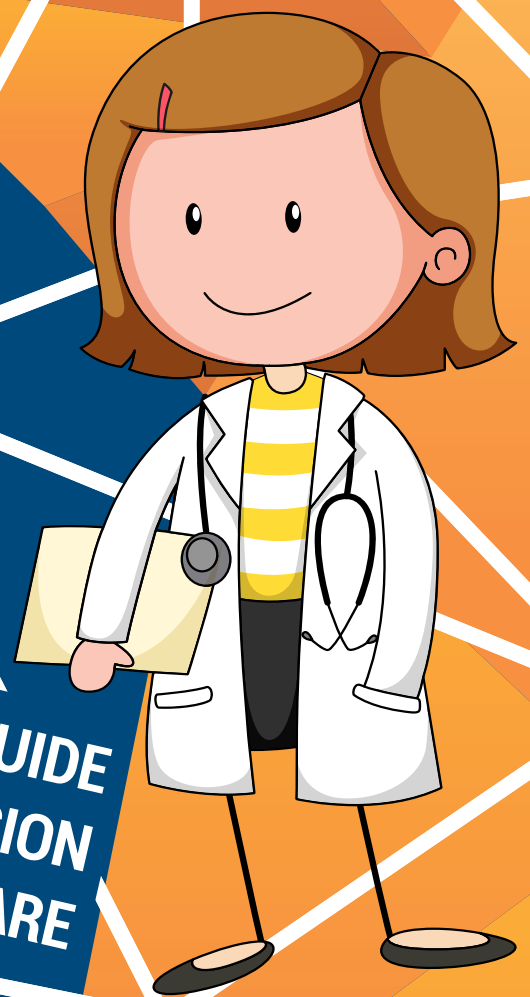


# SUFFERING DURING PANDEMIC TIMES



A GUIDE  
TO FOSTERING COMPASSION  
IN INTENSIVE HEALTH CARE

*Target audience: Intensive  
health care professionals*



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*Suffering during pandemic times: A guide to fostering compassion in intensive health care*

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## HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

This material is intended **to take care of you, and for those who provide care to others**. That is, to assist intensive care professionals who are at the frontline in the fight against COVID-19. In these **first two pages**, we present the **summarized contents**, in order to facilitate the reading of the central points of the text. After each summary, we have a hyperlink to anyone who wants **to deepen their knowledge**. Just click on it and you will be directed to the point of interest.

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING OF THOSE WHO CARE: THE PAIN OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Psychological discomfort and emotional instability affect everyone, including professionals in intensive care. **Assessing the situation is essential, as underestimating or overestimating risks can be a dangerous trap. Finding balance is the great challenge of this moment** and, to help you accomplish this, we have carried out a careful review of scientific studies so that you can have a clearer idea of the dimensions of the problem to be faced. What do critical care professionals face? [\(Click here to learn more\)](#).

## COMPASSION: WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT HELP?

All people suffer throughout their lives from losses due to illness, death (both their own and that of their loved ones), or even the aging process.

Compassion consists of a deep desire to alleviate suffering. It involves a willingness to deal with suffering, struggles and difficulties, and it entails engaging with those experiences in an attempt to make things better.

- It is a natural response awakened in us (of empathic care) in the face of suffering [\(click here to learn more\)](#).

## WORKING AS A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC IS AN EXERCISE OF COMPASSION

In the fight against COVID-19, the search for relief of suffering plays a central role in the performance of health professionals. Compassion has three different interconnected facets that can be important strategies for coping with stress: self-compassion, compassion for others, and openness to receive compassion from others. **Regarding self-pity, for many people self-criticism is a habit so ingrained that they don't even realize how hard they are on themselves. We rarely say harsh things to a dear friend, but we talk badly to ourselves all the time.** See some examples: [\(click here to learn more\)](#).

