

*Skills to Live Out Your Values at Work and Beyond*  
**Self-Care Skillfulness**

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# Outline

- **Orientation:** recommended, caveats, and self-care domains
- **Research:** approaches and measures
- **Suggested practice:** recast in terms of your preferred life-enhancement system(s)
  - **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) example:** for further brainstorming with/sharing by the audience
- **Additional resources**
- **References**

# Orientation

- General agreement that engagement in self-care represents best practice for professionals (Maranzan et al., 2018; Practice Research & Policy Staff, 2010; Wise et al., 2012)
- High levels of self-care may be especially important for early career professionals (ECPs), who have several heightened risk factors for burnout relative to other career stages (Dorociak et al., 2017b)
- Those engaged in social justice efforts and diversity education may also be at increased risk (Eaton & Warner, 2021; Miller et al., 2018)

# Orientation

- How best to teach/learn and “habitize” self-care skills remains an open empirical question (see [Pakenham, 2015](#))
- It’s important to respect multicultural diversity when it comes to sources of stress and self-care recommendations ([Leonowicz, 2016](#))
- There are a lot of self-care domains and skills . . .

# Orientation

- E.g., *Norcross and VandenBos (2018), Leaving It at the Office A Guide to Psychotherapist Self-Care*, currently in its second edition
  - Appreciate stressors and risks
  - Tend to the person, spirituality, and values of the therapist
  - Focus on rewards
  - Facilitate creativity and growth
  - Tend to the body
  - Tend to thinking (changing thoughts and mindfulness)
  - Tend to relationships and setting boundaries
  - Have healthy escapes
  - Organize the environment
  - Avail oneself of therapy

# Orientation

- E.g., *Carter & Barnett (2014), Self-Care for Clinicians in Training: A Guide to Psychological Wellness for Graduate Students in Psychology*
  - Assess stress, burnout, competence, and secondary trauma
  - Set goals, manage time, and maintain realistic expectations
  - Develop and implement a self-care plan
  - Intrapersonal and interpersonal care
  - Find and utilize good mentors
  - Create self-care cultures in graduate training programs
  - Learn to balance training and personal life

# Orientation

- E.g., *Posluns & Gall (2020), Dear Mental Health Practitioners, Take Care of Yourselves: a Literature Review on Self-Care*
  - Awareness
  - Balance
  - Flexibility
  - Physical health
  - Social support
  - Spirituality

# Research

- Systematic review ( $k = 21$ ) of self-care training among health service psychology graduate students identified five approaches (\*two of which yielded promising effects in studies) (Callan et al., 2021)
  - **Fostering a culture of self-care\***
  - Provision of mentorship/supervision
  - **Provision of self-care training\***
  - Development of a self-care workbook or tool
  - Personal therapy
- Systematic review ( $k = 8$ ) of self-care measures for behavioral healthcare professionals and trainees identified 10 tools, 2 of which appeared especially promising psychometrically (Jiang et al., 2021)
  - **Professional Self-Care Scale (PSCS; Dorociak et al., 2017a)**
  - **Self-Care Behavior Inventory (SCBI; Santana & Fouad, 2017)**



# Suggested Practice

- Do you advise persons you serve about . . .
  - Assessment and feedback?
  - Self-regulation and identity?
  - Behavioral approaches, such as pleasant activities, accomplishing tasks, and planfully avoiding relapse?
  - Self-actualization and positive exercises?
  - Physical fitness toward emotional wellbeing?
  - Challenging and changing thoughts?
  - Mindfulness?
  - Social skills?
  - Effectively avoiding problems?
  - The benefits of psychotherapy?

# Suggested Practice

**Then you're well prepared to practice what you preach!**

Reflect on self-care practices in terms of concepts and skills from your own preferred life-enhancement system(s)

# Example: DBT (Linehan, 2014, 2015)

- Our typical intervention approach, which expects providers to practice mindfulness and other skills themselves, including via consultation team facilitation
- And indeed, thinking about self-care within this context has helped me to remember and more intentionally practice self-care strategies recommended in the literature
- *Note:* Alternative systems appear to be effective in facilitating improved self-care among professionals in training (Packenham, 2015; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007; see also Colman et al., 2016)

# Acceptance via Mindfulness

Intentional awareness of just the present moment, without attachment, judgment, or rejection, as a path to more dialectical, balanced, skillful, insightful, and spiritual living

