

For March 26, 2018

Self-Care for Disability Workers

If you were to ask any health provider if they know the definition of self-care, many, if not all, would answer with certainty, “Of course!” If asked if they engage in self-care activities, you would oftentimes get a long moment of silence followed by a list of excuses. This is the tricky part about self-care; although it is a very popular topic—one that is always recommended by health providers—it is often forgotten or overlooked by the prescriber.

What is self-care? Why is it important for disability workers and other mental health providers?

[Self-care practices](#) are intentional activities we do in order to take care of our mental, physical and emotional health. It differs for everyone, and there is no concrete outline on how to do it. For example, some may consider gardening a self-care activity; whereas some would much rather attend a hot yoga class.

Although self-care is critical for efficiency and skillfulness in this field of work, it can be easily, and [very quickly, forgotten and lost](#). Not taking care of our well-being may lead to compassion fatigue and burnout, which could impair our decision making and [have adverse effects on client care](#).

We give an immense amount of empathy to our clients. We often listen or witness very tragic and emotionally difficult stories and situations, and give it our all to support our clients. Our profession is not intended to be a two-way street, and so it is vital to create outlets to not only take care of ourselves but to [better ourselves as providers](#).

We should walk the talk and make it a priority to take care of our own well-being that we so often recommend to our clients. Engaging in regular self-care activities will help us be more present and attentive, improve relations with those we support, as well as decrease errors.

What are some possible warning sign of burnout or stress?

Recognizing warning signs of stress or burnout is the first step towards taking care of oneself. The second step is to not feel ashamed of them or see them as failings, but rather see them as a [sign of health and self-awareness](#).

According to the [Canadian Centre of Occupational Health and Safety \(2012\)](#), there are many physical, psychosocial, cognitive, and behavioural signs of work-related stress that may lead to burnout. Some of these include sleep disturbances, frequent illness, anxiety, hopelessness, decreased attention, and increase of alcohol and drug use.

Self-Care Plan: Where to Start?

Although self-care can look very different for everyone, it may be a good idea to come up with a preliminary plan that includes [a few golden rules](#). Here are just a few examples of what this plan could look like:

- Create a ‘no’ list with things you know don’t help your well-being and that you no longer want to do (e.g., checking emails at night or answering your work phone at home).
- Adequate and hygienic sleep. Aim for 8 hours of sleep every night!
- Exercise, whether it is signing up for a gym, a class, going hiking, or simply going for a quick walk around the neighborhood.



- Encourage a healthy and nutritious diet.
- Engage in relaxation practices, such as meditation, mindfulness activities, spirituality, just being outside, etc.
- Make sure to make time for your loved ones.
- Do at least one relaxing or pleasurable activity a day.

Remember, you are the author of your life. Only you can decide when and how to start taking care of yourself. Whether you are a disability worker or some other health provider, being aware of your own needs and warning signs and taking care of yourself are part of providing the best care to your clients.



ADWA thanks Joanna Nowotarski, M.A. Counselling Psychology (pending June 2018) for contributing this E-Bulletin. Joanna is a Counselling Therapist at Calgary SCOPE Society.

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