

Washington State University

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

Animal Caregiver Training (ACT)

What is ACT?

It is essential you look through these materials in order to understand compassion fatigue (CF) and what can be done to address the issue. Please note that physical injuries occurring in the workplace are not covered under this program.

Know Compassion Fatigue

CF stems from absorbing the suffering of your patients and/or clients. If you work with animals that experience pain and distress, or are responsible for the euthanasia of living beings under your care, you could experience the following:

- Increased stress at work
- Difficulty concentrating on the job
- Bodily pain in your work environment

A Common Condition

Even if you momentarily experience any of these, you may be experiencing CF. There is a high rate of CF in animal caregivers. If you are experiencing CF, please know that there is assistance available and the first step towards helping yourself is gaining a better understanding of the issue.

Self-care

Witnessing the pain of others can take a cumulative toll. Caregivers often begin in their roles with great enthusiasm and sense of purpose, but repeated exposure to painful and/or distressing experiences might eventually lead to workplace stress, burnout, exhaustion, irritability, and consideration of a career change. If you experience these symptoms, you should allow yourself time for self-care.

Reducing CF at Work

Consider taking action to create a more comfortable work environment. Try making the following changes in your workplace:

- Schedule times in advance for breaks
- Remind yourself of your positive career goals.
- Encourage social support between staff

Reducing impact of CF in your home life

One of the more difficult aspects of CF is that struggles from work often impact home life. It is recommended to try these strategies when you're not at work to ease the effects of CF:

- Create boundaries between work and home life to allow time to de-stress.
- Intentionally make time to have close conversations with others you care about.
- Promote self-care, resiliency, and wellness through activities such as exercise, a healthy diet, a full-night's sleep, meditation, relaxation, etc.

If you need more help

Even if you have only momentarily experienced CF, you are encouraged to do something about it. Many caregivers cope with CF through a renewed emphasis on self-care and, when necessary, the help of a counselor.

- **Student Contact:** If you are a student looking for a counselor, you should contact the Washington State University Mental Health and Counseling Center. Please view the [Counseling Center Webpage](#) for contact and appointment information.
- **Employee Contact:** If you are an employee looking for a counselor, you should contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Please view the [EAP Webpage](#) for contact and appointment information.
- **After Hours Contact:** If you require assistance after working hours (Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm) or during the weekend, please call the mental health hotline at Palouse River Counseling: 509- 334-1133.

CF Presentation

You can access more detailed information about CF in this [presentation](#).