

Empowering relationships...



DECEMBER 2019

The Redwood Empire Therapist

OUR DECEMBER MEETING

Compassion and Burnout Andy Wallace, PhD

A common mistake that many health care practitioners make is assuming that compassion causes burnout. 'Compassion fatigue' is the colloquial expression for this mistake. In fact, 'compassion fatigue' is a misnomer for empathic distress, which refers to the over-identification with the suffering of others. A powerful antidote for empathic distress is the cultivation of compassion. More compassion, not less, is the answer. Research on compassion indicates that compassion is an activating, energizing, and uplifting state of mind. The more one develops one's own innate compassion response the more one is capable of holding the pain of others without losing emotional balance or becoming disabled by it.



Part of becoming more compassionate includes becoming more compassionate towards oneself. Self-compassion refers to unconditional loving-kindness from the self for the self. We need to distinguish self-compassion from self-esteem, which refers to conditional self-acceptance. Compassion for self and others is an innate disposition that persons can cultivate intentionally. Cultivating compassion provides a means for health care practitioners to remain engaged and vital in their work of service for others.

Dr. Andy Wallace earned his PhD in moral philosophy from University of California, San Diego. He is a full professor and chair of the philosophy department at Sonoma State University, where he has taught since 1998. He is a Stanford Certified Compassion Cultivation Training Teacher and teaches at the Compassion Institute in Petaluma, CA.

Dr. Wallace's research focuses on compassion, especially the ontogenetic developmental mechanisms that help to explain why becoming more compassionate produces such remarkable health benefits for the compassionate individual. He is also interested in the ethical implications of compassion: how best to understand the role that compassion plays in

December 6th, 2019 – RECAMFT Meeting

10:30 – 11:00 social & sign in

11:30 – 1:00 meeting

Compassion and Burnout Andy Wallace, PhD

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January 3rd, 2020

Identifying the Effects of Hormones and Metabolism on Psychological States throughout the Life Cycle with Jane Kennedy, CFNP, MN, MPH

**January 31, 2020 8:30 – 4:00
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David Jensen, JD**

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moral experience. Current empirical research on compassion suggests that it can represent a powerful antidote to burnout in the helping professions.

An international speaker, he will present current research on the energizing or activating nature of compassion and offer participants practices to cultivate their own compassion responses.

What Else is in Here This Month? Check It Out

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President's Message Doreen Van Leeuwen, LMFT



"But they actually did it, and they did it perfectly!"

That's a quote from Sonoma County Fire District Battalion Chief Mark Dunn expressing praise for the hundreds of firefighters that recently took on the Kincaid Fire as it roared within feet of the homes of Windsor. As a result of their fierce fight against the fire, fueled by the nearly fanatical attitude of "we refuse to let you take our town", hundreds of homes were saved.

It was, and is, a miraculous outcome. Thousands of prayers were answered in the smudged and weary heroic faces of those who put their lives on the line for us again. Angels in fire-fighters' clothes...

But, at the same time, **this** is also true: we inhabitants of Sonoma County were thoroughly scared as again the specter of mass destruction hovered over us this Halloween season. Not only were we inconvenienced by power outages and evacuation orders, but also the recent disruptions have cost us lost wages, food, sleep and even the marginal sense of well-being that was just returning after the fires of 2017.

No matter where you turn, you hear the phrase that "**this is the new normal**" Frankly, I want to stick my fingers in my ears when I hear it, don't you? Because thinking this way complicates everything about the recovery from this

new round of devastation. We, of all people, know intimately just how enormous a toll this is exacting,

especially on those who *did* lose homes, business and animals.

But anticipating that this will happen year after year? I'm sure some of you are wondering whether you can face such upheaval again. That sigh of relief and feeling of gratitude for being spared is quickly comingled with the thought, "this time", and questions about whether to stay, and if so, how to anticipate and prepare for more of the same.

The sharp focus for us needs to be on how **we ourselves** mindfully address these challenges, so that we can continue to be fully present for our clients. But this is a lot to ask of us, when we too were exposed to the smoky air, fiery images, consuming angst and displacement as our clients just last week. We've barely unpacked our own cars, and yet we are called on to help them unpack their troubled minds and souls.

I have every confidence that we can rise to the occasion. We can find inspiration in the courage and determination of those first responders as we engage in creating new professional strategies to deal with our unique circumstances. But it will take fresh thinking, and creative collaboration to hone our personal and professional selves to stay competent. I am here to support you in that journey.

