



*Respite for you  
= better care for  
your loved one*



## **Compassion Fatigue: When It Hurts to Care**

Jane W. Barton, MTS, MASM, CSA  
Author of *Caregiving for the GENIUS*  
Caregiving Ambassador AARP Colorado

### **Program Title and Description**

#### ***Compassion Fatigue: When It Hurts to Care***

As professional or personal caregivers, we witness the suffering of others—physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. To witness the pain and suffering of others is to be forever changed. Compassionate people bear the suffering of others and often times compromise their own health and well being when they assume too much of the burden. We must always be aware of where we end and the other person begins—the importance of boundaries. We can companion others in life, but we cannot assume the responsibility for another’s life. To do so puts us at risk of experiencing compassion fatigue, a risk for all who care.

### **Biographical Information**

Jane W. Barton, author of *Caregiving for the GENIUS*, is a passionate speaker, writer, and listener. As the founder of Cardinal, LLC, she provides educational programs, books, and blogs to assist people in confronting the daunting challenges posed by aging, serious illness, and the end of life. Jane is well versed in the areas of grief and bereavement, caregiving, hospice and palliative care, change and transition, and spirituality and health. She presents innovative, transformational programs to community members, healthcare providers, pastoral caregivers, clergy, funeral service providers, and national audiences. As the Caregiving Ambassador for AARP Colorado (2014-2017), she offers educational programs for personal and professional caregivers throughout the state of Colorado.

Previously, Jane served as Director of Education for a hospice and palliative care educational institution in Denver, Colorado. She has also served as a chaplain and bereavement facilitator in hospice and palliative care. Jane is a certified Spiritual Director as well as a Certified Senior Advisor. In a former life, she worked as a financial services representative and an exploration petroleum geologist and manager.

Contact Information:  
[www.CardinaLife.com](http://www.CardinaLife.com)  
[CardinaLife@msn.com](mailto:CardinaLife@msn.com)  
303-489-3903

## **Learning Objectives**

1. Explore the Journey of Witnessing
2. Examine the Risk of Compassion Fatigue
3. Recognize the Signs of Compassion Fatigue
4. Discuss Ways to Manage and Mitigate Compassion Fatigue

## **Definitions**

### ***Compassion***

- means to bear or to suffer with
- prompts a strong desire to alleviate the suffering of others, a relational response

### ***Empathy***

- is our visceral response to the suffering of others
- is predicated on our ability to relate to the experience of another
- sparks compassion fatigue when we over identify with the suffering of another

### ***Compassion Fatigue***

- is a secondary traumatic stress disorder
- occurs as a result of over-identification with the suffering of others
- results in a reduced capacity to care or a desire to care

### ***Moral Distress***

- is rooted in an ethical conflict
- is experienced when we feel constrained from doing the right thing
- diminishes our sense of self

## **Quotes**

“Our witnessing reflects, first of all, who we are. Our personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs all contribute to the quality of the caring relationships we establish. The distinguishing qualities of successful witnesses - sensitivity to the distress of others, flexibility, genuineness, empathy, respect - are not simple external behaviors that can be assumed at will. They are the product of a lifetime of experiences that shape us into the particular kinds of people and witnesses that we are.”

Paraphrased from Dale Larson (1993) *The Helpers Journey*

### **The Serenity Prayer**

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1943)

## **Exercises**

### **1. How Do You Manifest Stress?**

**Objective:** To raise awareness regarding your personal stress reactions and to recognize historical patterns. Consider physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual manifestations of stress.

**Exercise:** Reflect on the ways in which you respond to stress. Once done, share your reflections with a partner.

### **2. Identify and Create Transition Rituals**

**Objective:** To identify rituals or behaviors that facilitate the transition from work to home and from home to work.

**Exercise:** As a group, discuss creative ways to transition to and from work.

### **3. Develop a 5 Minute Plan of Self Care**

**Objective:** To recognize the activities that feed your soul, give you joy, calm your spirit, and renew your zest for life and work.

**Exercise:** Identify physical, emotional, or spiritual activities that you ENJOY doing. Develop a specific plan as to when, where, how, and with whom you plan on making this activity a part of your daily routine. Revisit this plan of care periodically and hold yourself accountable to the goals you establish today.

## **A Caregiving Benediction**

(*Caregiving for the GENIUS*, Chapter 22. Jane W. Barton, 2013)

A benediction is a short invocation in which we ask for help, blessings, and guidance. Therefore, there is no better way to conclude our conversation about the journey of caregiving than with a benediction. We need all the help we can get as we care for each other! So, as the caregiving journey unfolds one step at a time, may we all be blessed in the following ways:

May we have the courage to care for each other.

May we feel companioned in the caregiving journey.

May we have the wisdom to prepare to care.

May we have sustaining faith to confront our fears.

May we graciously offer and receive help.

May we discover strength unimagined during times of loss.

May we remain hope-full during the times of trial.

May we recognize the sacred in the ordinary.

May we engage the journey one step at a time.

May we be grateful for the moment.

May we humbly answer the call to care.

May we listen well, love deeply, and live fully-all the way to the end of the road.

May it be so.

## **Resources**

AARP Caregiver's Cairn - A Blog for Caregivers and Care Receivers

<http://states.aarp.org/janes-caregiving-cairn/>

AARP Caregiving Resource Center

<http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/>

*Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue Into Flow (Paperback)*

by Karl La Rowe, 2005.

CAREConnection: <https://careconnection.aarp.org/en/home.html>

*Caregiving for the GENIUS*. Barton, Jane. 2013.

Colorado Respite Coalition: <http://www.coloradorespitecoalition.org/>

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project: <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>

*Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized*. Figley CR, ed. New York: Brunner/Mazel; 1995.

*Help for the Helper: The Psychophysiology of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma* (Hardcover) by Babette Rothschild, 2006.

*Overcoming Secondary Stress in Medical and Nursing Practice*. Wicks, Robert J. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

The Fable of the Bridge: <http://www.thecruxmovie.com/pdf/TheBridgeShortStory.pdf>

*The Helpers Journey*. Larson, Dale. 1993.

*The Truth About Burnout*. Maslach C, Leiter MP. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 1997.

*To Weep For A Stranger: Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving* (Paperback) by Patricia Smith. 2009.