

Help the Helper

Self-Care
for
Peer Support
Specialists

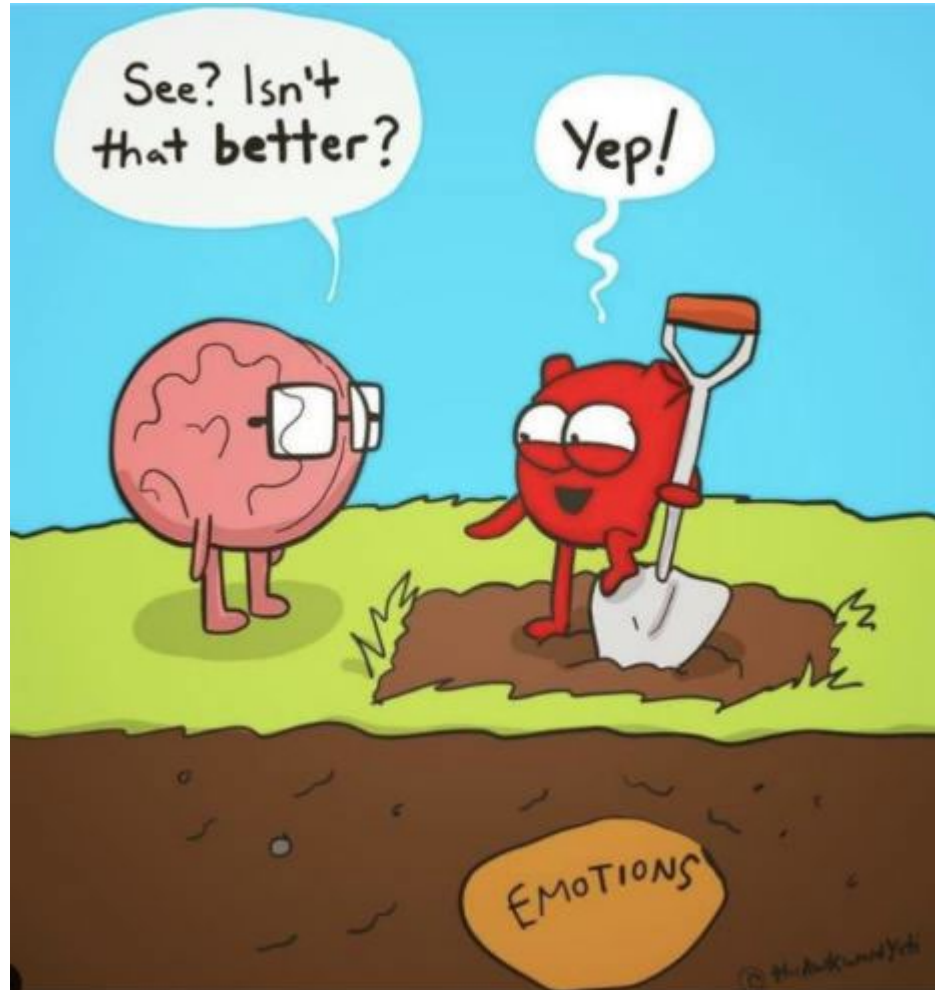
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Learning Objectives

- Describe self-care as harm reduction
- Create at least one self-care practice for yourself

How do you take care of yourself?



What is self-care?

Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. This can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact.

-National Institute of Mental Health

Why does self-care matter?

Peer support specialists face mental, emotional, and workplace challenges.

Workplace Challenges

- **Feeling overworked**
- **Lack of sufficient supervision**
- **Challenges navigating addiction stigma**
- **Difficulty maintaining boundaries**
- **Lack of resources for clients**
(ex. transportation)

Personal Challenges

- **Feeling emotionally drained**
- **Feeling like there are no solutions**
(i.e. resources)
- **Taking problems home**
- **Difficulty hearing clients' stories,**
vulnerable to emotional triggers
- **Feelings of failure to do the job**
successfully

(Tate, 2021)

“The Strong One”

No one can do self-care for us.



Self-care Requires Self-reflection

Self-reflection is an essential part of developing a self-care practice.

Ask yourself:

- **What does it feel like when I am not taking care of myself?**
- **What are my warning signs and signals?**
- **How do I know when it's time to take action to care for myself?**

Signs to Focus on Self-care

- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Anger and irritability**
- **Apathy, hopelessness**
- **Ignoring hygiene needs**
- **Bottled up emotions**
- **Excessive blaming**
- **In denial about problems**
- **Compulsive behaviors (e.g. overspending, overeating, gambling)**
- **Chronic physical challenges such as gastrointestinal problems and recurrent colds**



- **Absenteeism (missing a lot of work/many sick days)**
- **Difficulty separating work life from personal life**
- **Dread**
- **Insomnia**
- **Excessive complaining**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Depression**
- **Anxiety**
- **Isolation**
- **Detachment**
- **Loss of motivation**

When to Seek Professional Help

National Institute of Mental Health states to seek professional help if you are experiencing severe or distressing symptoms that have lasted 2 weeks or more, such as:

- **Difficulty sleeping**
- **Changes in appetite or unplanned weight changes**
- **Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning because of mood**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable**
- **Inability to complete usual tasks and activities**
- **Feelings of irritability, frustration, or restlessness**

(NIMH, 2024)

Barriers to Self-care

Self-care is so important, but we struggle to make it a priority. Why?

