

# Self-Assessment Checklists for High-Intensity Relaters

The following checklists will help you determine your current level of risk of experiencing secondary trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue. They will also help you to identify the degree of satisfaction you get from helping others. Taking the time to complete these subjective self-assessments will help you identify both the positive and the damaging aspects of your experience being in direct contact with other people in a helping context.

## Completing the checklists

- Be as honest as you can about what your present experience is helping others.
- If the answer is *never*, write an **N** next to the question.
- If the answer is *sometimes*, write an **S** next to the question.
- If the answer is *often*, write an **O** next to the question.

For simplicity, the checklists are phrased to apply to professional caregivers and helpers. That is, they refer to *clients* and *co-workers*. But these checklists apply equally well to nonprofessionals who are caring for loved ones at home or in other settings. If you are part of this second group, substitute *loved one* for *client*, and *other family members* or *other helpers* for *co-workers*.

## Checklist #1: Your *positive* responses to being a helper

*Am I happy and fulfilled?*

- \_\_\_ Overall, I am happy and content.
- \_\_\_ My life and my work are satisfying to me.
- \_\_\_ I feel calm and emotionally balanced most of the time.
- \_\_\_ I know I'm a sensitive person, and I'm OK with that.
- \_\_\_ I am happy with the person I have become.

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- Even though my work as a caregiver is very demanding, I'm happy to be helping people who have significant problems.
- Helping others brings me a lot of personal gratification.
- Helping others makes me feel good about myself.
- I intend to be a helper for a long time.

### *Is my work a positive experience for me?*

- I look forward to helping the people who I take care of.
- I deeply enjoy my work as a helper or caregiver.
- I feel connected to other people at work and outside of work.
- I enjoy interacting with my co-workers.
- I often feel invigorated and energized after working with the people I help.
- Some people I help are especially inspiring to me and stimulating to work with.
- I regularly discover and learn new things from the people I care for.
- I make sure to keep up-to-date with new therapeutic techniques and other developments in my field.
- Helping others in pain has made me realize how much compassion I have.
- I pride myself in being a good helper.

### *How well am I taking care of myself?*

- I can maintain strong energetic boundaries with my clients.
- I have regular self-care practices I do that help me stay centered to do my work as a helper or caregiver.
- I have a good balance between my work and the rest of my life.
- I can finally say that I don't take work home with me, and I don't think about clients' problems once I leave work.
- I can keep a positive attitude about my job as a helper or caregiver even though I have to do paperwork too.

### *Do I have a strong support system?*

- I get enough support from colleagues, friends and family when I'm under a lot of stress.
- I can depend on my co-workers to help me out when I need support.
- I am available to help my co-workers when they need it.
- I have a supportive therapist I can go to when I need to process work-related issues.
- I have a patient and understanding partner who listens to me when I need to blow off some steam.

## Checklist #2: Your *negative* responses to being a helper

*How does my work make me feel emotionally and physically?*

- My work as a helper generates stress symptoms in me.
- I feel overwhelmed by my work as a helper.
- Being a helper makes me feel weak, tired, and even exhausted.
- Being a helper makes me feel depressed.
- Somehow, being a helper or caregiver makes me feel worthless.
- I lose my temper over little things.
- At times my anger seems out of control.
- I work too hard and don't make enough time for myself.
- I get a feeling of hopelessness when I'm helping others.
- I feel tense and anxious about helping some people.
- I feel like a failure or a fraud as a helper.
- I feel alienated from others.
- I often feel I should be paid a lot more for all my hard work.

*How vulnerable do I feel?*

- I "catch" other people's negative feelings too easily.
- Setting firm boundaries with people who are suffering is difficult for me.
- I'm afraid that I might have been "infected" by the residual trauma of those I help.
- I have to remind myself to be emotionally detached about the well-being of the people I help.
- It's hard for me to say NO to people who need help and support.  
I allow people I work with to take advantage of my kind nature.
- I change the subject with clients when their experience is too awful for me to hear.
- I avoid certain activities or situations because they make me feel overwhelmed.
- There are some people I help whose judgmental qualities make me anxious.

*Do my circumstances (past and present) make things easier for me, or more difficult?*

- I grew up in a family where verbal and physical abuse was common.
- I experienced trauma during my childhood.
- I have experienced trauma in my own adult life.
- I have "unfinished business" related to specific traumatic experiences from my past that I need to take care of, but I keep avoiding it.

- I don't have many close friends but would like that in my life.
- I have no one to talk to about the stress I'm regularly under.

*Are there signs that I'm starting to feel burned out?*

- I have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep.
- I startle easily at work and/or at home.
- I get frustrated having to do the routine tasks in my work as a helper.
- While working with abused clients, I feel angry toward the abuser who hurt my client.
- I want to avoid helping certain people.
- I feel in danger working with the people I help.
- I perceive that some people I help wish I would just go away.
- I feel like I'm just treading water in my life, and that I'm not achieving my life goals.
- I have flashbacks associated with those I help.
- I'm working more for the money than for personal fulfillment.
- I find it hard to keep my personal life and my "helper" life separate.
- By the end of the week, I feel like I have nothing left to give.

### **What do your results mean?**

When you have completed the questions, follow the steps to compile your results and consider your present situation as a high-intensity relater:

Number of *often* answers in Checklist #1: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of *sometimes* and *never* answers in Checklist #2: \_\_\_\_\_  
Total: \_\_\_\_\_

If your Total is 38 or more,

- Chances are that you are maintaining your overall health and well-being in spite of working in challenging circumstances. The higher your score is, the closer you are to being a healthy caregiver or helper that exemplifies optimal self-care.

If your Total is less than 38,

- You may be dealing with compassion fatigue or secondary trauma, even if you have not sufficiently acknowledged it before now. I urge you to explore ways to support your self-care sooner rather than later. A very important first step is to ask around for a recommended therapist or counselor with whom you'll feel comfortable discussing these issues. Perhaps your supervisor or family doctor can suggest one.

- Evidently, there are a number of helping or caregiving issues that remain unresolved for you. Perhaps you need to work on establishing better boundaries with those you help. Be honest with yourself about where you are at and acknowledge your feelings.

**Note:** This measurement tool isn't meant to "diagnose" you or to be the final word on how well you're taking care of yourself right now. Instead, it gives you a general indication of how well or how poorly you are doing as a caregiver or helper. It is worthwhile spending some time reviewing your responses, especially the statements to which you answered 'often'.

- The more you answer 'often' in Checklist #1, the more likely it is that you are managing to take good care of yourself in your interactions as a caregiver or helper.
- The more you answer 'often' in Checklist #2, the more likely it is that you are minimizing or trying to ignore your work-related stressors, and that you may be more at risk than you care to admit.

Burnout and secondary traumatization can creep up on you gradually, and relying on your memory of how you felt four, eight, or twelve months ago will not give you an accurate sense of whether you're sliding toward burnout, holding your own, or getting better at taking care of yourself.

The important thing is to be honest with yourself about your current situation right now and how it is affecting you, both positively and negatively. If you need some help or support, don't be shy or hesitant about asking for it. Do whatever is necessary to maintain your health and well-being because for all that you do for others, you deserve it.