

Building Compassion Satisfaction to Create a Place of Belonging



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Our resilience is supported by the capacity to maintain awareness of the thread of continuity from past to present to future. The busy jobs and lives that we lead and the distraction of technology that fills every pause in the action can interfere with our capacity to maintain this perspective.

Take a moment to chat about these questions

In consideration of your work,

- What is one thing that is better now than a year ago?
- What is one thing that is challenging you right now?
- What are you looking forward to?



Doing this kind of reflection with your colleagues creates community resilience as you build a shared narrative that includes a broad awareness.

I invite you to build a regular practice for yourself and your team for reflection of past, present, and future.



Compassion Satisfaction can be defined as feeling for someone in a manner that allows you to help and support without taking on their anguish as a solution or outcome.

Transforming the Pain (Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996)



Compassion Fatigue is a “disorder that affects those who do their work well.”

“It is characterized by deep emotional and physical exhaustion and by a shift in the helper’s sense of hope and optimism about the future and the value of their work.”

(Dr Charles Figley, 1995)

Vicarious Trauma is “the transformation of the helper’s inner experience, resulting from empathic engagement with another’s traumatic material.”

Burnout is a different concept and a potential outcome of challenging work.

* Compassion Fatigue is inevitable and also unique to the individual/situation.

* Burnout is avoidable and typically will require support to return that individual to a healthy baseline of functioning.

What are your road signs?



We've accomplished so much and made impressive gains since the pandemic. However, our work in education has become even more complex with seemingly never ending new challenges.

The well-being of school professionals requires more than a bubble bath and a deep breath.





So what can we do???

Meaning Making

How are you narrating your experience?





A resilient narrative includes:

- A shift in focus to what the individual can control.
- A balance of attention to the challenges & the lasting good that is developing in response to the situation.
- The prediction of a positive outcome. The hope and belief that a better time will come.
- Owning your fair share of accountability for success and perceived failures.

One way to tend to your narrative is through the productive vent!

Create a culture in which people “share the title and not the whole article”.



Let's practice!

- Turn to those sitting nearby and summarize in a genuine and thematic way the kind of school year that you have had as if it were the title to an article, book, or movie.
- If it was great say that!
- If it was hard, don't sugar coat the truth too much.
- Try to recognize hard and positive aspects.

Don't be afraid to try it, scratch it, and try again!

Ask for help if you find this hard!



Other ideas to promote community resilience...



Take control of the information that you consume

- For example, if the goal is to be an informed citizen, make a plan for consuming the news.
 - Consider the dose, maybe 1-2 sources, 1-2 times per day.
 - Consider the format. Auditory, visual and the impact of that input.
 - Consider the day you've had and your bandwidth.
- If you are facing situations that are disheartening, seek information that is inspiring.
- Intentionally shift your focus to information that is also true to maintain a healthy perspective.

The curious stance.

When someone approaches you in an unexpected manner, try to...

- Remember that the context for the behavior is unclear.
- “Step over” the behavior.
- Take a curious stance to determine context & needs.
- Not take it personally.
- Set boundaries: What is your role? Can you stay in it?
- Seek to meet unmet needs and co-regulate.
- “Strike while the iron is cold.”





The boundary is in the pause...

We may or may not be able to set a limit & stay firmly in our role.

We can reduce impulsiveness and consider our response.

We can seek a second opinion from an accountability partner.

How do you think you did this year with the various aspects of the curious stance?
How well do you think you balanced maintaining sturdy boundaries in your role vs.
necessary flexibility to meet the demands?

- Remember that the context for the behavior is unclear.
- “Step over” the behavior.
- Take a curious stance to determine context & needs.
- Do not take it personally.
- Set boundaries: What is your role? Can you stay in it?
- Seek to meet unmet needs and co-regulate.
- “Strike while the iron is cold.”



Serve & Return is hard when there is no return!



How do you respond to this situation?

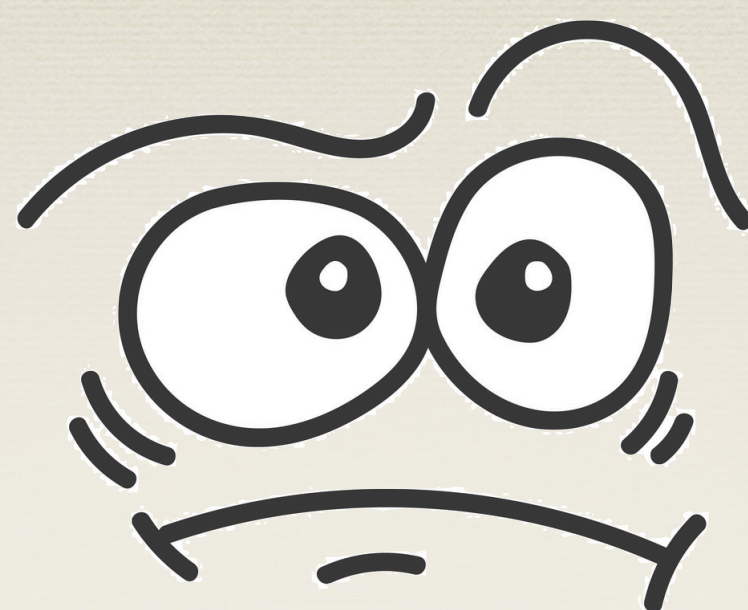
- Sometimes we get anxious and increase our serves to the degree that the student is overwhelmed.
- Sometimes we fade and stop serving due to lack of response.
- Sometimes we get frustrated or even angry at the student, their family, or others.
- Sometimes we question our own competence, project our insecurities, and take personally dynamics that are not about us at all.



