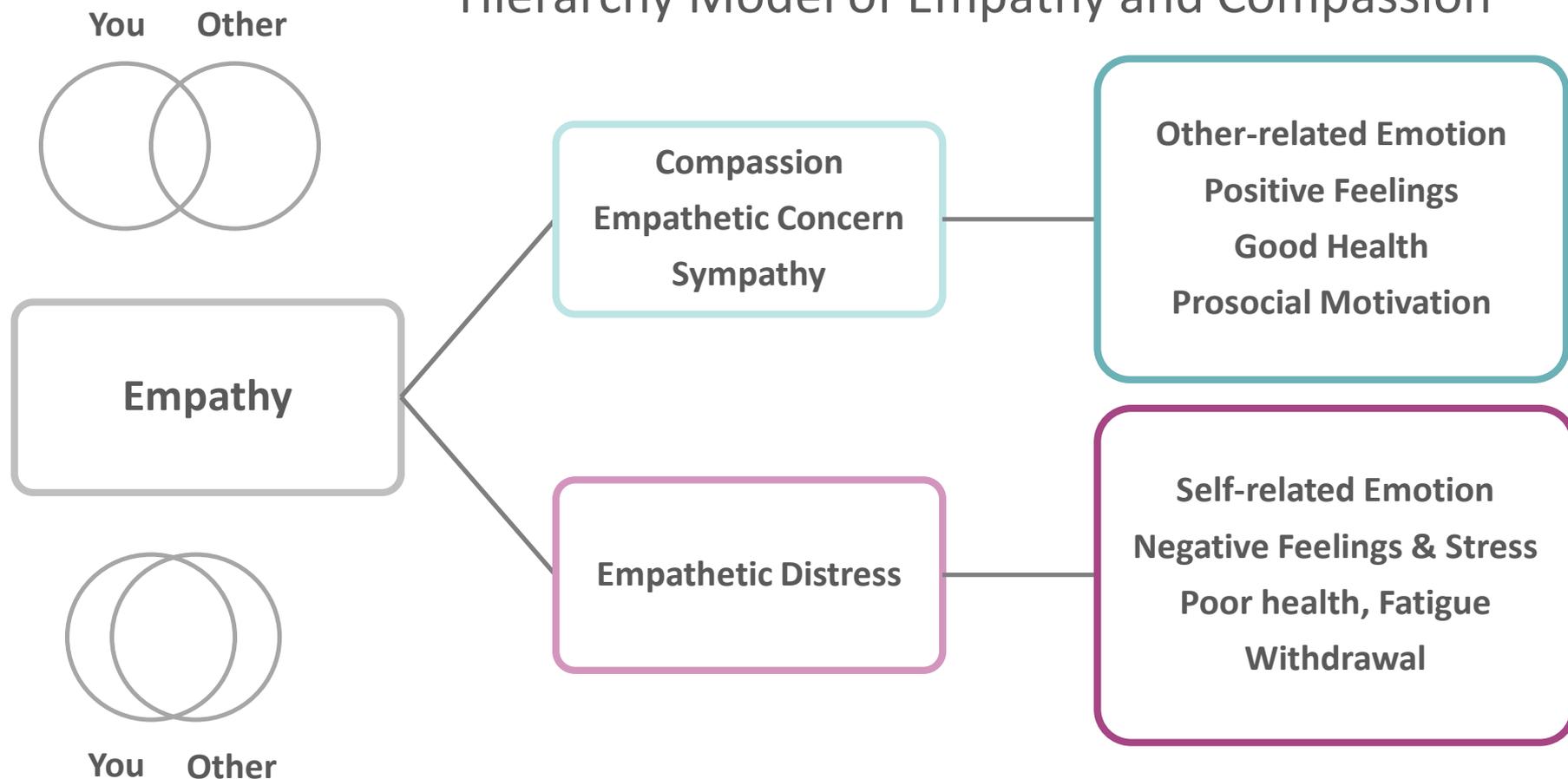


(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011;  
Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)