Thank you for giving me the privilege of serving as your president in 2019. The loyalty of your attendance, the camaraderie at our events, and the dedication of our many volunteers who make things happen so seamlessly have all made this year an outstanding one for me!

Doreen Van Leeuwen, LMFT, RECAMFT President, specializes in Imago Relationship Therapy for couples, critical incident debriefing and disaster mental health, and mind-body medicine. She offers virtual visits at doxy.me or in office at 1330 N Dutton AV, Santa Rosa.

What You Missed *By Michael Krikorian*

Due to the regional fires, the scheduled presentation on Imago Couples Therapy by Doreen Van Leeuwen, LMFT, was cancelled and will be rescheduled to a later date.



In place of her scheduled presentation, Doreen gave the attendees of the monthly meeting a chance to process their feelings and experiences of the evacuations and fires that had just blown through our county. She started by taking us through a mind/body guided meditation, then we broke into small groups to share our experiences.



Thank you, Doreen, for responding to the needs of the moment and helping up to practice the self-care that we teach to our clients. We look forward to your presentation on Imago Couple's Therapy at a future date.

Note from the Editor. I attended the meeting and was in one of the groups. We began talking some more about our experiences dealing with the fire and evacuations. After a bit, one of the participants observed that she was feeling more agitated the more we talked and we agreed. So we switched to consulting together and talked about handling suicidal clients and BPD clients and shared ideas about how to recognize that a client has a BPD. It was a very helpful discussion to me.

I am in a consultation group that meets twice a month and get a great deal out of it. This spontaneous consultation with 7 or 8 colleagues was just as rich because of who we are and the profession we share. I deeply value that in our chapter. Gail Van Buuren

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A Letter to Our Members about Climate Change

Dear Redwood Empire CAMFT Members At Large,

I am writing as a mother of two school-aged children, as a frightened woman, and as a licensed member of RECAMFT and CAMFT. I am grateful to President Doreen Van Leeuwen for recognizing after a conversation with me recently that RECAMFT needs a position statement about climate change. If we make a statement, we can help end Congressional *climate neglect*. Yes, climate neglect. We are mandated reporters.

RECAMFT members don't need to be told about the severity of recent stressors of fire, power outages, and floods. During the Kincadee Fire, every main stream news station, internet article and radio program attributed the fires and "extreme red flag weather" to climate change. In alignment with mainstream science, my children are taught at public school, on field trips, and through the media that climate change is real, imminent, and severe. They want to know why members of US government deny climate change when it is so visible, so breathable, so impactful for us. Recently I took my daughter to the Santa Rosa Climate Strike where a teen held a sign asking why he should go to school or study science if Congress won't utilize the information coming from such esteemed organizations as NASA, The American Association for the Advancement of Science, and The American Meteorological Society. Good point, right? Why push science if we don't use it?

As MFTs, we are part of the healthcare field— part of the field of science. As professionals invested in evidence-based approaches to health and wellbeing, we cannot ignore or consider tangential the scientific facts. NASA's website says, "The current warming trend is of particular significance because most of it is extremely likely (greater than 95 percent probability) to be the result of human activity since the mid-20th century and proceeding at a rate that is unprecedented over decades to millennia.¹"

[\(https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/\)](https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/)

If we ignore this, we are abetting severe, dangerous neglect that is imminent, severe, and affecting our mental and physical health *right now*. Today, how many people will be unable to function well, eat or sleep because of anxiety and depression

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symptoms from the climate crisis and mass enabled climate neglect?

As a mandated reporter, please take a stand. Join other health organizations that have passed **non-partisan** climate action resolutions:

- California Association of School Psychologists (<https://casponline.org/pdfs/publications/climate%20change%20resolution%202019.pdf>)
- American Psychiatric Association (APA) (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/climate-change-and-mental-health-connections/affects-on-mental-health>)
- American Medical Association (<https://assets.ama-assn.org/sub/meeting/documents/i16-resolution-924.pdf>)

Over 70 state and local medical and public health organizations issued a joint-call-to-climate-action in June 2019. Let's join the tide and issue a positional statement on climate change that declares climate neglect a generational justice and equity issue, that calls for Congressional action, and that calls on other mandated reporter organizations to pass their own climate action resolutions.

As an activism mentor recently reminded me, paradigms can shift quickly if enough people fight for it. Please vote for RECAMT to help make the shift. We still have time.

Sincerely,
Wowlvenn Seward-Katzmiller, MFT45718
Sebastopol, CA 95472, wskmft@gmail.com

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