



## **School Nurses in the Age of Coronavirus:**

Prevention and Well-Being for Self, Students, and Staff — Now More Than Ever!

## **Offering *and* Finding Compassion in the Distancing**



Please be mindful that some content may be triggering!



### Five Finger Breathing

<https://youtu.be/oBA1CYaakCo>

### Donna Gaffney, DNSc, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN



Donna is a nurse, psychotherapist, author and educator, and has long addressed a wide range of life-altering experiences in the lives of children and families—loss, trauma, and stress. She has counseled professionals, young people and schools in the aftermath of individual and national tragedies — 9/11, Sandy Hook, and Hurricane Katrina. In addition to academic papers, Donna is the author of *The Seasons of Grief, Helping Children Grow Through Loss*. She taught at Columbia University School of Nursing, and holds master's degrees from Teachers College, Columbia University; Rutgers University, and a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. Her post-doctoral work includes the Prudential Fellowship for Children and the News at Columbia Journalism School. Donna consults for the New York Life Foundation and the Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families Program at Arizona State University.

## Objectives



- Define the self-protective benefits of compassion.
- Assess one's boundaries of empathy.
- Describe how to be present for students, staff, and colleagues
- Identify actions that enhance compassion and empathy-building.



Special Thanks to Dr. Anne Hofmeyer for her knowledge and leadership in the field of compassion.

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.

Nelson Mandela

## WHY WE DO THIS WORK. . .



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## COMPASSION. . . “TO SUFFER TOGETHER ”

- Compassion is the feeling that arises in *witnessing* another’s suffering which then motivates a subsequent desire to help in order to *relieve* that suffering.
  - An affective state defined by a specific subjective feeling.
    - Warmth, empathic concern, capacity to understand the other’s perspective and intentions
  - Those emotions and thoughts *include the desire to help*.
- Empathy
  - Empathy refers to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person,
  - while recognizing that the emotions we experience are external to oneself, and are initiated by the other person.
- Sympathy
  - An “emotional reaction that is based on the apprehension of another’s emotional state or condition and that involves feelings of concern and sorrow for the other person”.
- Pity involves the additional appraisal of feeling concern for someone considered inferior to the self.

Eisenberg et al., 1994; Goetz, J. L., Keltner, D., & Simon-Thomas, E. (2010)

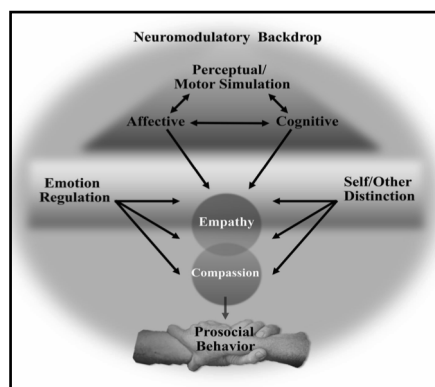


Photo: Nathan Dumilao on Unsplash

In healthy empathic responses, three steps occur:

1. Taking another person's perspective (mentalizing)
  - To see another's situation from their perspective through imagination Resulting abstract, propositional knowledge about the other's mental state.
2. Self-awareness (self-other distinction)
  - Distinguish one's mental state from that of others
3. Emotion regulation

Hofmeyer et al, 2019; Klimecki, 2015; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Valk et al., 2017



Mascaro JS, Darcher A, Negi LT and Raison CL (2015) The neural mediators of kindness-based meditation: a theoretical model. *Front. Psychol.* 6:109. CC Attribution 4.0 International

Hofmeyer et al, 2019; Singer & Klimecki, 2014

- Empathic experiences are caused by activation of similar neural networks that process first-person experiences.
- When one empathizes with a person who is in pain, the brain shows activation of similar circuits as the brain of the suffering person.
- Empathy is essential for understanding others' emotions, but when sharing the suffering of others *excessively* negative emotions and distress increases.

## ACTING ON THE DESIRE TO HELP . . .



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## Knock Knock . . .



Students who . . .

Come to your office often with subjective complaints

- Nausea
- Headache
- Have very vague symptoms
- Visit every day at the same time



## BREAKOUT ROOMS

1. Recognize suffering
2. Universality of suffering
3. Feeling for the person
4. Tolerating uncomfortable feelings
5. Acting to alleviate pain

## ACTING ON THE DESIRE TO HELP. . .

- Helping has the potential to be a source of positive transformations in people's lives, and can give rise to a sense of satisfaction.

Chen, F. P., & Greenberg, J. S. (2004)

- Gaining a sense of fulfillment for meeting a duty / obligation, and enjoyment derived from helping itself or from companionship with the recipient.

Cohen, C. A., Colantonio, A., & Vernich, L. (2002).