# Boundaries

## Hierarchy Model of Empathy and Compassion



(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011;  
Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)



# Boundaries

“Whether observation of distress in others leads to *empathic concern and altruistic motivation* or to *empathic distress and self-centered emotions* depends upon our capacity for **self-other differentiation.**”

Don't own other's pain

Beware of boundary issues

- Maintain perspective surrounding your personal investment
- Remain connected with your own resources

(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011  
Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



# Boundaries

*“Whether observation of distress in others leads to **empathic concern and altruistic motivation** or to **empathic distress and self-centered emotions** depends upon our capacity for **self-other differentiation**.”*

Don't own other's pain

Beware of boundary issues

- Maintain perspective surrounding your personal investment
- Remain connected with your own resources

Let go of things that cannot be controlled

Remember that you are who you are –  
*not* what you do

(Klimecki & Singer, *Empathic distress fatigue*, 2011  
Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



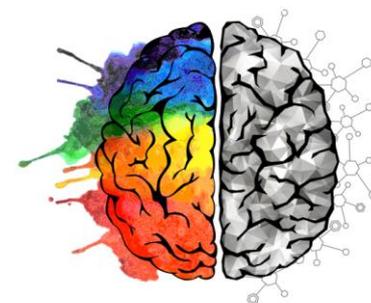
# Compassion

*“Compassion is a skill that can be cultivated, and empathic distress can be reversed by learning how to turn empathy into compassion.”*



## Compassion Training

- Meditation-related techniques foster feelings of benevolence and kindness
- ‘loving kindness training’



