

# Professional Self-Care

## Create your own Self-Care Plan

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# About the Presenters

Graduated in 1990 with MSW from  
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Has Worked in:

- Outpatient Mental Health Agency
- Crisis Services for Children and Families
- Case Management Supervisor
- Private Practice
- University Of New England Field Faculty  
since 2003



**Wanda Anderson, MSW, LCSW**  
University of New England

# About the Presenters

Graduated in 2006 with MSW from Boston University School of Social Work

Has worked in:

- Day Treatment Program for Teens
- Outpatient Mental Health Agency
- Hospital setting providing patient navigation for patients and families receiving cancer treatment
- non-profit agency providing grief support to children, families, and communities
- University setting providing field support and instruction



**Rebecca Diggins, MSW, LCSW**  
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# Learning Objectives

- Define self-care, burnout, compassion fatigue and trauma stewardship and the role they play in social work practice
- Consider self-care as an ethical responsibility and integral part of your profession
- Examine general self-care practices and strategies
- Assess and evaluate own self-care practices
- Learn how to develop personal and professional strategies to advance and prioritize self care

# Housekeeping

- Ask questions at anytime
- Respect others opinions
- Stand or walk around
- Every question is important
- Will have 1 breakout group



# Points to Ponder

## Let's Take a Minute

- What brought you to do this work?
- What keeps you doing this work?
- Why do you keep showing up?
- What keeps your light lit?
- How do you feel each morning as you prepare for your day/work?
- Close your eyes and envision Monday morning, does this bring anxiety or calm?

# Burnout Syndrome (BOS)

First described in the 1970s, BOS is a work-related constellation of symptoms that usually occurs in individuals without any prior history of psychological or psychiatric disorders. BOS is triggered by a discrepancy between the expectations and ideals of the employee and the actual requirements of their position. In the initial stages of BOS, individuals feel emotional stress and increasing job-related disillusionment

(American Thoracic Society, 2016)

# Burnout Syndrome Cont'd

Health professionals and social workers caring for seriously ill/dying or traumatized patients and their families are frequently exposed to distressing emotional situations and profound suffering. Lack of attention to health providers' stress responses to this suffering can lead to burnout, which has consequences for the provider and their interpersonal relationships.

Burnout is characterised by 3 dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism / depersonalisation, and inefficiency.

- Exhaustion reflects the stress dimension of burnout.
- Depersonalisation is an attempt to distance oneself from the client by developing an indifference or cynical attitude when feeling exhausted and discouraged.
- Decreased effectiveness and work performance result from negative attitudes and behaviours.
- These factors combined interfere with one's effectiveness or efficiency at work

(Goldberg, 2017)



# Compassion Fatigue

## Definitions

- The physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced by those who care for sick or traumatized people over an extended period of time. Unlike burnout, which is caused by everyday work stresses (dealing with insurance companies, making treatment choices), compassion fatigue results from taking on the emotional burden of a patient's agony.
- Apathy or indifference toward the suffering of others as the result of overexposure to tragic news stories and images and the subsequent appeals for assistance.
- Compassion fatigue is also synonymous with secondary traumatic stress disorder.

(Merriam-Webster, 2021)

# Compassion Fatigue Cont'd

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue: biological, psychological and/or social.

- Biological/Physical - Sympathetic and parasympathetic arousal (prolonged stress leads to immuno-suppression, and frequent illness).
- Psychological - Excessive self-concern, aloneness, powerlessness, despair, and stagnation.
- Social - Rejection, separation, lost control, giving up, destruction, emptiness, and disintegration.

(Friedman, 2002; Figley, 1995)

# Self Care

General: Self-Care describes the activities undertaken by individuals and the wider community in order to improve health, prevent disease and manage illness. It encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and decisions that people make for themselves to maintain a good level of physical and mental health.

Social Work: Self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain and enhance our short- and longer-term health and well-being. Self-care is necessary for your effectiveness and success in honoring your professional and personal commitments. (School of Social Work, University at Buffalo)

## Definitions

- The practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health.
- The practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress.

(Oxford Dictionary, 2019)

# Self Care - Your Ideas

- What does self-care mean to you?
- What isn't self-care?
- What does self-care mean in your organization?
- Is just a buzz word?

# Ethical Considerations of Self Care

**Mental Health Professions - now explicit in code**

**NASW**

**American Counseling Association**

**LCPC (Maine)**

**Psychologists**

**Association for Addictions Counseling**

**Teachers?**

**NEA - <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/code-ethics-educators>**

# Break Out Groups

- Name the top reasons you show up each day to your job
- Name the top reasons you feel stressed in your work role
- What are self-care strategies that can be used during your work day (either as an individual or during meetings)
- Reflect on your current self care strategies - what is going well, areas for improvement?

# Strategies for Self-Care

- Awareness
- Presence/Grounding
- Gratitude
- Routine, Structure, and Boundaries
- Humor
- Growth
- Connection
- Movement

# Awareness

- For one day, commit to paying attention to the running commentary in your mind. Is your mind seeing the glass half empty or half-full. Are you able to reframe things?
- At the end of the day, before sleep overtakes you, ask yourself “What can I put down? What am I ready to be done with? What don’t I need to carry with me for another day. (Lipsky & Burk, 2009)
- Ask yourself “what are my clients or my experiences at work touching in me about my own life (past and present)? What would it be wise for me to explore more in depth?” (Smullens, 2021)
- Journal - often we don’t know how we feel until we write it down (work, personal, or self-care journal!)