## THE SCIENCE OF COMPASSION



Photo: Bentley Waters

## THE SCIENCE OF COMPASSION. . .

- Two distinct neural pathways that are not in opposition.
  - socio- affective (empathy)
  - socio-cognitive (compassion)
- Compassionate action activates pleasure circuits in the brain.
  - Self-reports of compassion predicted greater activation in dopaminergic reward signaling areas and ventral tegmental area. This finding provides evidence that there is an intrinsic reward to compassion, one that could help outweigh any costs or risks.
  - Contemporary fMRI studies show the neurological areas activated with compassion include the medial orbitofrontal cortex and ventral striatum.
- Linked to reward and affiliation processing with oxytocin and vasopressin receptors that stimulates positive affect towards those who are suffering.
- Compassion activates networks that provide a protective action from stress.
- Heart rate deceleration has been shown to occur in situations that evoke compassion.
- Compassion training can increase resilience to stress; it lowers stress hormones in the blood and saliva and strengthens the immune response.



Photo: Yoann Boyer for Unsplash

Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010; Klimecki, et al, 2013.

## Too Much. . . Empathic Distress Fatigue

“ A strong aversive and self-oriented response to the suffering of others, accompanied by the desire to withdraw from a situation, disconnect from those who are suffering, and adopting depersonalizing behaviors in order to protect oneself from excessive negative feelings. Singer & Klimecki, 2014



Photo: Nadine Shabaana for Unsplash

- Compassion *does not cause fatigue*, ‘empathic distress fatigue’ may be more appropriate.
- fMRI research shows that ‘empathic distress fatigue’ is triggered when the ‘self-other’ distinction is blurred, and clinicians experience the distress of others as their own.
- Without emotion regulation skills, the ‘self-other’ distinction is blurred. Clinicians absorb another’s pain and negative emotions and suffer empathic distress fatigue and triggers:
  - An intense neurological response, fMRI studies reveal overwhelming pain and distress
  - Withdrawal behaviors to protect oneself, empathic distress, and poor role performance.

Hofmeyer et al, 2019; Klimecki, 2015; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Valk et al., 2017; Vachon, 2016

- Feeling compassion for one person makes us less vindictive to others.
- Employees who receive more compassion at work see themselves, their co-workers, and their organization in a more positive light, feel positive emotions like joy and contentment, and are more committed to their jobs.
- Compassionate people are more socially adept, making them less vulnerable to loneliness;
  - loneliness has been shown to cause stress and harm the immune system.



Photo: Humphrey Muleba for Unsplash

## Strategies to Reduce Empathic Distress and Cultivate Compassion

- Being responsive to our own suffering and acting to alleviate or prevent it. It is important to foster four strategies:
  - Compassion;
  - Self-care practices;
  - Self-compassion;
  - Compassion leadership in healthcare cultures.
- Develop a plan of care for your well-being. More effective than an ad hoc approach. This is not only about pursuing pleasurable activities. This plan incorporates self-discipline, self-awareness, accountability and motivation to make better life choices.
- Enhance your compassion literacy involves a “healthy balance of compassion for others and compassion for oneself” Mills et al., 2018
- Compassion training:
  - Does not reduce or remove negative emotions.
  - Increases activation in the brain areas associated with love, affiliation, positive emotions, hope and reward.
  - As a protective factor to empathic distress.



Photo: Benedikt Geyer for Unsplash

Mills, Wand, & Fraser, 2018a, p. 10; Mills et al., 2018b).

## WHEN YOU ARE OVERWHELMED. . .

- Burnout?
- Stress?
- Crisis?
- Trauma?
- Secondary trauma?
- Empathic distress?

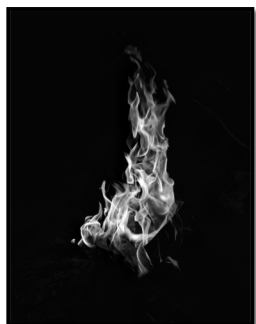


Photo: Jaclyn May for Unsplash

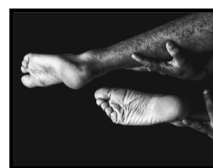


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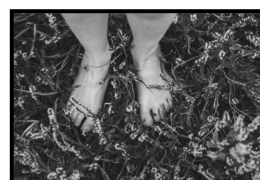
## Avoid Backdraft



## Stay Grounded



## and Plant Yourself



## The KEY to Surviving

- As little as five minutes per day has a positive effect and can lead to measurable changes in neural functioning.
  - fMRI studies show mindfulness meditation “regulates anterior insula activity” when we empathize with others’ suffering. Negative affect and stress is reduced, emotion regulation is enhanced, and increases prosocial, compassionate behavior. Laneri et al., 2017, p. 4034.
- AND . . .
  - Get more rest,
  - Eat healthier food,
  - Declutter personal space,
  - Spend time alone or in reflection,
  - Seek professional counseling or life coaching, or
  - Do any activity that supports, energizes, soothes or inspires.
  - Meditation practice is effective self-care strategy in both personal and professional setting.

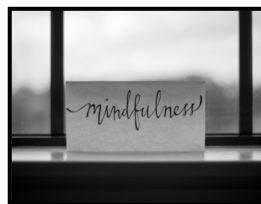


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Photo: Taylor Ann Wright for Unsplash

## BEYOND GOOD INTENTIONS



- Use compassion as your guide when relating to others.
- What better compass is there to help you navigate relationships in your work and personal lives and stay on course? Rimm, 2013.
- Leadership is beyond good intentions – it requires action Aigner, 2011.
- Good leadership is inevitably an act of compassion. A compassionate leader takes responsibility for the growth and development of others so they can understand and solve their own challenges Aigner, 2011.