Try these ideas instead...

Set a plan and pace for your serves and stick to it.

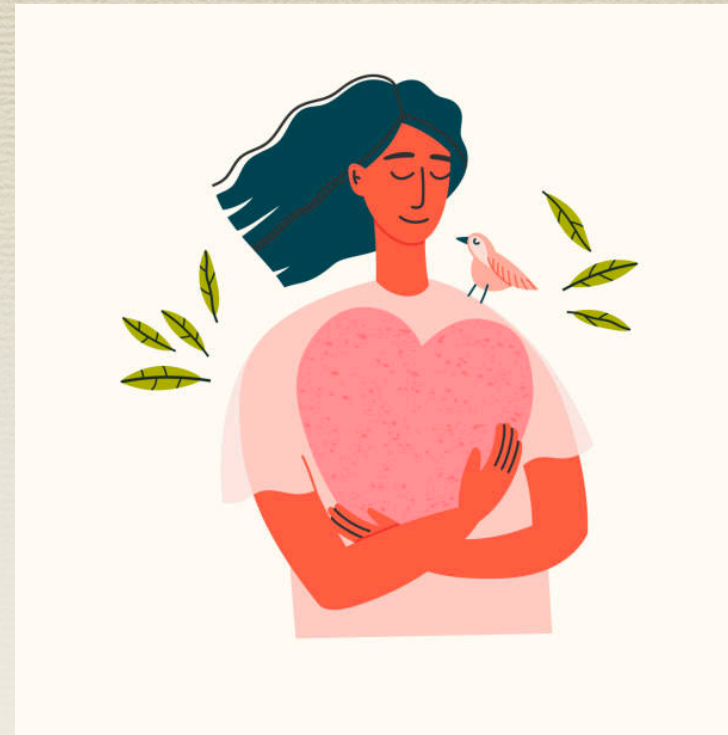
- Find a way to track your serves so that you don't give up.
- Try "drive by" serves if the student is rejecting of your attempts for connection.
- Find a way to reach out without the audience.
- Ask someone else to reach out and problem solve with the student.
- Persist despite the lack of response.
- As a larger community, seek ways to increase competence & belonging.



What if you are doing all the right things and the student is still stuck, shut down, truant, or escalated in response to the typical demands of school?

Strategies for the adult to cope with situations in which students are chronically disengaged

- Notice your internal script and comments- are they accurate & adaptive?
- Are you personalizing the situation inaccurately?
- Are you mind reading or making assumptions about how the student thinks/feels?
- How are you measuring your success?
- Are you consulting with others to share the worry & responsibility?



Please remember...

You did not create the problem, yet could be key to the solution!

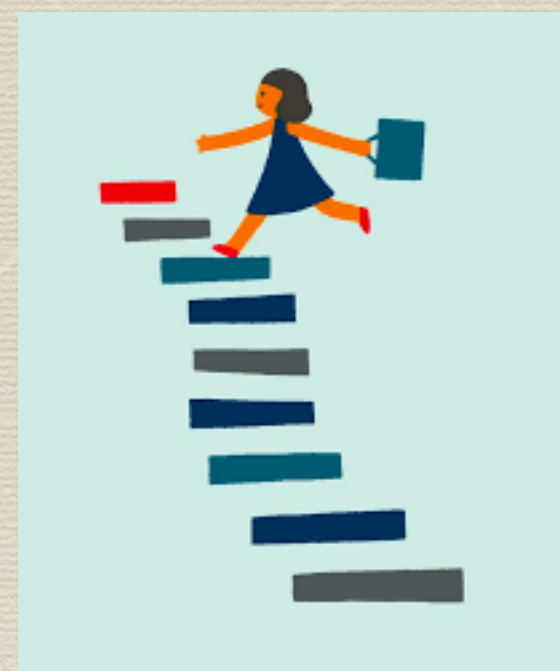
You can influence the shift from disengaged or learned helplessness.

You may not see the full impact of your actions during the time you work with that student
and their family.

What about this idea of serve & return resonates with your experience this year?
Which of the ideas might benefit your practice?

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- Are you personalizing the situation inaccurately?
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Scaffolding for a Stressed Brain

- Do one thing with intention/reduce multi-tasking.
- Keep a “parking lot” to reduce mental clutter & distraction.
- Use visual time tracking & clear time management strategies.
- Gradually rebuild stamina for sustained focus & mental effort.
- Take the time to prioritize efforts & plan.

What is one idea that you'd like to pursue?





Thank you for your dedication to the children and
families of Vermont!

Joelle van Lent, Psy.D.