## HOW TO DEVELOP SELF-COMPASSION AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?

In this section, we present a list of stressors that may be present during the pandemic. **Noticing suffering is a strategy that we can exercise to practice self-care and self-compassion.** We also demonstrate here how you can deal with these stressors in a compassionate way (what we call coping strategies). We

present some exercises such as the comforting touch, the compassionate letter, the affectionate breathing, among others. **All practices are described and can help you cope with the stress caused by the pandemic, bringing some relief.** [\(Click here to learn more\).](#)

## AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS?

The exercise of compassion for others is also a possible way of relieving a professional's pain during the pandemic. **Consciously cultivating compassion for others in your work routine as an intensive care professional can help you feel more satisfied with your own life.** And, did you know that compassion for others can also be trained? That's right! Below you will find exercises with simple and objective instructions to help develop compassion for others. These exercises can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Just follow these steps [\(click here to learn more\).](#)

## RECEIVING COMPASSION FROM OTHERS: HOW TO ALLOW YOURSELF?

**Many people find it difficult to ask for or accept help. They try to solve everything on their own, even when they really need support (maybe you have already had moments like this, or are currently experiencing this type of situation). And it can be critical that health care professionals accept the compassion of others.** In this section, we present a list of reasons that justify how important this is for health. We also provide a list of signs of resistance to receiving compassion from others. Afterward, we describe strategies to reduce this resistance. We draw attention to the connection between the three facets of compassion. So, if you have a tendency to self-criticize, then you are more likely to be reluctant to accept compassion. A simple and effective exercise to cultivate the ability to receive compassion is as follows: [\(click here to learn more\).](#) [\(click here to learn more\).](#)

## HOW DO I KNOW WHEN AND WHERE I SHOULD SEEK HELP?

In this section we present a **list of signs and symptoms** that may indicate that you are in need of professional support from a psychologist or psychiatrist. Additionally, we indicate where you can seek assistance if you think it is necessary. [\(Click here to learn more\).](#)

## CONCLUSIONS

Compassion is essential for helping to relive suffering, which is undoubtedly the main objective of health care professionals. Patients, families, health care providers, professional societies and health care organizations have identified compassion as a hallmark of quality care. **Compassion is understood as a form of strength that enables people to deal with difficulties, suffering and problems in a healthier way. It is a movement permeated by kindness and motivated by the objective of promoting better lives.** [\(Click here to learn more\).](#)

# SUFFERING IN PANDEMIC TIMES

## A GUIDE TO FOSTERING COMPASSION IN INTENSIVE HEALTH CARE

**Target audience:** Intensive health care professionals

In times of pandemic by COVID-19, psychological discomfort and emotional instability affect not only infected people and their families, but also professionals who work on the front lines, especially those who work in intensive care.

Health care teams experience significant emotional distress due to the peculiarities involved in their work during a health emergency. Therefore, this material aims to help you, an intensive care professional, who is working to confront COVID-19.

First, it is necessary to make a realistic and comprehensive assessment of the current situation. Denying or underestimating reality is not useful, just as there is no use in exaggerating or overestimating what is happening. It takes common sense and balance. We cannot adequately address a problem whose breadth, impact, or consequences are not at all known.

For this reason, we conducted a comprehensive review of scientific studies in order to assist you in analyzing the dimension of the problem to be faced. Of course, not all intensive care services will have the same characteristics. However, it is necessary that we are prepared for possible developments that have already been identified around the world and, indeed, in many Brazilian health care services.

### WHAT DO CRITICAL CARE PROFESSIONALS FACE OR MAY FACE??

- The need to prepare for the sudden increase in critically ill inpatients with the potential for rapid worsening.
- High transmissibility of the virus.
- Realistic concern about being infected (in China, infected professionals represented 29% of all patients with COVID-19), along with an increasing sense of vulnerability.
- Fear of being vehicles for the contamination of friends, family and other close people.
- Sudden and varied changes in the work environment.
- Physical discomfort caused by protective clothing.

- Suffering, powerlessness, guilt, feeling of loss of control, and loss of confidence in one's own abilities, as they witness the increasing deaths of critical patients (despite all efforts).
- Anguish and discomfort in the face of the reactions of family members in the death reports of patients.
- Psychological pressure due to the perception of high responsibility.
- Need to continue working, even when witnessing infection, hospitalization or the death of co-workers.
- Shortage of personal protective equipment at work, together with the perception that other protective measures in the workplace should be implemented, which intensifies the fear of exposure and the feeling of vulnerability.
- Difficulties with transportation due to the restriction or suspension of public transport.
- Shortage of respirators and other equipment needed for healthcare.
- Voluntary isolation from the family to reduce the risk of contaminating them, which can increase feelings of loneliness, fear, and loss of freedom.
- Insecurity and fear of taking on new clinical roles and responsibilities.
- Overload due to increased workload, the need to "amend" one shift on another, together with tiredness and basic needs not met or reduced (such as food and sleep).
- Limited access to mental health services to manage stress and emotional overload.
- Psychological suffering, including symptoms of anxiety and depression, excessive worry, insomnia, acute stress and work-related stress.
- Little motivation for work, which can be intensified by colleagues giving up (example: resignations, presentation of medical certificates) or witnessing their psychological illness (such as post-traumatic stress, acute stress, anxiety attacks, and / or intensification of pre-existing mental health conditions).