# Mindfulness: What

## Observe

Assess self-care (e.g., Professional Self-Care Scale (PSCS))

Track self-care (e.g., *Self-Care Diary Card Excel for MSU staff*)

Ask colleagues and persons you serve how you're helpful and listen mindfully

## Describe

Reflect on why you became a professional

Psychoanalyze yourself

## Participate

Throw your self-care attitudes into behaviors

Tackle challenges head on

Serve in professional organizations

Take activism actions in social missions/movements

# Mindfulness: How (1)

## One-mindful

Make temporary separations from work routines (e.g., take lunch at the same time every day and focus on *just* eating lunch)

Make transitions from/to work and non-work rituals (e.g., listen to the radio while commuting)

## Non-judgment

Welcome challenges

Let go of perfectionism

## Effective

Acknowledge that self-care is ethically called for

Schedule practice of skills you teach

Respond adaptively to challenges

Diversify schedule, activities, persons served, and services

Limit amount of material about persons you serve shared with family/friends

# Mindfulness: How (2)

## Effective (continued)

Reevaluate why you became/still work as a professional and address unhealthy motivations

Value reading, study groups, continuing education, and conference going as lifelong learning/improvement

Appreciate that personal/couples/family therapy is effective and normative among professionals and allow it for yourself

Seek out alternative personal development systems (creative, spiritual, self-help)

# Mindfulness: Alternative Perspectives (1)

## Wise mind

Ask yourself: Do my professional motivations help or hinder self-care?

Embrace your own unique style of helping, capitalizing on your natural and learned skills

Value and practice creative and novel methods

## Skillful means

Monitor busyness of schedule

Balance stress reduction for service provision vs. acceptance of the stress so you can focus instead on self-validation/-growth



# Mindfulness: Alternative Perspectives (2)

## Walk the middle path

Appreciate the flux: bouts of discomfort (prompting change) are followed by refreshment (a sense of acceptance), and vice versa

Use metaphors/paradoxes/irony

Antitheses to thoughts interfering with participating in personal therapy: practicing what you preach (if applicable) and personal therapy as continuing education

Remember: In many ways, professionals are all intrinsically independent contractors with much freedom of choice

Remember: Wealth or not, your work is a great way to make a living

Remember: There may typically be many more pros than cons in the work; your profession's career satisfaction may be  $\geq$  other disciplines; most may have enduring, successful careers; and most may do it all over again

# Mindfulness: Alternative Perspectives (3)

## Spiritual perspectives

Contemplate whether you're integrating spirituality and personal growth into your life

Seek meaning in your personal life (so that work isn't your ultimate meaning)

Identify and return to the spiritual antecedents that called you to your profession

Commune contemplatively with your higher or inner power/wisdom

Experience your wise mind's path to meaning and transcendence

Value your interconnectedness with your colleagues and persons you serve

Check in with your former mentors from time to time about your well-being

Contemplate hope/optimism of the human spirit to cultivate a hopeful philosophy of life and belief in change

Seek out others to help you rekindle concern, caring, and belief in the possibility of change

# Acceptance via Tolerating Distress

Allowing for it to pass, without making it worse; experiencing pain without suffering; and becoming free of inner demands

# Distress Tolerance

## Crisis survival

Employ mindfulness self-care

Employ emotional regulation self-care

## Reality acceptance

Synthesize pros/cons of work

Accept: Work may not always be what you want it to be, *and* this isn't a catastrophe

Accept: Some professional spillage into your personal life is inevitable

## Addiction

Honestly assess unhealthy escapism

Monitor and address addictive stimuli and behavior in your life

# Balance via Thinking Flexibly

Metaphors, paradoxes, and irony

Irreverence (e.g., humor, absurdity)

Walking the middle path (mindfulness, in relationships)

Shifting between ever-occurring polarities, including some common ones . . .