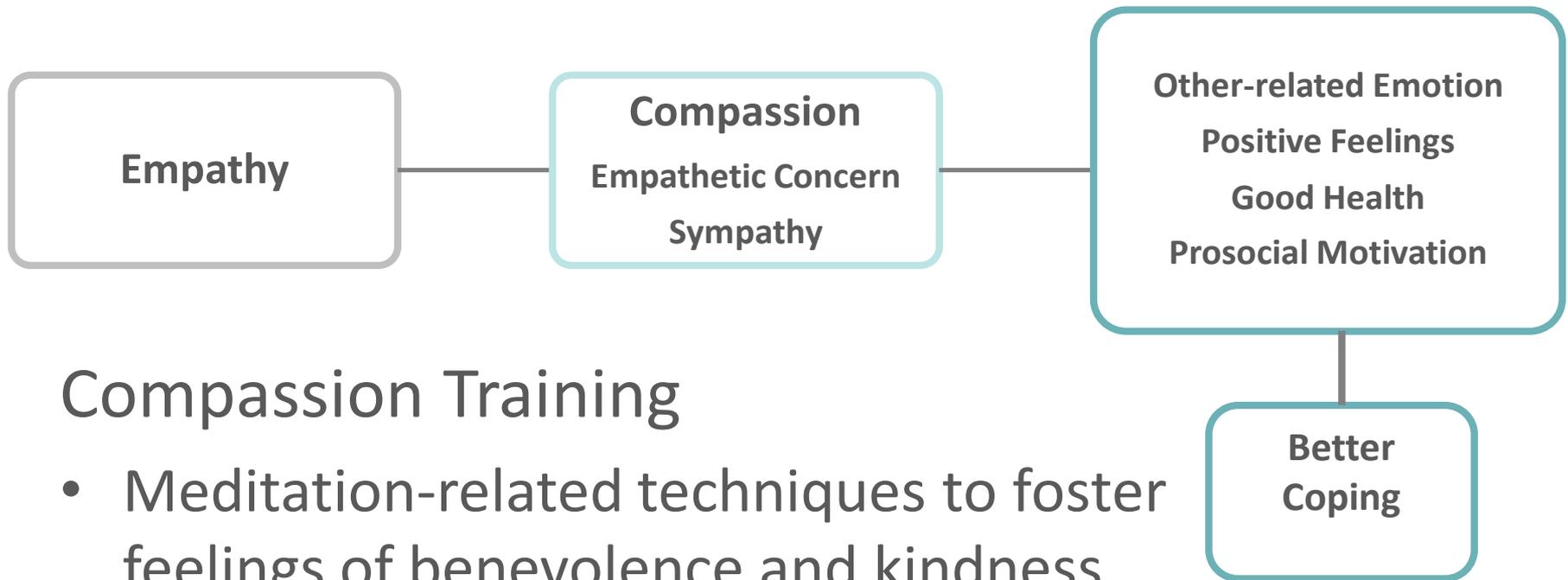
**NEUROPLASTICITY**

(Singer & Klimecki, *Empathy and compassion*, 2014;  
Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)



# Compassion

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## Compassion Training

- Meditation-related techniques to foster feelings of benevolence and kindness
- ‘loving kindness training’

(Singer & Klimecki, *Empathy and compassion*, 2014;  
Dowling, *Compassion does not fatigue!*, 2017)

# Healthy Relationships

“Intentionally affiliate with those who share your values, believe in you, and nurture your growth to enhance your well-being.”

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



# Healthy Relationships

Affiliate with those who:

- Care about each other and show it
- Genuinely like one another
- Joke around and/or pitch in when needed
- Pick-up on even the most subtle mood changes of fellow workers and ask about them in a caring and supportive manner

(Figley & Roop, *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community*, 2006;  
Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)

# Healthy Organizations

“Are mindful of their responsibility and obligation to facilitate their staff’s personal and professional growth by addressing issues of stress associated with compassion fatigue.”

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



# Healthy Organizations

- Create opportunities for staff to vary their caseload and work activities
- Honour the personal lives of staff, supporting them to take care of themselves and their families
- Empower staff through inclusivity in decision-making surrounding policies and procedures
- Create comfortable work environments, modeling the importance of the personal in the professional

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



# Healthy Organizations

- Promote professional development for their staff, recognizing it as integral to job endurance
- Sanction debriefing to allow staff to discuss the emotional components of their work
- Take the time to celebrate the sense of achievement found in the many success stories created, promoting compassion satisfaction
- Celebrate the lives of staff!

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



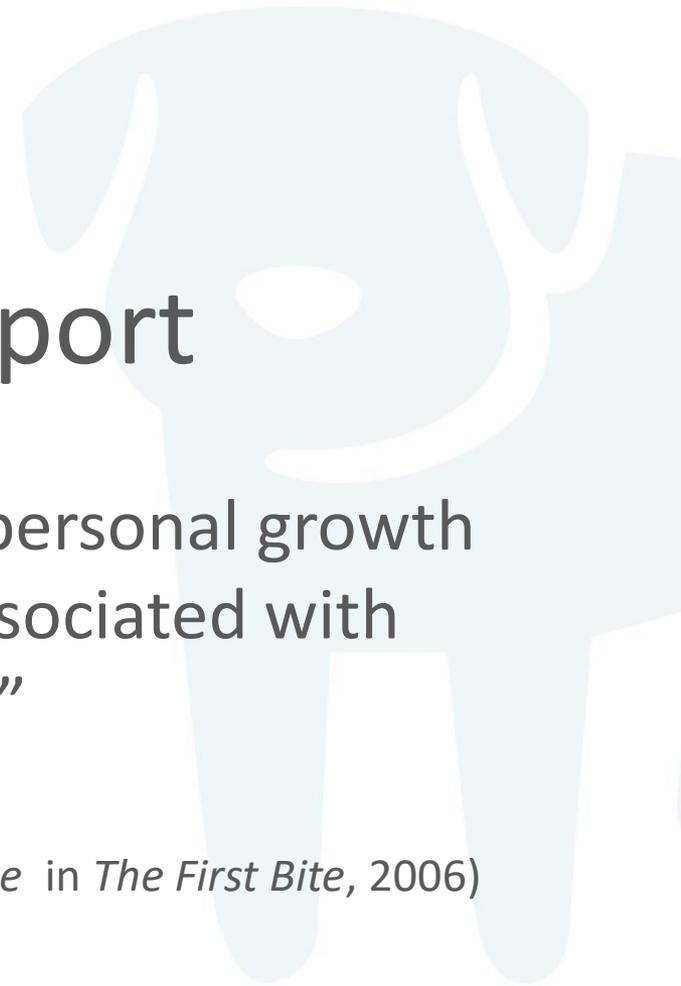
How do we  
treat it?



