

## Burnout Vs. Compassion Fatigue

**Burnout** (or **occupation burnout**) is a psychological term referring to a general exhaustion and lack of interest or motivation regarding one's work.

**Compassion fatigue**, also called **vicarious trauma**, refers to the negative emotions that individuals feel from helping others at work. This is most common in "helping professions", including first responders (e.g., counselors, crisis advocates, social workers, police officers, fire fighters).

Compassion fatigue consists of two parts: **burnout** and **secondary traumatic stress**. *Burnout* refers to the slow onset of feelings of hopelessness and that one's work has little positive impact. *Secondary traumatic stress* refers to the rapid onset of symptoms that mirror posttraumatic stress disorder, such as nightmares, difficulty sleeping, and flashes of intrusive images and/or thoughts, due to secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events. There are many symptoms of compassion fatigue, as shown below.

The difference between compassion fatigue and burnout is their origin. More specifically, compassion fatigue originates from dealing with victims of trauma, and burnout originates from occupational stress and being overworked.

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue	
Personal Symptoms	Examples
Physical	Headaches, fatigue, or weakened immune system
Emotional	Feeling powerless, anxiety, helpless, or distressed
Behavioral	Increased irritability, changes in appetite and sleep, hypervigilance, or being easily startled
Spiritual	Loss of purpose and meaning or questioning the good in the world
Cognitive	Diminished concentration, pessimism, inattention, or recurrent or unwanted thoughts
Relational	Withdrawn or isolated from friends or family or distrust of friends or family
Workplace Symptoms	Examples
Performance	Decreased quality of work, low motivation, or forgetfulness
Morale	Decreased confidence, loss of interest or apathy, feeling undervalued and unappreciated, being disconnected, or reduced compassion
Relational	Detached and withdrawn from colleagues, increased conflict or impatience with colleagues or clients
Behavioral	Calling out of work, arriving late, or general irresponsibility