

Self-care at Work

Practice Guide



A life jacket is a personal flotation device designed to assist a person by keeping them afloat, with his or her airway above the water surface. It is a piece of safety and survival equipment that no sensible sailor would be without. The weather and ocean are very unpredictable, and can cause you to fall overboard and drown very quickly.

Self-care involves putting on your 'life jacket', which is essential if you are going to survive in your chosen career. If you work in the human service industry, then it does not take long to realise that you get tired very quickly. It can be physically and emotionally draining, and there is a high risk of getting stressed and burnt out. Sadly, too many great professionals in this sector get tired, unmotivated or disillusioned because they have not been able to care for themselves.

Self-care describes taking care of your 'self'. It is the practice of making daily choices that keep you physically, mentally, socially, intellectually and spiritually healthy. By keeping yourself healthy, you are then able to provide quality services to other people who need your support.

It makes sense to adopt a strong commitment to caring for yourself, since self-care is a very large part of dealing with stress. Ultimately, self-care can benefit every area of your life.

The name of the game is taking care of yourself, because you're going to live long enough to wish you had.

Grace Mirabella



Self-Care and Wellness

Skovholt (2001) uses the metaphor of a tree to explain self-care. A tree takes in carbon dioxide in

order to give out oxygen. The tree must get nourishment to do this job, be healthy and grow. A regular supply of clean water, rich soil and sunlight gives it the nourishment it needs. Stressors which can cause the tree to die include pests, chemicals, storms or flooding. Like trees, people also need nourishment and growth to survive and do their job. They also need to protect themselves against the stressors that can take away strength and life itself.

The tree metaphor helps us understand how important self-care is to wellness. Wellness is an active process through which people make choices to achieve the highest potential for personal health and well-being. Wellness enables people to be happy, healthy and resilient to the stresses of daily life.

Self-care is something you should think about and do all the time, not just when you are feeling stressed or tired. Self-care should be something you plan for, make time for and prioritise in your weekly schedule. This will boost your resilience, nurture your personal wellness and maintain your health.

Some of the different ways that might help you to self-care at work include:

- Creating a comfortable office or tea room
- Making yourself a healthy lunch and sitting away from your desk to eat it
- Taking a relaxing walk at lunch time
- Moving away from the computer regularly to rest your eyes
- Using self-talk to maintain a positive attitude
- Keeping things in perspective
- Making time for self-reflection
- Nurturing your creativity and initiative
- Setting clear personal and professional boundaries



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- Maintaining healthy workplace relationships
- Attending team support and team building events or meetings
- Dealing effectively with workplace conflict
- Saying “no” to unreasonable requests or demands on your time
- Having fun at work, and finding things that make you laugh
- Limiting your self-criticism and being more accepting of yourself
- Having regular debriefing and supervision
- Prioritising your work and time managing your day successfully
- Asking for support with work that causes you stress
- Attending professional development workshops or seminars to increase your skills and knowledge
- Recognising the signs of stress and burn out and taking the steps to reduce its harmful effects
- Striving for balance within your work-life and workday
- Having a coach or mentor
- Taking holidays (some people forget to do this!!)

Personal wellness and resilience is a continuous, active process. Needs and situations change, so you should be proactive and regularly assess which self-care strategies work best for you.

Help seeking

People who are good at self-care, are good at finding support and help to overcome challenges or stress. Seeking help is an important strategy to help people debrief, find solutions, gain advice or take steps towards personal or professional growth. It is an important skill for all professionals to know when to seek out support, acting like a life jacket, which is vital for survival.

The Key Principles of Self-Care in Practice

- Respect yourself and value self-care choices.
- Take personal responsibility to self-care.
- Build a network of supportive role models, friends and mentors.
- Be a help seeker and value the support you receive from others.
- Make ‘downtime’ for yourself regularly and routinely.

REFLECT

What is your attitude towards self-care? Do you need to give yourself permission to take care of yourself more routinely?



Using the tree metaphor, what is the water, soil and sun in your life that sustains you and nurtures your “self”?

Can you improve your time management or workload so that you feel more in control and confident about your role and responsibilities at work?

Write down at least three ways that would help you enjoy work more or would increase creativity within your team.

Name three people that you can go to for support or guidance.

Name one person who encourages you to care for yourself and to whom you can be accountable.

Reference

Skovholt, T. M. (2001) *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.