Self-care & Maintaining Professional Boundaries

Jorie Schwartz, MSW, LISW-S
Why Self-care?

- High-stress occupation
- Longevity in the profession
- It is a parallel process
- Quality of life
- Others?
It is not selfish to refill your own cup, so that you can pour into others. It's not just a luxury. It is essential.
How to Flourish in Social Work

Preserving personal longevity and happiness, relationships, and your career

COMMON AILMENTS

"A feeling of depletion leads to dysfunction... a [Social Work] practitioner becomes increasingly 'inoperative'."

BURNOUT

COMPASSION FATIGUE

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

Stress

- Stress is a state of mental, emotional or physical strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.
Burn Out

- A state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.
- It can be related to the job environment and job requirements.
- The individual can become more rigid, resigned, irritable and quick to anger.

(Smullens, 2012)
3 Stages of Burnout

1 Stress Arousal
- irritability, anxiety, bruxism, insomnia, forgetfulness/poor concentration, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches

2 Energy Conservation
- lateness, procrastination/turning work in late, excessive time off, sexual dysfunction, fatigue, social withdrawal, increased substance use

3 Exhaustion
- chronic sadness/depression, suicidal ideations, chronic GI problems, chronic headaches, social isolation
Vicarious or Secondary Trauma

- A reaction to taking on clients’ trauma
- Similar to PTSD
- Can trigger the individuals own unresolved trauma
- It’s common among professionals who work directly with trauma victims

(Smullens, 2012)
Compassion Fatigue

- When burnout and/or secondary trauma are present, it can lead to compassion fatigue.
- A condition characterized by a gradual lessening of empathy over time.
- It is also common among individuals that work directly with trauma victims such as social workers, child welfare workers, medical personnel, psychologists, and first responders. (Smullens, 2012)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Burnout</th>
<th>Compassion Fatigue</th>
<th>Vicarious Traumatisation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Signs:</strong></td>
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<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Sadness &amp; Grief</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>Anger</td>
<td>Avoidance or dread of working with some patients</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
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<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Reduced ability to feel empathy towards patients or families</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
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<td>Negative reactions towards others</td>
<td>Somatic complaints</td>
<td>Apathy</td>
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<td>Cynicism</td>
<td>Addiction</td>
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<td>Negativity</td>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td>Loss of control, trust &amp; independence</td>
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<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Frequent use of sick days</td>
<td>Somatic complaints</td>
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<td>Increased psychological arousal</td>
<td>Relational disturbances</td>
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<td>Changes in beliefs, expectations &amp; assumptions</td>
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<td>Detachment</td>
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<td>Decreased intimacy</td>
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<th>Symptoms</th>
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<td>Physical</td>
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<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>Psychological distress</td>
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<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Digestive problems</td>
<td>Cognitive shifts</td>
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<td>Relational Disturbances</td>
<td>Muscle tension</td>
<td>Relational Disturbances</td>
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<td>Relational Disturbances</td>
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<td>Poor concentration, focus &amp; judgement</td>
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<th>Triggers</th>
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<td>Personal characteristics</td>
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<td>Work-related attributes</td>
<td>Previous exposure to trauma</td>
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<td>Work organisational characteristics</td>
<td>Empathy &amp; emotional energy</td>
<td>Type of therapy</td>
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<td>Prolonged exposure to trauma material of clients</td>
<td>Organisational context</td>
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<td>Response to stressor</td>
<td>Resources</td>
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<td>Work environment</td>
<td>Re-enactment</td>
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<td>Work-related attitudes</td>
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What is Self-care?

- Brainstorm?
- There are no wrong answers here!
- Things you do at work
- Things you do outside of work
- Working on yourself
- Things that help you stay passionate about work
This Self-Care Wheel was inspired by and adapted from “Self-Care Assessment Worksheet” from *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization* by Saakvitne, Pearlman & Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton, 1996). Created by Olga Phoenix Projects: Healing for Social Change (2013).
This Self-Care Wheel was inspired by and adapted from "Self-Care: A Treasury for Your Body, Mind, and Soul." This tool was developed by Eat, Pray, Love author Elizabeth Gilbert, who is well known for her self-care practices.

In the Personal section:
- Take time for lunch
- Set boundaries
- Leave work at work
- Do not work during your time off
- Get support of colleagues
- Take mental health days
- Learn to say NO
- Plan your next career move
- Take a class
- Take all vacation and sick days

In the Professional section:
- Safe housing
- Regular medical care
- Eat Healthy
- Exercise
- Take time off
- Get enough sleep
- Take vacations
- Acupuncture
- Massages
- Bubble baths
- Kiss
- Be sexual
- Turn off cell phone
- Get "me" time

In the Physical section:
- Eat Healthy
- Exercise
- Take time off
- Acupuncture
- Massages
- Bubble baths
- Kiss
- Be sexual
- Turn off cell phone
- Get "me" time
Self-care refers to selected actions that restore balance in our personal and professional lives.