Due to the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, stress levels have increased enormously, which can in turn have negative effects on the physical and mental health of intensive care professionals. However, **this does not mean that they need to spend this period alone.**

In the face of so many discomforts, we will talk about how compassion can help us. More specifically, this practical guide will provide tips and suggestions for exercises that you, the intensive care professional, will be able to practice in order to better deal with the challenges of your profession during the pandemic.





## BUT AFTER ALL, WHAT IS COMPASSION?

All people suffer throughout their lives, whether due to aging, illness or death (both their own and that of their loved ones).

Compassion consists of a deep desire to alleviate suffering. It involves a willingness to deal with suffering, struggles and difficulties, and engaging with those experiences in an attempt to make things better.

- It is a natural response of empathic care that is awakened in us in the face of suffering (our own or others).
- Compassion has evolutionary roots, as it is responsible for helping promote group cohesion and self-care.
- It encompasses a genuine and disinterested desire for people to be safe, happy and successful.
- Another way to view compassion is as a natural result of paying genuine attention to what is around us. Observe the metaphor below:

### METAPHOR - COMPASSION, EMPATHY AND OPENNESS

Peter tells his friend, John, the following story: Eight months ago, I has breakfast every day in the same cafeteria. After having his coffee, he passes by the cashier, where he is attended by the same employee. One day he realized that, although he was always attended by the same woman, he had never really stopped to notice her. Then, he was embarrassed and thought to himself: *"What a horror, I have treated you as a mere cash register, but with arms"*. The same day, he returned to the cafeteria determined to focus all his attention on her. The first thing she noticed was that she was singing a song that was playing on the radio, and that she had a very beautiful voice. When I told her that, she responded with a big, radiant smile. As soon as Peter told this to John, John realized that he also often goes to the same cafeteria (and that he had not noticed that woman either). Then John thought: *"I will go to the cafeteria and say that I heard that she has a very beautiful voice. So I will also make you happy and notice your smile"*. However, as soon as John arrived at the cafeteria, he noticed that she was already smiling. It was then that John realized how much is lost by not paying attention to people. **People are human beings, not pieces of furniture. Each of us has a life, a story, different feelings, joys, and pains... If we pay attention to each other, we will recognize this, and our lives will be enriched by a continuous sense of connection and discovery. This is the opening for true compassion.**



## WORKING AS A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL IN THE MIDDLE OF PANDEMIC IS AN EXERCISE OF COMPASSION

In the fight against COVID-19, the search for relief of suffering plays a central role in the performance of health professionals. Compassion has three different interconnected facets that can be important strategies for coping with stress:

- (1) **Self-compassion:** This is the compassion that we direct to ourselves. Physical and mental self-care are demonstrations of self-compassion.
- (2) **Compassion for others:** This is the compassion that we direct to other human beings, such as family, friends, colleagues, patients, and others.
- (3) **Receiving compassion from others:** To be able to care for others, the other person must be open to receiving (or requesting) care. How many times, as a health professional, have you encountered patients who did not ask for something... who did not want to be "disturbed"? Likewise, one of the ways to overcome the obstacle of work overload is to receive (or accept) help from others.

### SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion refers to our ability to direct compassion toward ourselves. In general, it can be observed when, in situations of suffering, we treat ourselves in the same way we would treat a very close friend.

**Practical considerations:** Suffering may be a mistake that you have made; failure / frustrations for not being able to reach a goal, or for not doing well in some evaluation process; feelings of guilt or inadequacy; some difficulty you are experiencing; among others.

It can be seen in three different aspects:

**1. Mindfulness:** This consists of the ability to **notice our discomfort** together with a **willingness / openness to contact this pain**.

**Practical considerations:** If we are so busy that we don't even have the ability to stop to realize what we are feeling, then we may have a hard time showing compassion for ourselves.

