Self-Care: The Session Focused On You

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Session Overview

1. Why self-care is important for practitioners
2. Defining self-care and wellness
3. Strategies for engaging in self-care
4. Self-care activity
Why Self-Care is Important for Practitioners

• Behavioral health practitioners work in a culture of one-way caring.  
• Need to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and patience without the expectation of receiving it in return. 
• Practitioners are at an increased risk for negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, and professional impairment. 
• While helping others move toward well-being, practitioners often can overlook their own needs.
Self-Care As Prevention

• Higher efforts to maintain self-care can lead to higher compassion satisfaction, greater well-being, higher quality of life, more positive affect, and lower efforts can lead to higher burnout and secondary traumatic symptoms.7

• Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists: Members are to “engage in self-care activities that help to avoid conditions (e.g., burnout, addictions) that could result in impaired judgment and interfere with their ability to benefit and not harm others.”8
Signs of Burnout

• Sadness, depression, or apathy
• Easily frustrated
• Blaming others, irritability
• Lacking feelings, indifferent
• Isolation or disconnection from others
• Poor self-care (hygiene)
• Tired, exhausted, or overwhelmed
• Feeling like:
  ▶ A failure;
  ▶ Nothing you can do will help;
  ▶ You are not doing your job well;
  ▶ You need alcohol/other drugs to cope.
Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

• Excessive worry or fear about something bad happening

• Easily startled, or “on guard” all of the time

• Physical signs of stress (e.g., racing heart)

• Nightmares or recurrent thoughts about the traumatic situation

• The feeling that the trauma of other people is yours\(^9\)
The Impact of Burnout

• Occupational stress and burnout amongst health care practitioners (HCPs) have been associated with physical and mental health problems including: anxiety, depression, diabetes, fatigue, heart disease, hypertension, insomnia, and obesity.\textsuperscript{10,11,12,13}

• Burnout amongst HCPs has also been associated with reduced job satisfaction\textsuperscript{14} and negative patient outcomes, including reduced patient satisfaction and increased work errors.\textsuperscript{15,16,17}
Defining Wellness (1 of 2)

• “A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”
  - The World Health Organization

• “A conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential.”
  - The National Wellness Institute
Defining Wellness (2 of 2)

Eight Dimensions of Wellness

1. Emotional
2. Educational
3. Financial
4. Spiritual
5. Occupational
6. Environmental
7. Social
8. Physical

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What Is Self-Care?

• Self-care refers to the “ability to refill and refuel oneself in healthy ways,”\textsuperscript{19} including “engagement in behaviors that maintain and promote physical and emotional well-being”\textsuperscript{20} and that “lessen the amount of stress, anxiety, or emotional reaction experienced when working with clients.”\textsuperscript{21}

• Self-care involves self-reflection and action in terms of knowing one’s needs and making a conscious effort to seek out resources that will foster health and well-being.\textsuperscript{22,23}
Engaging In Self-Care

• Awareness

• Balance

• Physical health

• Social support

• Meaning
Building Awareness

• Understanding of the risks for and symptoms of burnout and professional impairment. \(^{24,25}\)

• Increased self-awareness leads to a higher likelihood of recognizing and attending needs, \(^{26}\) which in turn allows increasing the ability to provide quality services. \(^{27}\)
Distributing one’s attention to various aspects of life, ensuring not to neglect important facets, and maintaining a sense of equilibrium in both personal and professional realms; whereas imbalance occurs when satisfaction in one domain leads to negative outcomes in other domains.\textsuperscript{28}
• Work-life imbalance (e.g., high case load, workaholism) is related to the experience of work stress, compassion fatigue, \textsuperscript{29} exhaustion among mental health practitioners, \textsuperscript{30} and feelings of anxiety, stress, and being unsettled. \textsuperscript{31}

• Maintaining balance in life is related to lower levels of emotional exhaustion, \textsuperscript{32} greater career satisfaction, \textsuperscript{33} and lower risk of burnout. \textsuperscript{34}

• Leisure time is a key component of self-care. \textsuperscript{35}
Physical Health

• Self-care in relation to physical health encompasses issues of sleep, exercise, and diet. 36

• In turn, physical health problems can have a negative impact on practitioners’ client work, especially to the therapeutic alliance. 37

• Insufficient sleep is linked to exhaustion and low professional efficacy, 38 higher levels of stress, 39 and clinical levels of burnout. 40

• For example, medical students who exercise regularly reported less exhaustion and greater professional efficacy, 41 and lower rates of burnout and higher quality of life. 42
Social Support (1 of 2)

• Evidence is less clear as some studies have shown social support is of less importance to mental health professionals.\(^{43}\)

• Other studies have found it to be a significant factor in practitioners’ well-being. In one example, Killian\(^{44}\) found that social support was the most significant predictor of compassion satisfaction among trauma therapists.

• Strong social support is related to lower levels of perceived stress,\(^{45}\) while a lower level of personal (e.g., family) and professional (e.g., collegial) support is linked to greater psychological distress.\(^{46}\)
• Personal support (i.e., friends, family) is a valuable element of self-care and a way to promote life balance for practitioners and may be more important than other types of support (e.g., peers, professors) for graduate counseling students.47,48

• Finally, personal therapy is recommended as a method of self-care.49
Meaning (1 of 2)

- Having a sense of meaning and existential well-being in relation to one’s work is associated with lower levels of depression, less stress and more social support, greater career satisfaction, joy, and less burnout and fewer psychiatric symptoms.
Meaning (2 of 2)

- Mindfulness refers to the quality of awareness that occurs through intentionally focusing on present moment experiences in an accepting and non-judgmental manner.\textsuperscript{55}

- Mindfulness Based Interventions in healthcare professionals were effective in increasing mindfulness and self-compassion and reducing anxiety, burnout, stress, and rumination.\textsuperscript{56,57,58,59}
Building Self-Care Into A Routine

• Integrate breaks into work by placing them into your schedule as working on yourself leads to better work.

• Keep a log of positive experiences with individuals you’ve worked with that you can review.

• Keep a list of reasons to remind yourself why you do your work.

• Have a ritual for when you start and stop work.

• Commit to one self-care activity you can add to your daily schedule and one you can add to your weekly schedule.
Self-Care Activity

1. Find a comfortable position for yourself that you can hold for about 10 minutes.

2. Try to maintain good posture and start by noticing your breath.
Thank you

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Adapted From


Sources (1 of 11)


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