## LEAD WITH COMPASSION

- Approach the person with a genuine concern for their well-being and desire to understand – and to find a constructive way forward
- A compassionate approach requires us to 'suspend judgement' as we 'listen' to understand what led to the situation.
- Our compassionate response strengthens our relationships with others and influences the culture in productive ways to improve patient outcomes and colleague well-being.
- Leading with compassion fosters opportunities for growth and safe practice.
- Does *not* mean we sanction poor performance or behavior.

Rimm, 2013

## EMPATHY AND REFLECTION

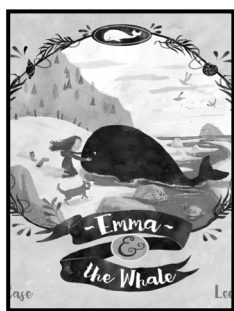
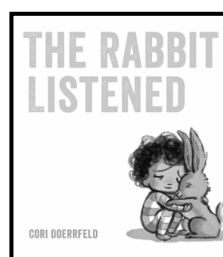
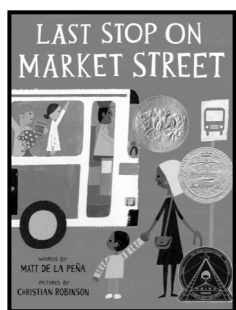
- The type of imagination triggered by literary reading teaches readers to walk a mile in a stranger's shoes, helping them realize how others feel empathy.
- Literary reading helps us examine ourselves:
  - thinking about how to relate to others,
  - to ethical issues and to life in general (reflection).



Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). *Poetic justice: The literary imagination and public life*. Boston: Beacon Press; Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## EMPATHY

- **Narrative** empathy is the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition.
- Empathy is **not identification**, as empathy does not require readers to see themselves as the character, in identification 'we take on a character's goals and plans as our own, and see ourselves as the character feeling what he or she feels' (p. 824, Mars et al, 2011).
- Young readers may not have mastered the ability to empathize yet, but they are in the process of **developing this skill**.
- Engaging with the text **demands perception, attention, imagination, empathy, and reasoning**.



### Your Daily Ritual

Think about creating your own personal ritual. There's something comforting and grounding about rituals and routines. Whether it is the Coronavirus pandemic or personal challenges, life can become very hectic and chaotic.

There is a tendency in that moment of awakening to jump up and out of bed, to get going as quickly as possible. Stop.

- Set a few moments aside, even before getting out of bed, to set your intention for what your day will be, to be loving to yourself, and what you plan on accomplishing. If you set only one intention for your day, that may be all you need.
- Consider other questions like:
  - How do I want to show up today?
  - What do I need to do and how do I want to be doing it?
- It also means setting some intentions, such as "Today I will practice kindness towards myself and others," "Today I will practice forgiveness for myself and others," or "Today I will not go with perfection but accept myself and others as we are."

These thoughts can begin your day by putting you in a positive frame of mind for whatever comes your way.

## RESOURCES

- Loving-Kindness Meditation developed by Emma Seppala. <https://emmaseppala.com/gift-loving-kindness-meditation/> (Seppala et al., 2014).
- Chris Germer: <http://www.mindfulnesscompassion.org/>
- Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare: <http://www.theschwartzcenter.org/>
- Free eBook: Compassion. Bridging Practice and Science by Singer and Bolz describes compassion training programs and empirical research. <http://www.compassion-training.org/>
- Twelve Books that model empathy <https://www.readbrihtly.com/books-that-model-empathy-compassion-young-readers/>



## Compassion

Bridging Practice and Science

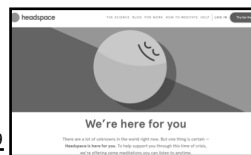


## RESOURCES

### GREAT APPS FOR YOUR PHONE

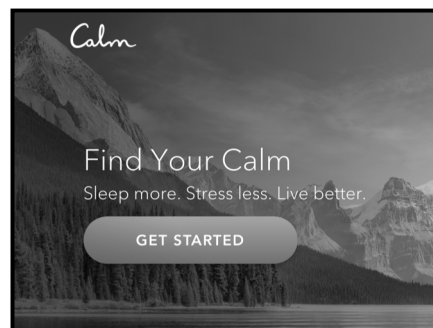
#### HEADSPACE

<https://www.headspace.com/covid-19>  
(free for health care providers!)



#### CALM

<https://www.calm.com/>



### Five Finger Breathing

<https://youtu.be/oBA1CYaakCo>

and

<https://youtu.be/5QVqMaWrP-s>



Caring for Yourself in the Face of  
Difficult Work/Place  
[https://www.proqol.org/uploads/Helpen\\_Pocket-Card\\_2020.pdf](https://www.proqol.org/uploads/Helpen_Pocket-Card_2020.pdf)

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Let us know how you are doing!



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