Periods of discomfort (prompts for change)	vs.	Periods of refreshment (“easies” to accept)
Cons of profession	vs.	Pros of profession
Being employed	vs.	Being an independent contractor (in one sense or another)
Professional limitations	vs.	Professional strengths
Professional failures	vs.	Professional successes
Monetary wealth	vs.	Professional enjoyment
Expected/needed workaholism, professional perfection and celebrityism, Olympian self-care	vs.	“Good enough”
Practicing helping	vs.	Seeking therapy
Being a professional among colleagues	vs.	Being a non-professional among family/friends
Dedication to persons you serve	vs.	Protecting personal time
High number of persons served/risky persons served	vs.	Low number of persons served/“safe” persons served
Unilateral obligation to meet the needs of persons served	vs.	You and persons served impacting one another as people served
Persons served projecting on to you	vs.	You projecting on to them
Challenging	vs.	Caring
Healthy boundaries	vs.	Empathy and connection
You caused events for persons you serve	vs.	Other potential causes for events among persons served
Dichotomous success	vs.	Success as an evolving process
Personal failures	vs.	Failed cases

# Change via Learning Principles

How to understand problem behaviors or missing desired behaviors

# Learning Principles (1)

## Analyzing behavior

Prioritize targeting root causes within systems (over peripheral issues)

## Regulating the environment

Not all self-care is intrinsic to you, so also target your environment for the promotion of self-care

Advocate for self-care with administrators (cite to evidence of increased employee productivity, satisfaction, and retention, and improved outcomes for persons served)

Advocate for self-care within your discipline (accreditation, ethics, continuing education, research, conferences)

Collaborate with colleagues to make group support and self-care practice/monitoring part of operations (à la DBT consultation team)

Assess and improve the comfortability and appeal of your workspaces

Incorporate more sensory awareness stimulators into your workspaces (since practice involves a lot of cognitive and affective awareness)

Appraise workplace violence risk and proactively safeguard yourself and your workspaces



# Learning Principles (2)

## Regulating the environment (continued)

Schedule gaps into your work schedule for relaxation, reflection, family/friend contact, or support tasks

Explore options for streamlining/delegating support/non-core work activities

Identify how you are negatively impacted by management/administration and explore ways for increasing freedom/independence/control

# Change via Regulating Emotions

Understanding your feelings, and decreasing the frequency and intensity of unwanted emotions

# Emotional Regulation: Understand

## **Understand and name emotions**

Observe bodily sensations forming part of emotions

## **Mindfulness of current emotions**

Focus mindfulness skills on emotions

## **Managing extreme emotions**

Employ mindfulness, check the facts, and distress tolerance

## **Troubleshooting emotional regulation**

Tailor self-care skills to an analysis of the types of stressors you encounter

Reflect on the culmination of all your terminations with persons served

Handle significant stressful life events, including by soliciting advice from more senior colleagues

Discuss your professional/personal commitments with social supports

Identify negative effects on you and your loved ones by discussing work stressors and soliciting feedback

Solicit friends/family to prompt you when you're too rational without enough irreverence (spontaneous, genuine)

# Emotional Regulation: Reduce Intensity (1)

## Check the facts

Evaluate what truly maintains your overworking/impedes you engaging in self-care escapes

Use observation, disclosure to social supports, and self-report measures of irrational thinking to monitor your work-related thinking (e.g., Cognitive Distortion Questionnaire (CD-QUEST))

Counteract catastrophizing: Probability occurred/will occur? Probability the worst could happen? Badness % of the worst if it happened?

Counteract judgmental thinking (e.g., “I must . . .,” “I should . . .”): Good professionals must be liked by and effective with all the persons they serve; colleagues should work as hard as you; you shouldn’t experience emotional difficulties because you’re a professional

Counteract non-dialectical thinking: Consider alternative possibilities/explanations to assumed personal causality for events among persons who serve; recast success as a process (e.g., effort) and along a continuum (e.g., partial progress); distinguish failed cases from personal failure and accept your inevitable professional limitations

Counteract unrelenting standards: You’re expected/need to take on more work than you do; you must be perfect (compare yourself to similarly situated peers, not authorities); unrealistic self-care regimen

Recall: Dialectic of caring vs. challenging

# Emotional Regulation: Reduce Intensity (2)

## **Act opposite emotions**

Employ skills like getting what you want in relationships, checking the facts, and validation

## **Problem solve**

Employ this planful skill to, e.g., regulate the environment

# Emotional Regulation: Reduce Vulnerability (1)

## Accumulate positive emotions (short term)

Rate activities in your personal and professional schedules for pleasure

Regularly engage in a hobby

Be humorous/seek humor

Schedule gratitude exercises

Stress and relax your muscles (progressive muscle relaxation, massage, etc.)