The more we recognize our difficulties, the easier it is to overcome them. And, in time, those emotions that seemed so scary no longer seem as scary anymore.

We can focus on our difficult emotions, not with the aim of condemning them, but with openness, kindness and a commitment to doing better.



**2. Shared Humanity:** Remember that suffering and imperfection are a central part of the human experience and are things that we all face.

➤ It's okay to make mistakes, fail and not be perfect. We all make mistakes, fail and are imperfect, without exception.

**Practical considerations:** What often happens is that when people get frustrated, make mistakes, are disappointed, or go through internal conflicts, there is a belief **that everyone else is doing great and having perfect lives**. So, when I am disappointed or frustrated with myself, and there is a kind of "baseline" that presupposes perfection, this ends up making me feel isolated and alone in the face of my suffering.

Self-compassion reminds us **that suffering, in its most varied forms, is normal. It is part of the human experience. And, based on this assumption of shared humanity, it is precisely when we suffer that we feel most connected to others** (instead of feeling isolated).

**3. Kindness to yourself:** **This consists of adopting a posture of kindness and self-care in response to one's own suffering.** In other words, it involves treating yourself with kindness and care instead of judging and criticizing yourself. Thus, it is essential that the intensive care professional is aware of his own limitations, trying to re-establish himself in a self-compassionate manner. One of the ways to take care of ourselves and, therefore, to be in a better position to care for others, is through self-directed kindness.

#### **Practical considerations**

➤ We are generally much more critical of ourselves than of those we like. And we are even more critical of ourselves than of people we don't like.

➤ For many people, self-criticism is a habit so ingrained that they don't even realize how hard they are on themselves. We rarely say harsh things to a dear friend, but we talk to ourselves all the time. Here are some examples:

*"I'm too lazy."*

*"I always do things poorly."*

*"I should have done a lot better, I didn't try hard enough."*

*"I am fat."*

*"This outfit looks horrible."*

*"It was ridiculous that I said that."*

### **Resistances to self-compassion**

There may be strong resistance to the term "self-pity" due to some confusion. You may think:

"But if I'm not critical of myself, won't that make me resigned to my mistakes, making change difficult?" No. **Being self-compassionate will not make you ignore**

your mistakes, but it will make you deal with your own suffering in a more gentle way and without so much judgment. Contrary to popular belief, research has shown that self-criticism generates more demotivation, and not the other way around. In addition, self-compassion implies the courage to get in touch with discomfort, learn from it, and move on.

*"I don't want to feel sorry for myself!"* People tend to quickly relate self-pity to self-pity. However, self-pity encourages people to have the courage to stop and realize the error. For this to be possible, it is necessary that we have the ability to notice and accept our own limitations so that it is possible to do differently and take responsibility for our actions.

## Exercising self-compassion

Managing your mental health and psychosocial well-being during this time is as important as managing your physical health. Below you can read some phrases that can help you identify challenges in your own life. They concern possible stressors that may be present during the pandemic.

Remember: noticing suffering is important so that we can exercise our self-care, or self-compassion.

### Stressors

- I am afraid of contaminating my family members or other important people.
- I have a responsibility to be a means of contagion for patients.
- I am afraid of contaminating myself.
- I am afraid that something worse will happen to me and important people will be left unattended.
- I feel anxious when I go to work.
- I feel overwhelmed at my job.
- I am concerned that, due to the scarcity of resources or beds, I need to "choose" who will be treated.
- I am afraid that my patients will die.
- I feel discomfort with protective clothing.
- I feel guilty for not being able to help anymore ... I feel helpless in the face of this situation.
- I have to follow strict service protocols, even if I don't agree with them.
- I feel very responsible for the health of the patients.
- I feel socially isolated or distant from my family and / or friends.
- I perceive angry colleagues and / or get easily irritated.
- I feel misunderstood by those who are not health professionals and have expectations that our work cannot guarantee.

## How to deal with stressors in a compassionate way?

The different ways in which we deal with stress can be considered coping strategies. There are more suitable strategies than others to deal with the different stressors that we may face. If you have detected one or more stressors listed in the table above, the compassionate coping strategies that we will present below can help you.

