

# Advancing Adult Compassion Resilience:



A Toolkit for



Schools

Developed in partnership with:



Systems and Strategies to Support Social Emotional Wellbeing at Work

[compassionresiliencetoolkit.org](http://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org)

# Introduction

**The reality of public school education is that it is both exhilarating and stressful.** Education is a realm full of organizational and professional changes, expectations, and uncertainties that are often continuous, occurring at an ever-increasing pace, sometimes contradictory, and usually in response to economic, social, and political demands. In our efforts to build resilience in our students, we are charged with the examination of our capacity personally and professionally to model that which we strive to build. The extent to which our organizational culture and systems support these efforts needs to also be examined. An intentional focus on building teacher resilience is both an individual and organizational responsibility and opportunity. The content of the toolkit has been strongly informed by research and best practices related to resilience, positive psychology, compassion fatigue, organizational psychology, and mindfulness.

## What is Compassion Resilience?

Teacher resilience is a relatively recent area of investigation which provides a way of understanding what enables teachers to persist in the face of challenges and offers a complementary perspective to studies of stress, burnout and attrition (Beltman et al., 2011). Teacher resilience is defined as “using energy productively to achieve school goals and meet students’ needs in the face of adversity” (Patterson et al., 2004). Compassion is the combination of the consciousness of others’ distress and a desire to alleviate it. It is a basic quality needed to be able to meet students’ needs. Compassion resilience for those in the education field is:

1. The ability to maintain our physical, emotional and mental well-being (using energy productively) while compassionately identifying and addressing the stressors that are barriers to learning for students,
2. Identifying and addressing the barriers to caregivers/ parents and colleagues being able to effectively partner on behalf of children, and
3. Identifying, preventing, and minimizing compassion fatigue within ourselves.

Think of this resilience as a reservoir of well-being that we can draw upon on difficult days and in difficult situations. It is a dynamic process or outcome that is the result of interaction over time between a person and their environment (e.g., Bobek, 2002; Day, 2008; Sumsion, 2003; Tait, 2008). Resilient teachers tend to maintain job satisfaction and commitment to their profession (Brunetti, 2006). This toolkit will explore the protective factors that build and maintain compassion resilience.



## Why Build Resilience in Adults in Schools?

A focus on compassion resilience will guide all staff back to the core set of values and the drive for a sense of purpose that drew them to work in schools in the first place. It will do so by supporting the development of a strong set of skills to manage expectations, set professional and personal boundaries, build effective collegial relationships, and practice real-time and ongoing self-care. A focus on relational trust between teachers, students, families, colleagues and administration will encourage the risk taking and exploration of new ideas that promote good teaching and learning. Teachers aren’t the only ones who benefit from a focus on resilience. Principals, administrators, superintendents, student services staff, coaches, para-professionals, and others who form the school community contribute to the decisive elements that influence a school that is thriving.

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This toolkit offers information, activities, and resources for school leadership and staff to understand, recognize, and minimize the experience of compassion fatigue and to increase compassion resilience perspectives and skills. The authors of the toolkit are a collaborative team made up of mostly educators including classroom teachers, student services personnel, and administrative leadership. Community mental health practitioners were also on the team.

With a keen eye on practicality, the toolkit is designed for flexible implementation by facilitators within their school. We typically recommend the toolkit be implemented over a two-year timeframe. Each of the twelve sections can be briefly implemented in a thirty-minute session (with individual reflection and application resources) or more time can be dedicated for in-depth learning experiences. Input from the schools that piloted the toolkit included a strong suggestion that the implementation plans include a process that provides safe places for “real talk” among

staff about toolkit concepts. Small group staff conversations and a plan for two-way communication between the staff groups and administrative team are key strategies for implementation. A team of leaders and the appointed facilitator(s) will need to make decisions about the time that the administrative team and staff will dedicate to the toolkit activities, and topics that might be a higher priority. With that direction, the facilitator selects activities to match the needs, characteristics, and dedicated focus of the group.