# Counselling Support

“Professional support to facilitate personal growth by addressing issues of stress associated with compassion fatigue.”

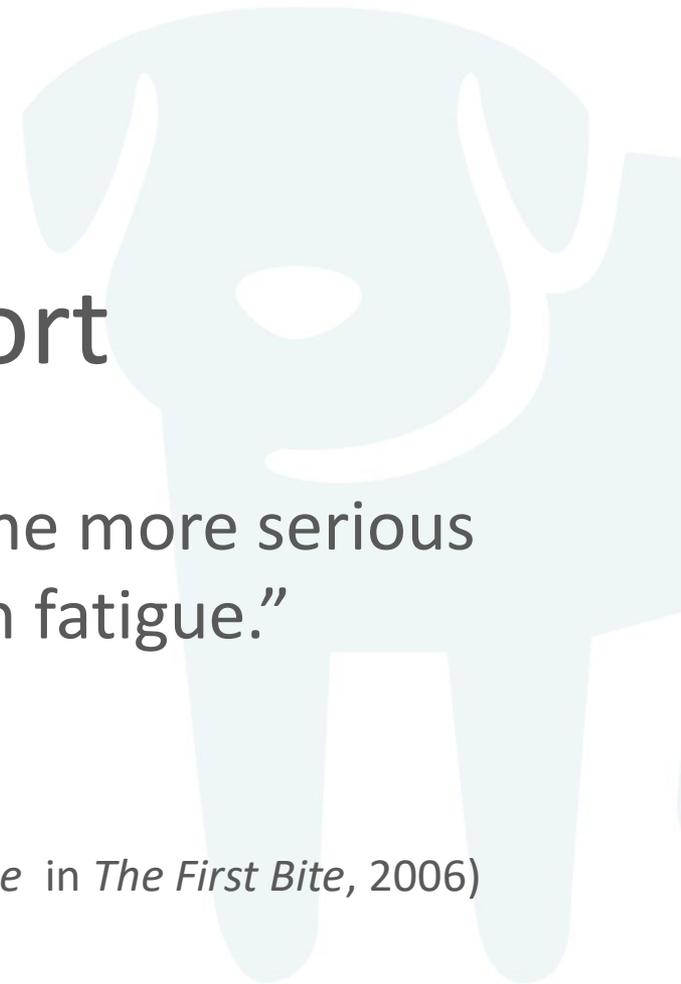
(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)



# Medical Support

“Professional support to manage the more serious consequences of compassion fatigue.”

(Stoewen, *Compassion Fatigue* in *The First Bite*, 2006)







What have we  
talked about?

# We've Talked About...

What it is...

What it's not...

What makes us vulnerable...

What it looks like...

What the consequences are...

How we manage it...

How we treat it...





So taking it  
from here...



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What will you  
do differently?

Action

# Commitment

“An ounce of action...  
is worth a ton of theory.”

(Friedrich Engels, 1820-1895)



# Commitment

What will you and your staff do differently

- In the next week?
- In the next month?
- In the next year?

Make written, public, specific, and measurable commitments

- SMART goals are ideal



# Commitment

## Group Discussions

- Improving Self Care
- Improving Social Care
- Supporting Coworkers
- Improving Boundaries
- Lifelong Learning
- Organization Strategies





# Improving Self Care

*Are you going to take better care of yourself?*

- How are you going to do this?
  - Exercise more? Eat better? Rest and relax? Pursue a passion? Start a hobby? Register with a team? Volunteer? Focus on personal growth? Meditate? Work fewer hours? Take a vacation? Pursue outdoor activities? Pursue the arts? Play more? Parent more?
    - What's important to you?
    - What resonates with you?
- How can important others support you in this?
- How can you build lasting success?