**Note:** The same strategy can be useful to deal with different stressors.

### 1. Comforting touch

We are less likely to receive physical expressions of kindness when we are quarantined, but we can still comfort ourselves with our own touch. Our skin is an organ extremely sensitive to touch. By physically touching our body, in a gentle, caring and welcoming way, we can cause our brain to trigger chemical reactions that are capable of generating an internal feeling of tranquillity, peace, comfort and security, reducing cardiovascular stress and easing intense and painful emotions. Don't be ashamed to offer yourself a hug, or to put your hand gently over your heart, when you need it most. Try to understand the kind of physical touch that seems to work best for you. Some examples are:

- Place your hands on your heart, abdomen or face;
- Caress your own hand;
- Place one hand under the other, or inside the other;
- Caress your own face;
- Put your hands together and place them close to your face, closing your eyes, as if you were going to sleep;
- Embrace yourself;
- Massage the back of the neck or neck;
- Give yourself a cuddle.



This touch is a gesture of self-care and can also serve as a relaxation exercise in times of stress.

### 2. Compassionate letter

Write a letter, or some compassionate and loving words to yourself. This exercise can be useful in times of difficulty, doubts and uncertainties.

You can write the letter in three ways:

- Think of someone (it may be imaginary) that you consider intelligent, loving and compassionate. Then write a letter to you from that person's perspective.
- Write a letter as if you were talking to a dear friend who was in the same situation as you.
- Write a letter sent by your "Wise Me", "Higher Me", "Compassionate Me" (or as you prefer to call your most evolved part) directed to the version of you that is facing difficulties.

After writing the letter, read slowly, letting the words soothe and comfort you.

### 3. Affectionate breathing

This exercise aims to make the mind more focused and calm.

- Find a comfortable posture, in a place where you will not be disturbed.
- Then, let your eyes close gently.
- Breathe a few times, lightly and gently, releasing unnecessary tensions from your body.
- If you wish, try placing a hand on your chest, or in another calming place, as a reminder that we are cultivating not only any conscience, but a loving conscience.
- Start observing the breath in your body, feeling it inhale and exhale. Simply notice the natural rhythm of your breathing, flowing in and out.
- Feel your entire body subtly moving with your breath, like the movement of the sea, as if your whole body is breathing.
- Your mind will naturally wander (like a curious child). When that happens, just redirect your attention to the rhythm of your breathing.
- Allow your entire body to be gently enveloped by the rhythm of your breathing.
- Gradually release your attention from your breath. Connect with your experience and allow yourself to feel what you are feeling, and just be as you are.

### 4. Self-management of stress

Although it is impossible to get rid of stress entirely, some adjustments to your routine can help minimize overload. Below are some tips for self-management of stress:

- Plan, prioritize and choose carefully the activities for which you will engage.
- Acknowledge your limits.
- When considering the different areas of your life, note and record:
  1. The useful behaviours you currently perform that help you deal with the stress of being an intensive care professional;
  2. Unproductive activities that increase your stress level;
  3. Viable changes that you can include to take better care of yourself.

A single practice of self-pity will not change your life, as it is a skill that needs to be trained. With practice, we hope that we will be able to adopt an open, courageous, gentle and supportive attitude toward ourselves in the face of struggles and difficulties.



## COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

The people who witness suffering, when taken by compassion, feel an intense desire to help those who suffer.

Before talking about this in detail, it is important to be aware of the reality faced by patients with COVID-19 with regard to emotional aspects. To facilitate this process, we highlight the main points in the table below. Let's see:

### COVID-19 patients may experience different types of psychological distress, such as:

- symptoms of anxiety and depression;
- anguish and uncertainty related to the development of the disease itself;
- impotence in the face of the fact that there is no effective medication for the disease;
- impotence, sadness or anger at the possibility of dying without being able to say goodbye to important people;
- fear of contaminating family members;
- irritability and lack of patience;
- tension and stress;
- worsening of pre-existing psychological disorders;
- feelings of loneliness.

### The exercise of compassion for others as a possible way to relieve the professional's pain during the pandemic

Compassion for others is manifested in actions of kindness, care, goodness, patience, giving, generosity towards others, whether they are patients, family members or co-workers.

Consciously cultivating compassion for others in your work routine as an intensive care professional can help you feel more satisfied with your own life. Hence, the importance of giving ourselves permission to be compassionate, knowing that everyone is wrong (shared humanity).

