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# **Self-Care: The Session Focused On You**

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# Session Overview

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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



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# Why Self-Care is Important for Practitioners

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- Behavioral health practitioners work in a culture of one-way caring.<sup>1</sup>
- Need to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and patience without the expectation of receiving it in return.<sup>2</sup>
- Practitioners are at an increased risk for negative outcomes such as stress,<sup>3</sup> burnout,<sup>4</sup> and professional impairment.<sup>5</sup>
- While helping others move toward well-being, practitioners often can overlook their own needs.<sup>6</sup>



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# Self-Care As Prevention

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- 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.<sup>7</sup>
- 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.”<sup>8</sup>



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# Signs of Burnout

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- 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.<sup>9</sup>



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# Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

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- 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<sup>9</sup>



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# The Impact of Burnout

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- 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.<sup>10,11,12,13</sup>
- Burnout amongst HCPs has also been associated with reduced job satisfaction<sup>14</sup> and negative patient outcomes, including reduced patient satisfaction and increased work errors.<sup>15,16,17</sup>



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# Defining Wellness (1 of 2)

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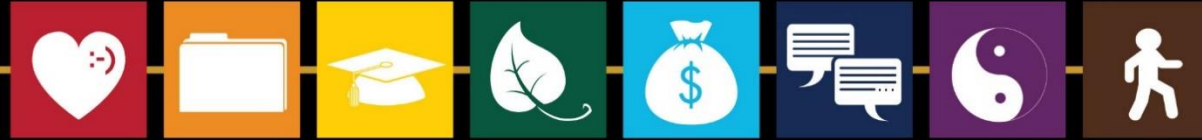
- “A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”
  - The World Health Organization
- “A conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential.”
  - The National Wellness Institute



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# 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<sup>18</sup>



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# What Is Self-Care?

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- Self-care refers to the “ability to refill and refuel oneself in healthy ways,”<sup>19</sup> including “engagement in behaviors that maintain and promote physical and emotional well-being”<sup>20</sup> and that “lessen the amount of stress, anxiety, or emotional reaction experienced when working with clients.”<sup>21</sup>
- 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.<sup>22,23</sup>



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# Engaging In Self-Care

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- Awareness
- Balance
- Physical health
- Social support
- Meaning



# Building Awareness

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- Understanding of the risks for and symptoms of burnout and professional impairment.<sup>24,25</sup>
- Increased self-awareness leads to a higher likelihood of recognizing and attending needs,<sup>26</sup> which in turn allows increasing the ability to provide quality services.<sup>27</sup>



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# Balance (1 of 2)

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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.<sup>28</sup>



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# Balance (2 of 2)

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- Work-life imbalance (e.g., high case load, workaholism) is related to the experience of work stress, compassion fatigue,<sup>29</sup> exhaustion among mental health practitioners,<sup>30</sup> and feelings of anxiety, stress, and being unsettled.<sup>31</sup>
- Maintaining balance in life is related to lower levels of emotional exhaustion,<sup>32</sup> greater career satisfaction,<sup>33</sup> and lower risk of burnout.<sup>34</sup>
- Leisure time is a key component of self-care.<sup>35</sup>



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# Physical Health

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- Self-care in relation to physical health encompasses issues of sleep, exercise, and diet.<sup>36</sup>
- In turn, physical health problems can have a negative impact on practitioners' client work, especially to the therapeutic alliance.<sup>37</sup>
- Insufficient sleep is linked to exhaustion and low professional efficacy,<sup>38</sup> higher levels of stress,<sup>39</sup> and clinical levels of burnout.<sup>40</sup>
- For example, medical students who exercise regularly reported less exhaustion and greater professional efficacy,<sup>41</sup> and lower rates of burnout and higher quality of life.<sup>42</sup>



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# Social Support (1 of 2)

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- Evidence is less clear as some studies have shown social support is of less importance to mental health professionals.<sup>43</sup>
- Other studies have found it to be a significant factor in practitioners' well-being. In one example, Killian<sup>44</sup> 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,<sup>45</sup> while a lower level of personal (e.g., family) and professional (e.g., collegial) support is linked to greater psychological distress.<sup>46</sup>



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# Social Support (2 of 2)

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- Personal support (i.e., friends, family) is a valuable element of self-care and a way to promote life balance for practitioners<sup>47</sup> and may be more important than other types of support (e.g., peers, professors) for graduate counseling students.<sup>48</sup>
- Finally, personal therapy is recommended as a method of self-care.<sup>49</sup>



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# Meaning (1 of 2)

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- Having a sense of meaning and existential well-being in relation to one's work is associated with lower levels of depression,<sup>50</sup> less stress and more social support,<sup>51</sup> greater career satisfaction,<sup>52</sup> joy,<sup>53</sup> and less burnout and fewer psychiatric symptoms.<sup>54</sup>



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# Meaning (2 of 2)

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- Mindfulness refers to the quality of awareness that occurs through intentionally focusing on present moment experiences in an accepting and non-judgmental manner.<sup>55</sup>
- Mindfulness Based Interventions in healthcare professionals were effective in increasing mindfulness and self-compassion and reducing anxiety, burnout, stress, and rumination.<sup>56,57,58,59</sup>



# Building Self-Care Into A Routine

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- 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.



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# Self-Care Activity

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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.



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# Thank you

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# Adapted From

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