



## **Four Steps Helping Professionals Can Take to Release Empathic Distress & Cultivate Compassion On the Job**

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Empathic distress happens when helping professionals begin to lose sight of the boundary between themselves and the person in need that they are serving. The acronym REAP is an easy-to-remember tool I created for releasing empathic distress and replacing it with compassion for others using the following four steps:

**Recognize** when you're experiencing empathic distress.

**Establish** a self-compassionate boundary.

**Adjust** the focus of your attention.

**Practice** lovingkindness.

Ruminating anxiety and worry about the well-being of others is common to many human service professionals. It is a particular type of stress called empathic distress or empathic fatigue. You can apply the following four steps to release empathic distress or to prevent it from building:

1. **Recognize** when you're experiencing empathic distress by pausing and scanning the body for points of tension and tightness that may be related to your focus on those in need that you are helping.
2. **Establish** a self-compassionate boundary when you notice empathic distress by saying to yourself: "This pain is not mine; it is not me" and by motioning the body in a way that communicates a gentle "letting go" of the distress.
3. **Adjust** your attention away from the person's problems and onto their strengths & abilities by asking yourself: "How have they managed this far in life without me?"
4. **Practice** lovingkindness. This may be as simple as wishing the other person well by quietly saying: "May you be happy; may you be peaceful and free from all internal and external harm." In addition, I designed a guided meditation especially for human service professionals that you may listen to [here](#).