Taking care of your well-being, being sensitive to other people's needs, exercising the ability to tolerate emotional suffering and cultivating a non-judgmental attitude are aspects that can be developed and that are part of compassion.

### What would compassionate health care look like?

In a compassionate health care system, patients, family members and the health team itself would feel heard, safe, supported and cared for. In this sense, being in tune with your own needs and those of your colleagues is a good alternative.

**Practical considerations:** We know that it is difficult to always be compassionate, as this is a skill that needs to be trained and that is constantly evolving. Thus, it is emphasized that the description aims to illustrate what is sought, ideally.

## Exercising compassion for others through loving kindness

Below you will read instructions for performing an exercise in loving kindness. You can do this exercise with specific people in mind, such as a patient, family members, or teammates, for example. To perform, just stop a few minutes or seconds and follow the steps below:

- Desires directly or well for others by silently repeating a phrase "That all human beings have wisdom to face their pain and be well".
- Turn your attention to your breathing and seek, if possible, to change a little more slowly and deeply.
- Bring to your memory a situation that you deeply desire or well-being for someone you love deeply.
- Seek to connect with this loving emotion of compassion.
- If you are connected to this emotion, it will be amplified, desirable or well-being for all who like it.
- End this exercise with three breaths, repeating the phrase "*May all human beings have wisdom to face their pain and be well*".

Studies show that loving-kindness exercises can act on neural systems and foster a compilation to get and understand episodes, or that they are very important to gain some degree of use and rebalance in the midst of an extreme situation.

## Giving and receiving compassion

- Sit in a comfortable place and let your eyes close gently.
- Place a hand on your chest, remembering to cultivate not only greater awareness, but a loving awareness.
- Breathe deeply, feeling your body relax with the movement of your breath.
- Gradually, let your breathing find its natural rhythm. And just watch.
- Now, focus your attention on the inspiration movement, enjoy the experience of feeling or entering your body.
- With each breath, imagine that you are inspiring kindness and compassion for it. Images or words of compassion may arise.
- Change the focus to your exhalation: feel your body release air.
- Look for someone who is in love or is experiencing difficulty. Visualize that person.
- Direct your breath to that person, offering them tranquility and compassion.
- Observe an inhalation and an exhalation. Dedicating inspiration to yourself and breathing to others.
- You can think of it as words: "One for me and one for you".
- I breathe goodness and compassion into myself and I breathe goodness and compassion into the other.



## RECEIVING COMPASSION FROM OTHERS

Many people find it difficult to ask for or accept help. They try to solve everything on their own, even when they really need support. Maybe you have already had moments like this, or are currently experiencing this type of situation. As well as being compassionate toward others, being able to receive compassion in difficult times can be a good strategy for dealing with the stress of the pandemic.

### Why is it important for healthcare professionals to accept others' compassion for them?

- Receiving compassion from others increases your ability to understand the emotional state of patients, family members and colleagues.
- Accepting the kindness, support and care of others towards us is an act of self-care (self-compassion).
- In addition, receiving compassion from others helps to re-establish emotional balance and alleviate psychological distress, which can impair attention, cognitive functioning and clinical decision-making.

### Identifying signs of resistance to receiving compassion from others

Resistance to receiving compassion from others is more common than we think. Check below some signs that may indicate the presence of this resistance:

- Believing that wanting people to be kind to us is a sign of weakness.
- Charge yourself to always be able to “handle” everything yourself.
- Feeling that you owe a favour to the person who is good to you.
- Fear that others will feel sorry for you if they hear about the difficulties you are going through.
- Fear of “opening up” to someone and that person exposes his life to everyone.
- Feeling that you have failed, if you need to ask for support, support or help for someone.
- Fear that they think you are playing “poor thing”.
- I am afraid of becoming too dependent on the care and help of others, to the point of not being able to function independently when needed.
- Feeling that you are “abusing” the goodwill of others and that no one has anything to do with your problems.
- Being embarrassed, anxious, embarrassed or uncomfortable when people are compassionate towards you.
- Faced with free demonstrations of compassion, asking yourself what the person wants from you “in return”.
- Feeling empty, sad, or incomplete, when people show compassion for you.
- Be afraid that people who are kind to you will walk away if they discover something “bad” about you.
- Don't feel taken care of, no matter how compassionate people are towards you.

