

Compassion Fatigue & Emotional Numbing

When repeated exposure to others' suffering changes how much emotional capacity you have left.

What it can look like

Reduced empathy, irritability, cynicism, dread, detachment, intrusive images, guilt about not caring enough, or feeling emotionally “flat” can emerge after prolonged exposure to suffering.

Numbing can be protective

Emotional distance may help a person function during difficult calls. Problems develop when the nervous system no longer knows when to reopen connection.

Recovery supports

- Protect genuine off-duty time.
- Reconnect with relationships and activities that are not built around crisis.
- Use peer consultation to process difficult exposure.
- Watch for escalating alcohol use, isolation, and sleep disruption.
- Seek trauma-informed therapy when numbness, cynicism, or intrusive symptoms persist.

Try this reflection

Where do you notice emotional numbing helping you function, and where is it starting to cost you connection?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.