**EXERCISE**
- Light exercise 3 days a week improves happiness by 30-40% and increases work productivity by 5%

**MEDITATE**
- 50% reduction in anxiety and stress
- 70% decrease in overall health-related quality of life

**READ**
- Reading love stories to children boosts memory and inhibits the stress system.

**LAUGH**
- Laughter strengthens the immune system, makes you feel better, and raises energy.

**GREENSPACE**
- Having a green space in your environment can reduce stress by over 30%.

**EAT WELL**
- Omega 3 fatty acids improve memory and learning.

**TIME OFF**
- 15 minutes a day can reduce stress.

**SLEEP**
- Humans require 8 hours of sleep to be at their best.

Not just an add-on activity, self-care is also a state of mind through development of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-efficacy.

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Categories of Supervision

- Administrative
- Educational
- Supportive

(Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, NASW, 2013)
Revolutionary Self-care

1. Eliminating negative self-talk
2. Rituals of self-care
3. Choosing optimism
Self-care Assessment
Self-care as it Relates to Client-care

- Brainstorm, how is your own self-care related to the care you provide others?
We have a responsibility to take care of ourselves:

**4.05 Impairment**

(a) Social workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility.

(b) Social workers whose personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties interfere with their professional judgment and performance should immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect clients and others.

(NASW, 2006)
It’s in the NASW Code of Ethics!

The Code of Ethics also states that we have a responsibility to our colleagues:

**2.09 Impairment of Colleagues**

(a) Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague’s impairment that is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties and that interferes with practice effectiveness should consult with that colleague when feasible and assist the colleague in taking remedial action.

(b) Social workers who believe that a social work colleague’s impairment interferes with practice effectiveness and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to address the impairment should take action through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

(NASW, 2006)
The code also provides guidance to supervisory-level social workers in this area:

**3.07 Administration**

(c) Social workers who are administrators should take reasonable steps to ensure that adequate agency or organizational resources are available to provide appropriate staff supervision.

**3.08 Continuing Education and Staff Development**

Social work administrators and supervisors should take reasonable steps to provide or arrange for continuing education and staff development for all staff for whom they are responsible. Continuing education and staff development should address current knowledge and emerging developments related to social work practice and ethics.
Scenarios – Small Group Work
Characteristics of Workers Struggling with Burnout

- Over-identification with clients
- Taking on too much re workload
- External-locus of control
- Poor professional boundaries

(Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993)
Professional Boundaries Self-assessment
Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

- Paying attention to boundaries is essential to helping your clients and upholding the standards of the profession.
- Because social work involves sustained interaction with individual clients, boundaries should be defined from the beginning of the relationship.
What Drives Healthy Boundaries?

Remaining client centered!
- Helper does “No Harm” to client in helping process
- Rights of the client are respected and honored
- Helper is always respectful of and conscious of need to guard privacy of client
- Helper does not take advantage of and recognizes extent of “vulnerability” of client in situation
Steps to Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

- Establish rules of contact
- Demonstrate professional interpersonal behavior
- Avoid dual relationships
- Nurture your non-professional life
12 Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Is this in my client’s best interest?
2. Whose needs are being served?
3. Will this have an impact on the service I am delivering?
4. Should I make a note of my concerns or consult with a colleague?
5. How would this be viewed by the client’s family or significant other?
6. How would I feel telling a colleague about this?
12 Questions to Ask Yourself

7. Am I treating this client differently (e.g., appointment length, time of appointments, extent of personal disclosures)?
8. Does this client mean something special to me?
9. Am I taking advantage of the client?
10. Does this action benefit me rather than the client?
11. Am I comfortable in documenting this decision or behavior in the client file?
12. Does this go against the Code of Ethics?
Self-Reflect!

- Be self-aware of feelings and behaviors involved in working with each client
- Utilize supervision time to discuss feelings about clients and your boundaries
- Be observant of behavior of other helpers in the field and call them on it if they appear to be overstepping their boundaries with clients
- Always act in best interest of clients
- Attend to your self-care
How to be More Resilient

Take this cup,
I’ve filled it up,
With love and joy and laughter.
Now it’s empty,
Fill it up.
Repeat,
Forever after.
First, so full
I’m giving
All my love and joy in living
Then near empty,
Tired of living,
And I’m the
One who needs the giving.

This cup, this cup,
This cup of life,
It’s always overflowing;
We give and get
And get and give,
Life’s balance
Keeps on going.
Take this cup,
I’ve filled it up,
With love and joy and laughter.
Now it’s empty,
Fill it up.
Repeat,
Forever, after.

By: Laura Byrnes
What’s Your Plan?

- A self-care plan refers to activities and practices that are engaged in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance a person’s short- and longer-term health and well-being.
I tried carrying the weight of the world, but I only have two hands.
References


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