## What can be done to reduce resistance to receiving compassion?

If you have identified signs of resistance to receiving compassion from others, know that this is directly related to your ability to be compassionate with yourself.

We need to take care of our own needs first, so that we can be compassionate towards others without feeling exploited or overwhelmed. When this happens, our suspicions about the genuineness of compassion that others offer us also fall apart.

**If you have a tendency to self-criticize, then you are more likely to be reluctant to accept compassion. You are not a robot. You don't have to (and shouldn't) take care of everything by yourself.** If you have difficulty receiving compassion from others (or yourself), know that you are not alone.

– Imagine that someone important to you is going through a difficult situation, during which you could help to ease the discomfort. However, this someone decides not to tell him, facing everything alone and suffering much more than necessary. How would you feel when you finally learned what happened? Yeah ... People who care about you feel exactly the same when you leave them out of their difficult times.

– A simple and effective exercise to cultivate the ability to receive compassion is as follows: Before going to sleep, reflect on the different ways you have shown compassion to yourself throughout the day and what you could have done differently. Also, reflect on whether you are in need of care, support, help, support, listening (ie, compassion) from others. If so, let people know who can help (even if doing so is uncomfortable).

– Remind yourself that cultivating compassion takes time, requires courage, tolerance of discomfort and commitment to change.

– If you are reluctant and uncomfortable to receive compassion from others, how about being compassionate with yourself in the face of this discomfort?

All people, including you, are worthy of receiving kindness, kindness and compassion. Depending on how you are feeling, you may need to seek professional assistance.



### How do I know when to seek help?

Below is a list of signs and symptoms that may indicate that you are overworked and possibly in need of professional support from a psychologist or psychiatrist:

- I feel that I have little energy for work or other activities.
- I realize that my productivity at work is impaired.
- I don't feel motivated or excited to do almost anything.
- I have been irritated easily and disproportionately to the reason.
- I feel sadder than usual, on a recurring basis.
- I am more anxious, nervous, restless, or agitated than usual.

- I have severe difficulty in maintaining attention or concentrating on activities.
- Physical complaints such as pain, gastric problems, or headache.
- Sleep much more or less than usual.
- I feel that there is little to expect from the future.
- I often have the feeling of worthlessness.
- I have been feeling very competent or very insecure in my work.
- I feel a kind of “emotional tiredness”, as if I were exhausted.
- I find it difficult to promote effective treatment for patients.
- I find it difficult to connect with myself and my emotions.
- I find it difficult to connect emotionally with people, in my personal life, or at work.
- I feel disappointed with the institution where I work and / or with my profession.

**Attention:** Remember that feeling this way at times is completely normal. Pay attention to the intensity and duration of these signs and symptoms, as well as the impact they have on your life as a whole.

### Where to get professional help?

If you think any professional assistance is necessary, you can seek professional help in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; website <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help/immediate-help>, and in the Top Helpline Resources (website <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/NAMI-HelpLine/Top-HelpLine-Resources>).

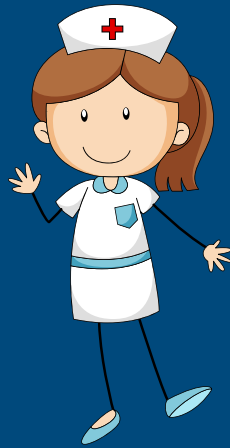
**Remember.** The COVID-19 pandemic can be very difficult for you as a health professional, but the situation will not last forever. Try to focus on what you can do for yourself and for others right now. Later, when the pandemic subsides, it will be time to think of other resources that can help you and others in the long run.

## CONCLUSIONS

Compassion is essential for the relief of suffering, which is undoubtedly the main objective of health care professionals. Empathy and compassion have a beneficial impact on patients' health outcomes (including mortality), training and satisfaction rates, as well as reducing complaints of negligence.

Patients, families, health care providers, professional societies and health care organizations identify compassion as a hallmark of quality care. The role of compassion in healthcare is evident. Just look at your prominent position in patient rights codes, clinical practices guidelines, health care reform proposals and health care quality assessment systems.

Compassion is understood as a form of strength that enables us to deal with difficulties, suffering or problems in a healthier way. It is a movement permeated by kindness and motivated by the objective to promote better lives.



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**Translation:** Marília Cury Cazassa.

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