



EMERGENCY

The Psychology of



Discussion Guide

Exploring burnout, compassion fatigue, and the cost of caring

For thoughtful
conversations about
the people who care
for others at their worst.



1 First Impressions



1. What was your overall reaction to ER?
2. What parts felt most realistic? What felt dramatized?
3. Which character or storyline stayed with you the most, and why?
4. How did the show make you think differently about healthcare work, if at all?

2 The Psychology of Burnout



1. What signs of burnout did you notice in the doctors and nurses?
2. How did the three dimensions show up: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of accomplishment?
3. Have you seen these signs in your own work, school, or in someone you care about?

3 Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma



1. How does caring deeply for others change people over time?
2. What examples of compassion fatigue did you notice?
3. Why do you think people in helping professions sometimes pull away or shut down emotionally?
4. What helps caregivers stay open and connected despite the hard parts?

4 The Cost of Caring



1. How does the show portray the personal cost of this work?
2. What boundaries, sacrifices, or choices do the staff make?
3. How do their relationships outside of work get affected?
4. What is gained, even amid the cost, by doing this kind of work?

5 Lessons for Our Own Lives



1. What can we learn from ER about resilience and self-care?
2. How can we better support the caregivers in our families and communities?
3. What small changes could make a meaningful difference in your own life or workplace?
4. How can we honor the people who hold the system together?

6 Take Action



Choose one or more ideas to put into practice:

- ☐ Thank a healthcare worker in your life.
- ☐ Start a conversation about stress and support at work.
- ☐ Be more mindful of your own limits and take a real break.
- ☐ Offer practical help to someone in a caregiving role.
- ☐ Learn more about burnout and compassion fatigue.

Key Takeaways



- ♥ Burnout is a real and serious response to prolonged stress.
- ♥ Compassion fatigue is not a weakness — it is a normal reaction to difficult work.
- ♥ Those who care for others need care themselves.
- ♥ Small steps toward balance and support matter.

“
*Caring for others
is life-giving work.
It also comes at a cost.
Both things can be true.*
”

Resources

If you are struggling with burnout, compassion fatigue, or the emotional toll of caregiving, you are not alone.

- Talk with a trusted friend, colleague, or mentor.
- Consider speaking with a mental health professional.
- Explore local or professional support resources.
- Take care of the caregiver — including yourself.



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Understanding
minds.



Strengthening
connections.