# Improving Social Care

*Are you going to focus on the important people – and relationships – in your life?*

- Who is important? Why are they important?
- How can you nurture and build such relationships?
- How can you create “sacred time”?

*Are you going to reach out for expertise when you need to? (counselling +/- medical support)*

- Why is this important?
- Are you worth it?
- Who will you call?



# Supporting Coworkers

*Are you going to support coworkers when they're showing signs of CF and/or burnout?*

- What kinds of behaviour are you noticing?
- Why is it important to “approach” rather than “avoid” or “ignore” behaviours that are unhelpful to others?
  - How do these behaviours influence others? (public, staff)
  - How do these behaviours influence the workplace culture?
- Who should approach them? You? A colleague? A manager?
  - Can there be both informal and formal support options?
- How can you approach them to share what you've noticed?
- What do you say? What do you do?



# Improving Boundaries

*Are you going to* maintain proper boundaries on your personal investment at work?

- How do you define and measure yourself?
- What kinds of self-talk do you engage in?
- How can you avoid over-extending yourself?

*Are you going to* maintain proper boundaries on your personal investment at home?

- How do you define and measure yourself?
- What kinds of self-talk do you engage in?
- How can you avoid over-extending yourself?



# Lifelong Learning

*Are you going to* firmly commit to continuing education and professional development?

- Why is this important?
- How does stagnancy contribute to burnout and CF?
- What *organized* and *self-directed* CE opportunities can and will you engage in?
- What ways might your organization support you?
- What ways might your organization benefit from this?
- How can you integrate new learnings into your organization?
- How will you integrate reading for pleasure?



# Organization Strategies

*Are you going to incorporate strategies in your organization that reduce the stress that contributes to compassion fatigue?*

- How can the workplace better support staff wellness, health, and wellbeing?
- How can you support one another to take good care of yourselves and your families?
- How can you increase the sense of safety and support in the workplace?
- How can you create a positive work environment?
- How can you vary work activities?



# Organization Strategies

*Are you going to incorporate strategies in your organization that reduce the stress that contributes to compassion fatigue?*

- How can you create a collaborative, facilitative, empowering, and “open door” approach to management?
- How can you create a more comfortable work environment?
- What kinds of internal and external options for support can you offer?
- How might clear protocols and processes for performance reviews help?
- What else???



# Commitment

The natural response to the downward spiral of compassion fatigue is to work harder until there is nothing left to give, which is counter to the adaptive response of taking a break. The symptoms of compassion fatigue are the same as those of chronic stress and are a consequence of caring for the needs of others before caring for your own needs. Compassion fatigue results from a lack of daily self-care practices that create opportunities to reflect, refuel, and rejuvenate.

The good news is that feeling compassion fatigue results from being a deeply caring person. When you care for yourself, you can care for others from a place of abundance not scarcity. With development of healthy self-care routines, you can continue to successfully provide compassionate care to others. Recognizing the signs of compassion fatigue is the first step toward positive change, and the second step is making a daily firm commitment to choices that lead to resiliency.

(Withrow & MacEwen, 2012)



*Debbie*

Thank you!

**PETSMART**  
*Charities*

# PETSMART Charities



At PetSmart Charities we believe in the human-animal bond. That's why we're here to help by supporting organizations that provide pets and their caretakers with tools to promote healthy pet ownership — including education, training and programs that help keep pets and families together.

Learn more about our mission:

[PetSmartCharities.org/pro](https://PetSmartCharities.org/pro)





# References

1. Figley CR. Introduction. In: Figley CR, ed. *Treating Compassion Fatigue*. New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002.
2. Figley CR, Roop RG. *Compassion Fatigue in the animal-care community*. Washington, DC: Humane Society Press, 2006.
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*“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.  
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”*

☞ Dalai Lama ☞

