

# WASH your WEB: An Easy-to-Understand Guide

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Wash your Web, is used to “washout” your built up “cobwebs” of strong on-the-job emotions. Don’t let them accumulate. Don’t get burnt-out. It’s in two parts:

WASH is for use before and during a shift, and  
WEB is for after a shift.

The first part, WASH, is done before your shift and between cases. The video *Wash your Web (training, part 1): BEFORE-SHIFT TALK THROUGH* can be used as a guide to help you do it. The video is less than three minutes. Or you could do it silently to yourself during morning hand-over, a coffee break or toilet break.

With practice, It’ll take less than a minute to

WALL off empathy,  
ANTICIPATE strong emotions,  
SHELVE strong emotions to deal with them later, and  
HOLD HOPE after HELPING compassionately.

The second part, WEB, is done after your shift to help process your emotions, let your mind file them away. Try to do it before you relax and get on with life. The video *Wash your Web (training, part 2): AFTER-SHIFT TALK THROUGH* can be used as a guide to help you. It contains over forty useful words to help you label and express emotions. It’s less than five minutes long. Or you could do it while walking in a park, exercising, or sitting on a couch (without a stiff drink). It takes about five-to-ten minutes to

WALK through the day’s events in your mind,  
EXPRESS your shelved strong emotions, and use a  
BILATERAL stimulation technique.

Let’s go through it all in detail. WASH, prepares for your day of emotions with: Wall off empathy, Anticipate strong emotions, Shelve strong emotions, and Hold Hope.

WALL OFF EMPATHY. To do this, it helps to know the difference between compassion and empathy, like knowing the difference between “walk” and “run” to do whichever you want. Compassion and empathy are closely related but compassion is more useful at work.

Compassion: *My goodness this poor person needs help, what do I need to do, say, and achieve right now? rather than*

Empathy: *My goodness this poor person needs help, this is shocking, why do these things happen, how would I cope, how does anyone cope?*

Why compassion over empathy? Studies show empathy can lead to burnout but compassion doesn't. To use compassion over empathy, it helps to visualise a steel wall or a shield protecting your empathy deep near the centre of your brain. It's just a reminder, but it helps.

ANTICIPATE STRONG EMOTIONS. Here you visualise a “space” in your mind for the emotions to come; a “shelf” that you build, large enough and strong enough to take any emotion. Anticipation is useful because *forewarned is forearmed*.

SHELVE STRONG EMOTIONS. During work, as you experience strong emotions, get the emotion and “sit it” on your shelf. You'll deal with it later, after your shift. Doing this will allow you to get on with your day.

HOLD HOPE. As a trained professional, you help other people and hold hope for them; you hope things work out for them. But they may not. Still, you are helpful. This is a key part of compassion. Holding hope helps you get through a day. This is not wishful thinking, it is a statement of truth coupled with hope to activate compassion. It helps to say something silently to yourself to affirm how helpful you have been:

*I am a competent professional doing my best under these circumstances;  
I did OK and will learn to do better next time;  
I did what I could and I hope it goes well for the person.  
I am part of a system trying to achieve good outcomes.*

WEB processes the shelved strong emotions you accumulated while on shift. It helps you deal with them in five-to-ten minutes before a movie, meal, or interaction with loved ones. WEB is Walk through your day, Express each shelved emotion, & use a Bilateral Stimulation Technique.

WALK THROUGH YOUR DAY by recalling events from the start to the finish of your shift, in your mind. Don't get caught up in any situation, just be an observer. This only takes a minute. It prepares your brain for processing your shelved emotions.

EXPRESS EACH SHELVED EMOTION. This is where most of the work gets done. Notice, label and express each shelved emotion.

To NOTICE it, see it on your shelf & remember when it happened.

To LABEL it, choose just the right word to describe the emotion. The video gives you over forty words. Choosing the right word means thinking about your emotion as you feel it. Combining thinking and feeling helps process the emotions. It keeps you in control. You choose how strongly you allow yourself to experience and express each emotion.

To EXPRESS your shelved emotion, recall the events and the emotion. Feel it and express it: cry, express anger, disgust or fear in words or safe actions using hand gestures. You are getting in touch with the emotion; yet you are in control. This combination of control and express promotes health and prevents burnout. Feel but be in control. It helps you not get overwhelmed.

If a shift was really bad, have someone close-by. If it's "too much" get help. You should never get to the stage where you feel unsafe. (You may be on the brink of burnout, depression or PTSD and need professional help.) This tool is preventative only, for people who are well, not already burnt out or traumatised. Going over things in the mind is normal and is done by most people most days and it is safe.

It also helps to laugh, either now when expressing emotions, or privately with friends or trusted colleagues at things on your shift which were odd, black, frivolous or strange.

A BILATERAL STIMULATION TECHNIQUE also helps process emotions. Use it throughout the WEB part of the tool. The video demonstrates one such technique: cross your hands in front of your body, palms towards your face, then rest your fingers on or near the opposite shoulder or collarbone. Tap your fingers gently and alternate Left-Right-L-R-L-R at a relaxed pace, one L-R per heartbeat. Do this throughout the WEB, but stop and start whenever you feel like it. Take time at the end the WEB when you have finished processing shelved emotions to feel calm, soothed, and peaceful while tapping.

There are two really important things you'll learn through this: using compassion rather than empathy avoid burnout, and suppress (shelve) rather than repress (deny or push down) strong emotions so that you can deal with them.

That's it.

A few seconds before and during your shift, and a few minutes after your shift. It takes longer with more effort at first. Like any skill, the more you do it the easier it gets. I suggest doing it for every shift to make it a habit. Use it for at least three weeks before you decide this may or may not be right for you. I believe you can stave off burnout with this. All the best. Thanks for all you do.

Cheers

Dr Christian Heim

PS: We have ethical approval but are waiting to do a trial on this. This tool is for (stressed) people who are well, it is not for helping past abuse or trauma, or for people on the brink of burnout, depression or PTSD. Keep yourself safe; guarantee your own safety. Seek help if you need it. If past trauma memories come up intrusively, this is a sign you may need professional help and this tool is not for you. Kind regards, CH.