



# Strategies for Thriving

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## Conquering the Effects of Secondary Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

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**Compiled by:  
Trauma Healing Center, Inc.  
Olathe, Kansas**



**This book is dedicated to our Community Caregivers: the men and women who care for the safety and needs of our community such as first responders, medical professionals, pastors, counselors, social workers, teachers, and many others.**

Our communities are in crisis. Trauma, anxiety, depression, and suicide are at an all-time high. We at the Trauma Healing Center are committed to supporting our Community Caregivers any way we can. We value what you do, and we are grateful for the sacrifices you make for our community every day!

Thank you!

## Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress And Compassion Fatigue

### The Power of Strategic Pauses

Strategic pauses give your brain a chance to rest which is essential for mental focus and clarity. Our frontal lobe is highly efficient, but it cannot operate for long periods of time and maintain a high level of efficiency. Learning to rest – even for a few minutes – from intense or highly cognitive tasks allows the frontal lobe to recharge. In her book, [A Minute To Think](#)<sup>1</sup>, Juliet Funt digs into the brain science of taking strategic breaks throughout the workday and offers practical tips on how to do this successfully.

The key to successful strategic pauses is what you do while you rest your mind. Funt recommends using these strategic pauses to recuperate and rest your mind and body, to make a plan for reducing the wasted energy tasks in your day, to reflect on your present situation, and to construct a plan for moving forward. Research shows when done regularly and intentionally, these strategic pauses can strengthen your performance, improve productivity, and reduce the chances of experiencing compassion fatigue due to work-related stress.

For the purpose of this booklet, we will focus on Funt's first recommendation for strategic pauses: recuperation. Being able to recuperate from stressful activities involves learning how the brain and body work, and incorporating regular strategies into your routine to foster the strength of your brain and body so they can function at their highest level.

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<sup>1</sup> [A Minute to Think: Reclaim Creativity, Conquer Busyness, and Do Your Best Work](#) by Juliet Funt

## Joy and Rest Rhythms

We are amazing and complex creations, but we are not infinite in our strength or capacity. The care of our heart and mind should not be overlooked in the busyness of our jobs and personal lives. Developing regular rhythms of joy and rest are at the heart of Funt's first category of strategic pauses. This step allows our brains to recuperate from work-stress and our hearts to process all the experiences of the day.

When we give our minds and hearts space to rest and focus on thoughts or activities that bring us joy, we are also increasing our resilience or our ability to "bounce back" from difficult situations<sup>2</sup>. This is essential for those who are working with the needs of the community. The internal pressure that is felt to do your job well combined with the burdens that are carried for others can lead to stress and fatigue that can be debilitating if not treated. While the amount of stress experienced by Community Caregivers cannot always be reduced, giving your brain space to recharge and increasing your ability to recover quickly from stress is always possible thanks to the neuroplasticity in our brains!

The neuroplasticity in the brain allows it to learn, make new connections, and develop new neuropathways at any point in life. This is great news on its own, but even better news is that it doesn't take huge changes or loads of self-discipline to utilize the neuroplasticity in our brains. The smallest changes can yield big results<sup>3</sup>. The rhythms of joy and rest can be built through regular use of appreciation, healing the wounds of our past and present, and connecting with healthy people. Whether these moments are brief or more extensive, they can create a lifestyle of deeper emotional capacity and greater cognitive strengths for the tasks at hand.

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<sup>2</sup> [Building Bounce: How to Grow Emotional Resilience](#) by Marcus Warner and Stefanie Hinman

<sup>3</sup> [The Power to Change: Mastering the Habits that Matter Most](#) by Craig Groeschel

## Self-Regulation

But when do you know you are doing enough to recuperate? Two assessments are included in this booklet to help you know the symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue, but another indicator that may be even easier to utilize is your own nervous system. Developing your sense of self-awareness will increase your efficiency in knowing when you need to implement a strategic pause.

In the book, Building Bounce, the authors describe how to do this in great detail. As we pay attention to our breathing, how our body feels, and the tension in our muscles, we can recognize quickly when we are experiencing stress and fatigue. As we recognize these symptoms, we can use proven self-regulation techniques to calm our bodies and take a strategic pause to allow our frontal lobe to recharge. The more we practice the steps of self-regulation and strategic pauses, the quicker we will be able to implement the process into our regular workday.

The small steps of self-regulation and strategic pauses will lead to healthy habits which can then transform your ability to reduce the impact of secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue in your life. Your recovery will be quicker and the results will last longer. In addition, when we take time for these steps, we will be able to better prioritize our tasks, reframe our current situation when needed, and heal from any past wounds that may be slowing us down.

The next page few pages contain self-assessments for both Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue. In many cases, you may be able to utilize the suggestions at the end of this booklet to reduce your stress and build resilience. In some cases, it may be necessary to seek professional help to manage your symptoms, to fully heal, and to move forward with the tools needed to be successful in life.

## Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress<sup>4</sup>

<b>Intrusive Thoughts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thoughts and images associated with client's trauma experiences</li><li>• Obsessive and compulsive desire to help certain clients</li><li>• Client/work issues encroaching upon personal time</li><li>• Inability to "let go" of work-related matters</li><li>• Perception of survivors as fragile and needing the assistance of caregiver ("savior")</li><li>• Thoughts and feelings of inadequacy as a caregiver</li><li>• Sense of entitlement or special-ness</li><li>• Perception of the world in terms of victims and perpetrators</li></ul>
<b>Avoidance Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Silencing Response (avoiding hearing/witnessing client's traumatic material)</li><li>• Loss of enjoyment in activities/cessation of self-care activities</li><li>• Loss of energy</li><li>• Loss of hope/sense of dread working with certain clients</li><li>• Loss of sense of competence/potency</li><li>• Isolation</li><li>• Secretive self-medication/addiction (alcohol, drugs, work, sex, food, spending, etc.)</li><li>• Relational dysfunction</li></ul>
<b>Arousal Symptoms</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased anxiety</li><li>• Impulsivity/reactivity</li><li>• Increased perception of demand/threat (in both job and environment)</li><li>• Increased frustration/anger</li><li>• Sleep disturbance</li><li>• Difficulty concentrating</li><li>• Change in weight/appetite</li><li>• Somatic symptoms</li></ul>

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<sup>4</sup> Compassion Fatigue & Burnout: Prevention and Resilience for the Workforce  
by J.Eric Gentry, PHD, LMHC

## Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue<sup>5</sup>

### Physical Symptoms

	I have had increased absenteeism “sick days”
	I have been feeling physically ill
	I have been feeling fatigued
	I have been feeling keyed-up and nervous
	I am doing less rather than more exercise
	Normal sleep has been more difficult for me
	I have lost enjoyment in intimate and sexual activities

### Psychological Symptoms

	I have noticed myself being more cynical and pessimistic
	I noticed that I was trying to avoid feelings by numbing or shutting down
	I have had work-related nightmares/bad dreams
	I have lost interest and enjoyment in activities
	I have difficulty in making decisions or making poor decisions
	I feel like I have lost some of my self esteem

### Emotional Symptoms

	I have anger directed toward my supervisors or co-workers
	I have been feeling flat, depressed, and hopeless more than I used to
	I have been more angry and irritable than normal
	I have moments of dread when thinking about going to work
	I am having trouble finding hope
	I am less connected to my spiritual and religious beliefs than I used to be
	I have felt overwhelmed more than three times the past week

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<sup>5</sup> [Compassion Fatigue & Burnout: Prevention and Resilience for the Workforce](#)  
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## Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue (con't)

### Spiritual Symptoms

<input type="checkbox"/>	I have been avoiding spending time with my friends and family
<input type="checkbox"/>	I fear for the safety of myself and my loved ones
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have engaged less rather than more in activities that used to bring me pleasure
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have a lack of time for self
<input type="checkbox"/>	I find it difficult to trust others
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have feelings of despair and hopelessness

### Professional Symptoms

<input type="checkbox"/>	I have been unable to get work or something specific to work out of my head
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have had unwanted memories pop up in my head of past events from work
<input type="checkbox"/>	My productivity at work has been reduced
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have felt like quitting my job more than once
<input type="checkbox"/>	I find paperwork and menial tasks getting in the way of my enjoyment of work

Five or more checked could indicate that you are suffering from Compassion Fatigue Symptoms.

# Self-Regulation

**Bottom-up: Movement, awareness of the nervous system, feeling present in the body**

*How does my body feel?*

**Breathing:** holding the breath deep into the Vagus Nerve.

**Movement:** bringing awareness to how the body feels and where it is in space.

**Relaxing muscles:** starting at your feet squeeze and relax each muscle group all the way to the top of your head.

**Focus on relaxing** your core muscles and letting your shoulders melt.

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**Top/down: Cognitive awareness and reframes.**

*What are my perceived threats?*

Is there a new way to view that threat that would be more true or more helpful?

Ask “what does that mean to me”? “is it true?” Ask others to help you do narrative checks.

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**Horizontal: Essential right brain engagement**

- Emotional, relational, art, music, journaling, and connection
- Build Community

# Using Strategic Pauses to Mitigate Work Stress and Build Resilience

## **Build Joy and Rest Rhythms**

### DAILY / WEEKLY

- Practice appreciation
- Engage in an enjoyable activity
- exercise: minimum walk 20 mins 4-5 times a week
- sleep: 7-8 hours per night

### REGULARLY SCHEDULE

- Set aside regular weekends for rest, fun, and self-care
  - Reflect on the many blessings you have had in life.
  - Reflect on the things you have overcome and the ways you have grown.
  - Assess your current need for healing and growth and take steps towards those goals.
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### **To Learn More Consider Reading:**

Building Bounce: How to Grow Emotional Resilience by Marcus Warner and Stefanie Hinman

A Minute to Think: Reclaim Creativity, Conquer Busyness, and Do Your Best Work by Juliet Funt

The Power to Change: Mastering the Habits that Matter Most by Craig Groeschel

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