# Grounding/Presence

- Before starting your workday, take a moment to literally stop in your tracks and ask yourself, “Why am I doing what I am doing? What is my intention?” After you hear your answer, gently remind yourself that you are making a choice to do this work. Take a deep breath; breathe in both the responsibility and the freedom in this acknowledgement.
- Commit to taking a 5 minute break every hour or two that you are working - focus on breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly. Notice anything beautiful around you and breathe that in as well.
- Survival Kit – reminders of what’s important to you.
- Prayer, meditation, mindfulness, other rituals and/or ceremonies

# Gratitude

- Gratitude can help us to hold two opposing thoughts and take us out of black and white thinking (sad about client situation, grateful you could provide support; angry about an issue, grateful you have passion)
- At both the beginning and end of your workday, take a distinct moment to think of one thing you are grateful for. Maybe log in a journal.
- Every single day, think of one person you are grateful to and tell that person.
- Advocate for your workplace to create some way where you and your colleagues can express gratitude towards one another. (Lipsky & Burk, 2009)

# Routine, Structure & Boundaries

- Have a manageable work load
- Have regularly scheduled supervision with supervisor and peers
- Get and give feedback with supervisor and peers
- Make people aware of your boundaries or your triggers before you snap or react
- Stay organized
- Take a “mental health day” when needed
- Prioritize and get sufficient sleep
- Know when to say no/reframe: know when to say yes!

# Humor

- Laugh, joke, find time to unwind
- Laughter Yoga
- Have a “funny buddy” who will watch funny movies with you, funny YouTube videos
- Listen to babies laughing (YouTube)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L49VXZwfup8>
- Remember a funny thing that you did or that happened to you and share it with a friend or write it down in a journal

# Growth

- Identify one thing that you would love to incorporate into your workday but are certain you could not. Now try everything in your power to make that a reality – even for just one day. (Lipsky & Burk, 2009)
- Read materials, articles, self-help books, related to an area that you would like to grow in
  - (CAVEAT - it is essential to remember that relaxation and enjoyment are intrinsic components of self-care. Even though learning is vital, it is fine to skip a heavier/more intense documentary, article, or podcast and instead do something that brings out joy!) (Smullens, 2021)
- Be assertive with your feelings

# Growth

- Process, talk things out with someone
- Meet with a therapist on a regular basis
- Turn inward, tune in, and listen to your inner dialogue and try giving yourself what you need
- Practice vicarious resilience and post-traumatic growth
  - instead of attaching to and replaying stories of trauma, practice recognizing and attaching to client success, resilience, positive life lesson you can learn and integrate into your own life

# Connection

- Religious or spiritual practices and connecting with nature
- Making time for partners, children, family, friends, pets
- Participating in community recreation groups
- Group therapy or community/topic specific support groups
- Engaging in and prioritizing reciprocal relationships - much of our day is in connection with clients or others when we are in a helping role - this can lead to loneliness and/or isolation (Smullens, 2021)
- Music, podcasts, movies, etc.

# Movement

- Exercise
- Movement for fun, for processing and/or integration - dance, sports, lawn games, walks with friends, tours, axe throwing, paddleboarding, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, etc.
- Yoga
- Stretching
- Swimming/floating in water
- Standing in meetings
- Taking the stairs instead of elevator
- Visiting/shifting to a different environment (ocean, lake, pond, forest, desert, park, etc.)



# Evaluating our Self-Care Efficacy

How do we know our self-care strategies are working?

- Just as each of your self-care plans will be different, so will how you know whether your plan and self-care strategies are effective and are working

Rebecca's Example - being in self vs. being dysregulated

Wanda's Example - being calm vs. agitated

# How I know my self-care is working: Rebecca

## I am in Self

- Productive
- Inspired
- Effective
- Efficient
- Connected w/colleagues
- Social
- Open
- Seeking
- Excited
- Energetic
- Clothing reflects positive space

## I am Dysregulated

- Overwhelmed
- Racing against the clock
- Pressured energy
- Constantly checking email
- Sleep interference
- Doubting abilities
- Feel underappreciated
- Disillusioned
- Exhausted
- Questioning career choice
- Withdrawing
- Seeking exit strategy
- Negative
- Don't care about appearance/clothing

# How I know my self-care is working: Wanda

## I am Calm

- Feeling content
- Able to sit still
- Feel gratitude
- Speaking calm and normal
- Relaxed
- Focused
- Engaged
- Confident

## I am Agitated

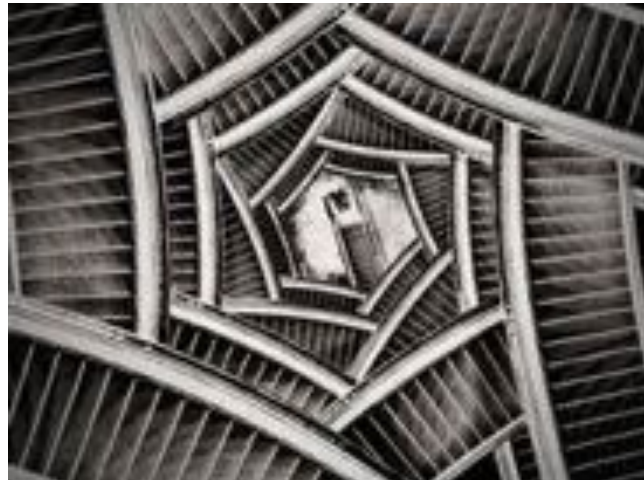
- Can't sit still
- Racing thoughts
- Can not focus
- Talk is pressured
- Jumping from one topic to another
- Can not finish anything
- Many grand ideas
- Feel unproductive
- Jittery
- Defensive

# Self-Care Plan Template

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SdzSdZKibrDRm2SWrpAoIQvk8M7XVRN26MpVBC4qdOw/edit>

# Be Patient and Keep Trying!

“Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.” -Martin Luther King, Jr.



Share with us 1 thing you are  
taking with you from this training



Thank you for sharing your time and  
experience with us!

Wanda & Rebecca

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