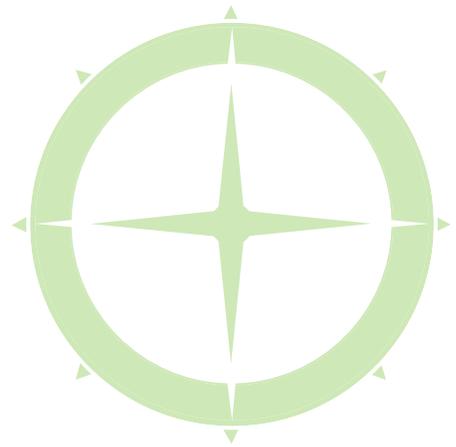
The Section Segments Key describes the consistent segments included in each topical section. The sections include material that can be shared with an individual, small group, and/or the whole staff. Distribution of the information and reflection activities can be by email, handouts, or presentation style. Due to the many links to online content, digital distribution for most segments is best. Small and large group activities are provided to guide the staff to apply the information to their personal and collective practices.

Review the two examples shown on the following page of how schools chose to implement the toolkit and the role of the toolkit facilitators.

### Example #1

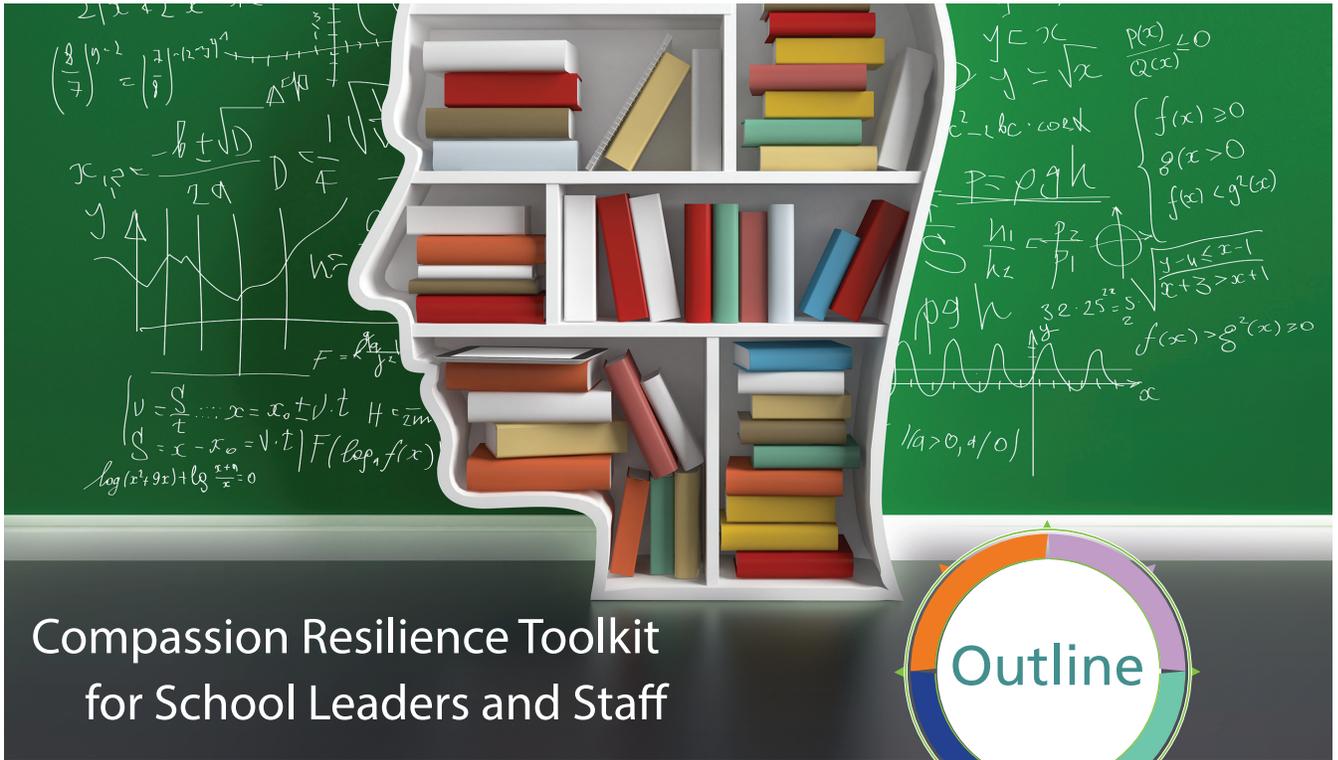
After two years of professional development on trauma informed schools, the student services team began to notice both an increase in staff desire to better understand student behavior and that they were spending more time offering casual support to teachers than they have in the past. They talked with the district administrative team about the Compassion Resilience Toolkit and came to an agreement that the toolkit would be implemented over the next two years with implementation leadership from the student services team at each building. One of the building administrators stepped up to consult with the facilitator team and to lead any activities that are specific to administrative leadership. The student services team chose to conduct schoolwide sessions for 2 hours at the start and end of each year, when students were not in the buildings. This offered opportunity to explore four of the twelve sections in depth and to do some fun experiential self-care activities. The other eight sections would be implemented over the two school years in the smaller teams that already existed in each building, with a student services staff person doing the facilitation. The student services team set aside 30 minutes at their regular whole team meetings to discuss the implementation of the toolkit and any unique needs of staff at the different buildings. They began by working through the appendix sections on Supporting Change Efforts, Dealing with a Significant Staff Disclosure, and Stress throughout the Career Cycle in order to best support staff (and themselves!) over the next two years.

