

Accountability Partners

Accountability partner. The Socratic dictum to “know thyself” and the biblical command “Physician, heal thyself” (Luke 4:23) could be interpreted to imply that dealing with compassion fatigue is a solitary challenge. But peer partnerships may offer a less isolating way to deal with the effects of working with persons who have experienced trauma. Contrasting with formal personal psychotherapeutic processes that are sometimes recommended to treat clinicians who are suffering the effects of countertransference, peer partnerships are more collegial and accessible and have been identified as effective and cost-efficient self-care strategies (Solomon, 2004). An accountability partner is a colleague who collaborates with the clinician to set and achieve self-care goals, functions as a source of support and encouragement, and keeps self-monitoring and self-directed care a practice standard. Participation in such an arrangement is voluntary and open-ended: measurable goals are set between partners, and the strategies used are selected on the basis of the perception of benefit. This type of peer involvement may be especially important when attempting to combat compassion fatigue. For example, in Bober and Rehger’s (2006) investigation of the utility of self-care strategies for trauma counselors, they noted a disconnect between the professional perception that self-care is useful, and the time spent engaging in such activities. Accountability-focused partnerships may be a conduit for translating intent into action, a missing ingredient in many self-help programs.

Example goals for accountability partners:

- Walk or engage in mindfulness activities together
- Prompt one another to do a SOS, self-check (via Feeling Thermometer)
- Engage in peer directed processing of what it means to do the work
- Identify and participate in professional development activities to increase sense of professional competence