WORKSHEET 132 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

Helping without wearing myself out

From empathic distress to compassion

AIM

Distinguish empathic distress (feeling another person's suffering to the point of exhaustion) from compassion (warmth and the wish to help), and build ways of helping that also protect the helper.

WHO IT IS FOR

Family carers, health professionals, teachers, social workers, psychologists, very empathic people who wear themselves out.

DURATION

20 min

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Explain the difference: empathy makes you feel the other person's pain; compassion adds warmth and the wish to help, and protects better against exhaustion.
2. The person describes 2 or 3 situations in which they help and identifies their signs of exhaustion.
3. For each one, distinguish what depends on them (a possible action, a wish) from what doesn't.
4. Add what they need for themselves (rest, support, limits).

POINTS TO WATCH

> In health professionals, established exhaustion requires specific support (burnout worksheets 97-105). In people who are very self-critical or who have experienced abuse, self-kindness can at first bring up sadness, discomfort or mistrust (the "backdraft" described by Germer and Neff). This is to be expected: go more slowly, in small doses, and validate the difficulty.

REFERENCES

Singer, T. & Klimecki, O. M. (2014). Empathy and compassion. Current Biology, 24(18), R875-R878.

Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Ricard, M. & Singer, T. (2014). Differential pattern of functional brain plasticity after compassion and empathy training. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 9(6), 873-879.

PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 132 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

Helping without wearing myself out

Feeling other people's pain can be exhausting. The researchers Tania Singer and Olga Klimecki distinguish this "empathic distress" from compassion: warmth and the wish to help, without drowning in the other person's suffering. And compassion is also directed at you.

1. Choose 2 or 3 situations in which you help someone.
2. Note your signs of exhaustion in each one.
3. Write what depends on you: a possible action, a good wish.
4. Write what you need yourself to be able to carry on.

Situation in which I help	My signs of exhaustion	What depends on me	What I need

A limit or a form of self-care I am putting in place this week:

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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