Talk: Self-Care for Clinicians with Rev. Dr. Cheryl Magrini

Chicago School of Psychology, Chicago Campus

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Why self-care? Think about the safety instructions in an airplane: in case of a sudden decrease in oxygen, the oxygen mask with drop down and adults put yours on first before helping a child. If you are passed out you cannot help a child. If you do not put your self-care mask on, you cannot be of help to your clients, to yourself, and to your family/friends.

“Self-care practice attends to your physical, emotional, relational, as well as spiritual and religious needs and are integrated into your daily life on an ongoing basis.

*Self care is self-awareness…*

*Self care is self-regulation”*

Carter, Leigh A. and Barnett, Jeffrey E. (2014). *Self-care for clinicians in training: a guide to psychological wellness for graduate students in psychology*. Oxford University Press.

From Dr. Magrini’s experience:

“Sunday, having been in the church for only five minutes, I ran into a woman, let’s call her Jill, who had last week told me about her adult daughter with cancer on the spine and in the right lung, and maybe in other organs as well. She had been in the hospital for three days getting the first round of radiation on the spine, with three more rounds scheduled in the upcoming weeks. Jan lives in Chicago and her daughter lives in Boston. Jan just two days earlier had a biopsy from her left breast and the thyroid with the results to be in by the end of the week. By virtue of being a minister and a relationship with Jan we could enter into a conversation that bypassed the usual casual greeting. I must be well grounded in my emotional, physical, mental and spiritual self in order to be an effective and compassionate listener. I have to engage in active daily self-care.

You are not being selfish or self-indulgent to take care of yourself. It is your responsibility personally and professionally to take of your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self – not only for clinicians but also for everyone who is in a helping profession and role.

**Practical**

What did you eat today? How did you get to the school? Were you cramming for an exam last night? To think about these with intentionality around eating, exercising, and sleeping you can put these into your daily routine. This does not mean going to the gym 5 days a week. It can be taking the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator. Bring a piece of fruit instead of getting a bag of pretzels out of the vending machine.

*Self-care requires self-awareness and intentionality*; it can be inconvenient; requires discipline. Allow yourself, give yourself permission to say that you are more important than anyone for part of your day. You in fact, are not indispensable, even though you would like to believe that you are not.

**Self-awareness is prevention and self-care in practice**

Engage in self-reflection on an ongoing basis. Be honest with yourself about stress and identify the stressors. It is nearly impossible to eliminate stress but it is possible to decrease and manage stress. Stress has physical ramifications: weight gain, increased rate for heart attack, increased cortisol level, exhaustion, migraine, body ache

Know your personal warning signs of stress – anger, impatience, wishing you were someplace else, fatigue, missing an appointment or canceling appointments, arriving late, not sleeping, binge eating, emotional eating. Even what you experience as positive can be a stressor.

Check in with your body using the body scan and breathing. (gently tensing each muscle group starting with the toes, then a muscle release; breathing in for 4 counts; release for 30 seconds to one minute). Use the half-smile while breathing in for four counts and out for four counts, belly expands in inhale, and pulls in toward the spine on the exhale.

Keep to your supervision responsibilities.

Be in therapy.

How do you get personal gratification?

Helping others; job – boundary issues

Will you be available by phone, email, text and to which patients?

Advancing career

Which conference, seminar, continuing education course will you attend?

Overextend on your caseload

Friendships

Do you have friends who are outside of your profession?

Learning

Graduate students are life-long learners. What will you undertake that is not related to your profession?

Boundaries – If you do not set your own emotional, mental, time boundaries no one else will. If you start in your profession without boundaries the lack of boundaries will take a slow toll and before you know it you will have severe stress.

Family/Me time

What calls, text, emails will you take and when?

Vacation – take; but they do not all have to be a week in Italy where you need a vacation from a vacation; consider a one day or two day retreat

Setting your schedule

This might not be in your control to start out in your career. Do what you can now to practice self-care and to give the message to co-workers and supervisors that you will not give or do more than asked, while still be excellent at your job.

This brings up “control.” Who or what is in control? What do you have control over. You can assert this power, to your benefit, not detriment.

Emotional

A healthy emotional life sets boundaries. Use meditation, yoga, mindfulness, remember your spiritual and religious life, talking with a trusted friend, supervision, therapy.

Doesn’t everyone in self-care say the meditation, yoga, mindfulness? Choose one and practice this in your own way.

Preventing mental exhaustion

Daily: Take a communication break: (language heavy profession, talking with clients, paperwork, meetings, responding to clients outside of appointments)

Plan a break in your daily schedule, even if for 15 minutes without phone calls, answering emails, texting, talking to colleagues about work. Put headphones on to breath, listen to music, tune out.

Self-care intentionality

Write a self-care integration plan.

Use specifics and goal setting that is attainable. If you cannot get to the gym five times a week realistically, maybe three times a week will be. Goal setting is specific, measurable, and accountable.

“I will go to the gym on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 6-7am with setting out my gym bag the night before and meet Jon at the locker room.”

Have an accountability partner. Share your self-care plan and meet on a regular basis to talk specifically about accountability.

Be kind to yourself if you do not meet your plan one week. Life happens. Readjust when needed or say – I’ve got tomorrow and next week to get back to it. Tell your accountability partner about this.

Remember:

If you do not take care of yourself, no one else will. In order to help your patients and to be in healthy relationships your emotional, physical, mental and spiritual life is central to your well-being.