These examples show how schools chose to implement the toolkit and the role of the toolkit facilitators.



### Example #2

A building leadership team chose to focus a school year on staff wellness. They had noticed some of the veteran teachers had lost some energy and the newer teachers were not benefiting from the strong role modeling the veteran teachers had offered in the past. They also noted that the number of IEPs had increased by 20% in the past five years. After reviewing the toolkit outline and discussing their hunches about sections that might need a “deeper dive,” they chose to implement six specific sections with a brief approach – email the information sections ahead of staff meetings and dedicate fifteen minutes to conduct one staff-wide activity during the meeting. They selected the other six sections to be implemented in professional learning communities (PLC) over the year. Staff would self-select a team to meet with for ninety minutes six times during the school year. The two staff people who stepped forward to provide leadership to the toolkit implementation shared responsibilities. One person prepared for the six staff meetings by emailing the information sections and corresponding resource links included in each section and recruited someone to lead the staff-wide activity at each meeting. The other toolkit implementation leader recruited PLC facilitators and met with them to share the toolkit sections they would be exploring and to explain how to select activities from the six sections for their PLC.



# Compassion Resilience Toolkit for School Leaders and Staff



Information, activities and reflections for school leadership and staff to understand, assess and build their capacity for consistently compassionate interactions with students, families and colleagues.

## Preface

- i. Introduction
- ii. Rationale for the Compassion Resilience Focus and Approach – Leadership and Staff
- iii. Implementation Guidance for School Leaders and Toolkit Facilitators

## Content Sections

1. Compassion in Action
2. Wellness, Compassion Fatigue, Resilience, and Self-Compassion
3. Compassion Fatigue Awareness, Connection to Trauma, and Assessments
4. Systemic Drivers of Compassion Fatigue
5. Expectations from Self and Others
6. Compassionate Boundary Setting – Personal and Professional
7. Contract for Positive Staff Culture
8. Strategies – Mind
9. Strategies – Spirit
10. Strategies – Strength
11. Strategies - Heart
12. Compassionate Connections with Parents

## Appendix

- a. Foundational Beliefs about Behavior
- b. Dealing with Significant Staff Disclosure or Crisis
- c. Supporting Change Efforts of Others and Ourselves
- d. Stress throughout the Career Cycle

# Section Segments Key

 <p>INTRODUCTION</p>	<p>Provides a paragraph summary of content in the toolkit.</p>
 <p>INFORMATION</p>	<p>Delves more deeply into the concepts presented in each section of the toolkit. Information is presented in various formats such as narrative, slides, links to videos, etc. The information can be shared with staff individually through email or handouts or to a small or large group of staff in presentation style by a school leader or the toolkit facilitator.</p>
 <p>SELF-CARE STRATEGIES</p>	<p>Rather than wait until later sections of the toolkit to encounter strategies for self-care that support compassion resilience, each section offers an activity related to the wellness compass. Experience the benefits of these strategies and prepare for the four sections that explore them more fully.</p>
 <p>WHAT'S NEXT</p>	<p>Introduces the next section of the toolkit.</p>
 <p>APPLICATIONS</p>	<p>Offer activities to engage individuals, small groups or whole staff in making the content relevant to their experience in your school community. Activities are targeted towards either school leadership or staff.</p>
 <p>LINKS</p>	<p>Internet links that are woven into the content are pulled out and listed for easy access. Links to other related resources are also listed.</p>

## Application activities can be:



INDIVIDUAL



SMALL GROUP



LARGE GROUP