Relax or contact friends/family during breaks

Get together with colleagues at work/breaks/escapes

At work, arrange for contact/touch with comforting object

In your personal life, seek comforting human contact/touch

Recall successful therapy cases

Vary your daily professional and personal activities

Keep a weekly day of respite

# Emotional Regulation: Reduce Vulnerability (2)

## **Accumulate positive emotions (short term) (continued)**

Regularly play away from work (renewed or new exciting adventures)

Limit exposure to upsetting imagery/media

## **Accumulate positive emotions (long term)**

Rate activities in your personal and professional schedules for meaningfulness

Visualize your valued possible future professional selves and take actions steps toward them

Identify/generate and return to your personal/life mission (what it will say on your tombstone) for prioritization/focus

Take trips, vacations, personal retreats, sabbaticals (be “off the grid”)

## **Build mastery**

Rate activities in your personal and professional schedules for mastery

Include some “rosy prognoses”/“errorless learning”/positive activities

# Emotional Regulation: Reduce Vulnerability (3)

## Cope ahead

Remind yourself of reality: Work is frequently demanding/tiring

Work near but under your max so that a reserve remains for the unexpected (work emergencies, personal demands, self-care needs)

Address your own limitations/needs rather than feigning omnipotence

Protect against different types of burnout

Commiserate with colleagues about the universality of work's stressors

Utilize a team approach for high-stress/-risk work

Know the data about areas of work with high risk for ethical complaints or lawsuits

Let go of wishful thinking and self-blame about self-care and instead execute a contract with yourself to be action-oriented and chart your progress



# Emotional Regulation: Reduce Vulnerability (4)

## Care for the mind by tending to the body

Don't forget about this self-care modality

Practice balanced eating/hydration

Monitor/get balanced sleep

Balance the heavily mental work: Get adequate (regular) exercise; move around more; engage in physical activities with clear outcomes (e.g., cleaning the house, yardwork)

# Change via **Social Skills**

Getting your needs met in relationships

# Interpersonal Effectiveness: Priorities (1)

## Get/maintain positive relationships

Gently approach (tend, befriend) those with whom you professionally interact, rather than aggressively approaching (fight) or avoiding (flight)

Reduce isolation and increase contact with colleagues

Build/maintain assistive collegial relations with other local professionals

Spend quality time with colleagues

Within reason (ethics, transference), ensure you have some invigorating persons you serve whom you enjoy

Value your long-term relations with persons you serve

Recall gratifying relationships with persons you serve and your termination experience

Contact/spend time with friends/family (including during work hours)

Seek out friendships and monitor for diminishing friendships (number, quality) and work on them

Tread carefully in using your professional “powers” with your family members

# Interpersonal Effectiveness: Priorities (2)

## Getting what you want/saying no and behavior change

Be effectively assertive with persons served, administrators, colleagues, referral sources, and external entities, who/that would compromise your integrity, ethics, or well-being. E.g.:

Appropriately minimizing emergencies/encroachments on your personal time by persons you serve

Insisting on your safety and that of your loved ones (decline certain persons to be served, refuse to disclose, secure your work setting, etc.)

Being strong in appropriately referring out challenging/non-responsive persons severed

Upon termination, being clear as to the why's and how's for/of post-termination contacts or renewed services

Insisting on a sufficient income

# Interpersonal Effectiveness: Priorities (3)

## Maintain self-respect

Know your professional roles, responsibilities, expectations, and limitations so that you can communicate/establish them with others (professional bill of rights, workplace policies, written contract with goals and shared responsibilities)

Tailor work to persons served within reason, monitoring for excessive customization, flexibility, or accommodations

Monitor for boundary crossings

Monitor for greed

Neither agree with the opinion of you held by your most idolizing nor most critical person served

# Interpersonal Effectiveness: Walking the Middle Path

## Walking the Middle Path

Arrange a balanced caseload (number of persons served, proportion of persons served)

Balance empathy/connection and healthy distance with persons served

Remember that your role is to meet the needs of persons served; theirs is not to meet yours

Reflect on projections on to you by persons you serve and manage you doig the same on to them via self-care (including with self-insight, conceptualization, anxiety management, and empathy)

Ardently protect your personal time/life and synthesize commitments to self and persons you serve

Utilize family/friends (non-professionals) to help you remain grounded/humble

Be irreverent (humor, absurdity)

# Additional resources

- From the American Psychological Association:
  - <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/self-care>
  - <https://www.apa.org/education/grad/self-care.aspx>
- From the National Academy of Medicine:
  - <https://nam.edu/clinicianwellbeing/>
- From Dr. Kenneth Pope:
  - <https://kspope.com/ethics/self-care.php>

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