- **Self-care can feel selfish and/or elicit guilt**
- **Loneliness and/or activate abandonment wounds**
- **Fear of judgment**
- **Fear that job will be in jeopardy if we take time for ourselves**
- **Negative self-talk and/or shame**
- **Anxiety about the future**

(Westphal & Watson, 2021)

Double-edged Sword of Recovery Principles

Strength	Recovery Principle	Vulnerability
Placing the welfare of others above one's own welfare, caring for others	Service (selflessness)	Not seeking help for or ignoring your own mental or physical concerns because personal health is not a priority
Commitment to supporting and helping participants sustain recovery	Responsibility	Guilt and complicated grief after perceived failure, taking the participant's actions personally
Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint	Humility	Not aware of, or not acknowledging, significant problems, silently suffering, not advocating for your needs
Following an internal moral compass to choose "right" over "wrong"	Integrity	Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to express the same level of integrity
Open-minded to action and change, motivated to become the best version of yourself	Willingness	Overexertion and exhaustion, feeling guilty when experiencing low energy, feeling ashamed when outcomes don't match expectation, frustration when others are not as eager to change

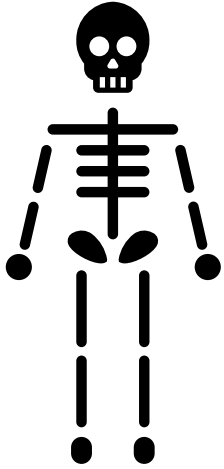
(Adapted from Westphal & Watson, 2021)

Create a Self-care Practice



(Butler et al., 2019)

Domains of Self-care



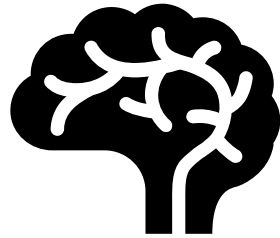
Physical Self-care

Healthy eating/nutrition
Exercise
Sleep
Maintenance healthcare
Hygiene



Emotional Self-care

Develop healthy coping skills
Set limits/maintain boundaries
Make time for yourself
Intentional activity
Talk to a safe person
Use the same tools you offer to your participants



Mental Self-care

Self-reflection and self-awareness
Professional care
Take time off
Intentional screen breaks
Self-expression (art, journaling)
Following curiosity/daydreaming
Solving puzzles/playing games

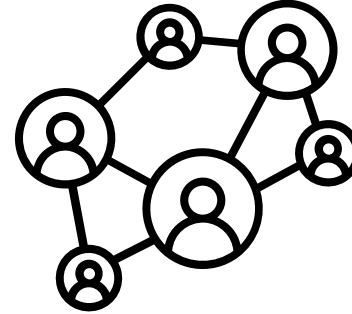
(Butler et al., 2019)

Domains of Self-care



Spiritual Self-care

- Spending time in nature
- Meditation
- Prayer
- Creating rituals
- Solitude and/or fellowship
- Volunteering/helping others
- Reflect on meaning/purpose



Social Self-care

- Make time for healthy relationships
- Self-care/recovery groups
- Healthy venting/sharing with a safe person
- Recreational activities
- Honor boundaries



Professional Self-care

- Time management
- Task prioritization
- Regular workday breaks
- Vacations
- Workplace boundaries
- Self-advocacy

(Butler et al., 2019)

Self-care Practice

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually
Physical	Multivitamin	Yoga class	Pay bills	Hiking	Maintenance healthcare appointments
Emotional	Journal	Therapy	Solitude Saturday	Random long weekend	Honor grief
Mental	Make the bed	Screen break + art	Read a “fun” book	Deep clean	Set goals and intentions
Spiritual	Meditate	Recovery meetings	Volunteer	Review practice	Yearly “house-cleaning”
Social	Text a friend	Recovery meetings	Open mic night	Reconnect with friends	“Big” vacation
Professional	Break away from my desk	To Do list + 1-on-1 with supervisor	Update wall calendar	Review goals	“Big” vacation

Self-care Practice



Distract

Metabolize

Self-care is Harm Reduction

We are ethically obligated to care for ourselves.

How we care for ourselves affects how we care for others.

Self-care is Harm Reduction

What happens if we don't prioritize self-care?

- Think about John from earlier in our discussion.
- Who was impacted by his lack of self-care?
 - John and his personal relationships
 - Participants at the syringe services program
 - Staff at the SSP
 - Reputation of employer
 - Community perception of the recovery community

Self-care is Harm Reduction

Think about the point of view of the participant or client. They are vulnerable and looking to you for help. If you are irritable, stressed, or inconsistent, you can harm the person you are working with by reducing quality of services.

Self-care helps reduce harm. Showing up as the best version of yourself improves quality of services and helps to promote reliability and trust.

Self-care is not selfish. Your actions impact others.

Holiday Self-care Tips

#1 – Connect to Social Support

Intentionally create opportunities to be with others to resist isolation.

#2 – Structure Your Days

Maintain your routine.

#3 – Know Yourself and Your Family

Ask yourself if your family is, or is not, a source of support for you.

Holiday Self-care Tips

#4 – Plan Your Escape

When it's time to go, it's time to go!

#5 – Practice Your Elevator Pitch

“No thanks, I don’t drink.”

#6 – HALT!

Hungry. Angry. Lonely. Tired.

Holiday Self-care Tips

**Bonus tip:
Know your resources!**

 **findhelpnow.org**



**Never Use Alone –
Overdose Prevention Line
877-696-1996**

An Inside Job

✓ **No one can do this inner work for you.**

- Self-reflection and self-accountability are your responsibility
- Ask for help, communicate your needs

✓ **Recognize the patterns**

- Example: Struggling with depressed mood in the winter
 - How can you anticipate a difficult season by adjusting your self-care practice?
- Thinking a new job or moving to a new city will “solve my problems” and continuing to experience the same discomfort. Ask yourself, “Why?”
 - “I follow me wherever I go”

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