Taking Care of the Leader

Why is Self-Care Important?

As helpers, we can experience trauma, either directly or indirectly, in our work on a regular basis. When we don't practice adequate self-care, we are at higher risk of developing job burnout and compassion fatigue. Both prevent us from being the best helpers we can be and worse, can lead to harming versus helping.

Self-care is not just about caring for **US.** It is also about caring for **THE PEOPLE WE SERVE.**

> "...it is unethical not to attend to your self-care as a practitioner, because sufficient self-care prevents harming those we serve."
>
> (Green Cross Academy of Traumatology, 2010)."

What is Compassion Fatigue?

- **Compassion Fatigue:** A reduced capacity or interest in being empathic and is caused by a culmination of two major factors: secondary traumatic stress and job burnout.
- **Secondary Traumatic Stress:** The experience of trauma-related symptoms resulting from exposure to someone else's trauma.
- **Job Burnout:** Mental and physical exhaustion produced by feeling frustrated, hopeless, ineffective, and worthless at work resulting in a negative impact on work performance and personal life.

The Five Stages of Compassion Fatigue

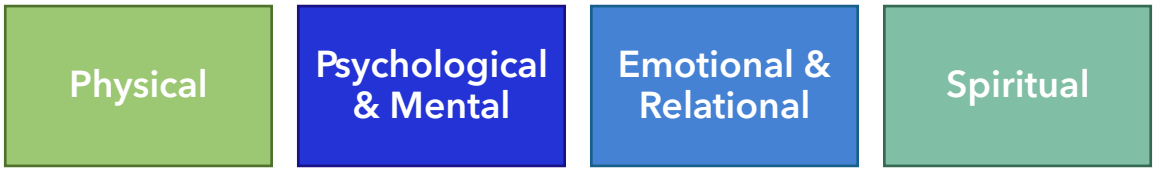
Zealot	Irritability	Withdrawal	Zombie	Renewal vs. Unwell
You're energized by a new situation or role and not sure what expectations are realistic. As a result, you take on more than is sustainable.	You begin to see the imperfect nature of your surroundings. Your frustrations begin to build, and your creativity starts to wane.	Things you used to enjoy become irritants. You feel tired, neglect relationships, and have trouble empathizing.	Hopelessness turns to rage. You don't have time for fun and isolate yourself from others.	You come to a fork in the road: continue deeper into compassion fatigue or turn toward resiliency.

Effective Self-Care

The first step to practicing effective self-care is a mindset shift so that we view ***WHO WE ARE*** as different than ***WHAT WE DO***. The next step is to create a plan! Effective self-care is *holistic* and includes strategies for use at home and while working. Strategies should be simple and realistic, but ***meaningful*** to you.

Building An Effective Self-Care Plan

Identity diversification is the practice of cultivating a well-rounded sense of self by investing in multiple areas of life and is key to practicing effective self-care. One way to do this is to make sure your self-care plan includes the four facets of effective self-care:



Think about building your self-care plan as if you are building your house. Each room might represent one of the facets listed above or another part of your identity (such as parent, friend, caregiver, spouse, etc.) The hallways between each room represent the connections and transitions between each facet or part of your identity. Your core values represent the strong foundation for your house. Just as you would not spend time in only one room of your house, you also need to spend time with each part of your identity when practicing self-care to have a holistic approach. Additionally, while making your plan, it is important to think through different settings (such as personal, professional, etc.) that are relevant to your life and approaches that can be used in each setting.

Helpful Guiding Questions

While creating your self-care plan, consider asking yourself questions like the examples below.

Physical	What are nonchemical things that help my mind and body relax?
	What supports my body to be healthy?
Psychological & Mental	What helps me counteract negative self-talk and/or unproductive emotions?
	What helps me break down bigger tasks into smaller steps?
Emotional & Relational	What helps me feel connected to other people?
	What helps me express my feelings in a healthy way?
Spiritual	What helps me feel hopeful or sustains me in difficult times?
	What helps me find meaning in life?
Source: Patricia A. Burke, *Trauma Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*	

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