

2021

GUIDE FOR
HELPING
PROFESSIONALS

Caring for the Caregivers



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INTRODUCTION

For many of us in the helping professions, we're great at caring for others. And, even though we often encourage the individuals and families that we work with to establish or maintain healthy routines and habits, we may struggle to take our own advice.

The increase in needs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is a not so subtle reminder that we must prioritize taking care of ourselves – the caregivers. In that spirit, we invite you to join us in a journey to take care of ourselves and each other.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

This toolkit provides a high level overview of self-care from the helping professional perspective. As you and your team are ready to dive deeper into a particular area, additional resources can be found on LancasterJoiningForces.org/CaregiverToolkit.

You'll find resources divided into the categories defined in this toolkit. With resources for individuals, supervisors/managers, agency leaders, and families. We will continue to add resources to each category on the Lancaster Joining Forces website.

We invite you to contribute your favorite self-care practices and resources. A small team will review each resource prior to making them available publicly. Please submit your self-care contributions at contact@LancasterJoiningForces.org.



SELF-CARE 101

WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care is, quite simply, taking care of your whole self – physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

Most of us were taught from a young age how to take care of our **physical** well-being by eating well, getting rest, and drinking water. Some of us may have learned about our spiritual well-being through gaining clarity around our own personal values and finding our purpose. Others of us learned how to explore our emotional well-being through the clear identification and healthy expression of feelings. Some of us learned how to practice self-compassion and acceptance to improve our **mental** well-being. Others learned to build and maintain healthy relationships to support our social well-being. We're all starting a self-care journey with different skills and experiences that make this an incredibly personal, individualized process. A process, often, of trial and error that improves our overall health and well-being – leading to greater life satisfaction.

Caring for ourselves includes things like:

- Getting enough sleep
- Eating a well-balanced diet (without skipping meals)
- Drinking plenty of water
- Regular Exercise
- Reading
- Journaling
- Doing things we enjoy!

It can also include:

- Affirmations
- Meditation
- Practicing gratitude
- Spending time in nature
- Reflection
- Prayer



WHY DO I NEED SELF CARE?

Taking care of our whole selves, has many health benefits.

Individuals who practice regular self-care benefit from

- Increased energy
- Lower risk of illness
- Better management of stress
- Increased job satisfaction
- Better able to care for others
- Mitigation of the impacts of chronic stress and trauma



Ready to take the self-care plunge?

WHEN AND HOW DO I PRACTICE SELF-CARE?

Self-care means taking care of yourself every day.

To maximize the benefits of self-care, we must learn how to take care of each part of ourselves – our physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and mental well-being.

For many of us, with practice, we can care for our whole selves each day through short, intentional activities or rituals. This may include things like parking at the back of the parking lot to allow yourself an opportunity to walk to work, connecting with a friend, spending your lunch break outside, or starting and ending your day with a ritual (how you transition to and from work, for example).

For helping professionals, recognizing the compassion fatigue we are vulnerable to and setting healthy boundaries with clients are two things to be mindful of when developing and refining your self-care plan.

Self-care CAN be, but doesn't HAVE to be attending yoga classes, paying for massages, or lengthy meditations. Self-care is extremely individualized. **It is not uncommon for a person's self-care needs to change over time –particularly during periods of increased stress.**

Compassion fatigue:
a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for others who are in significant emotional pain and physical distress



Click to learn more about setting and maintaining healthy boundaries

SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF BURNOUT

Employee burnout can result in lower productivity, higher absenteeism, and turnover. The good news is that it is possible to help our teams bounce back from burnout.

As supervisors and managers, we may see signs of burnout in our teams before they see it in themselves. By listening carefully and observing our staff, we can help employees recognize signs in themselves and their colleagues. Through a shared understanding of these warning signs, we can encourage and promote good self-care in our staff and ourselves.

Signs of burnout can include:

- Having trouble making decisions
- Isolating yourself
- Forgetfulness
- Irritable or impatient
- Trouble focusing
- Increased mistakes
- Angry outbursts
- Crying
- Decreased energy/ambition
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased absenteeism
- Changes in sleep patterns or appetite

Recognizing the signs is a great place to start. But, then what? Keep reading!

For more information about helping folks move from job fatigue to job satisfaction visit us here



SUPPORTING STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING BURNOUT

- 1. As supervisors and managers, we need to **take care of ourselves.**** We will be able to best support our teams when we're practicing our own self-care. And, let's not forget that our teams are looking at what we do - we are their fearless leaders.
- 2. Support your entire team.** There's a chance that if you're seeing signs of burnout in one or two team members, that others are feeling it too. Share messages of "We're in this together" AND advocate for deadlines to be moved (when possible) if the team's workload is too heavy. As helping professionals, this is not always possible, BUT, exploring what IS possible is essential.
- 3. As you're hearing and seeing signs of burnout, work with your employee to determine how they can **find more balance.**** This may include things like agreeing upon a cutoff time each day where they turn off their computer and cell-phone and everything else work-related. Or, let them know that you expect them to take their full lunch hour – away from their desk/workstation.
- 4. When possible, discuss with employees what is on their **workload.**** If employees are sharing that they're "doing the same thing over and over again" it may be time to explore how to shift some responsibilities to another team member and give them an opportunity to do something different. This is a great way to give less experienced team members a challenge while giving your more experienced staff an opportunity to breathe.
- 5. Signs of burnout may not go away on their own.** Continue to pay close attention to what your staff say, the quality of their work, their appearance, etc. Continue to communicate with them about what they need to get back on track. Keep in mind that external factors may be contributing to burnout at work – flexible scheduling, time off, and employee assistance programs can be helpful resources in these instances.



Click to learn more strategies for supervisors and managers

AGENCY LEADERS

POLICIES

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Here are a few things to consider in the context of caring for your staff:

- **Safety** – How do you create **BOTH** a safe physical environment (inside and outside your building) **AND** psychological safety for your employees and the individuals/families you serve?
- **Collaboration** - Are you inviting staff and clients to inform the development/revision of agency policies? Are employees of all levels given an opportunity to share ideas/questions/concerns before policies are finalized?
- Is it time to update your agency **mission, vision, and values**? Remember, values are what guide **HOW** we accomplish our mission.

Check out our trauma-informed organization resources



CREATING A SELF-CARE CULTURE

As agency leaders, we set the tone.

Leaders help highlight and define the value of well-being with our personal examples and reinforcement. We need to take lunch breaks and vacations. We must set tech boundaries by avoiding sending emails late at night or when we are taking paid time off. Leading by example will help our staff be more productive and experience more job satisfaction.



Psychological safety:

is the belief that you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. In a workplace, psychological safety means that team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other.



Other ways to foster a self-care culture:

- Build pauses into the workday (avoid back to back meetings)
- Allow for flexibility around and during the workday
- Create "stop doing" goals
- Recognize employees for their work and accomplishments
- Shorten meetings (or end them early)



Interested in exploring more about workplace culture?

PROMOTING EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (EAP'S)

Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) are an incredibly valuable and underutilized resource. Often, employees do not use their EAP because they do not know or understand what is provided. Sometimes, employees feel as if they'll be judged for using their EAP. Here are some strategies that organizations have found helpful:

- Regularly reviewing the benefits that your EAP provides to employees and soliciting employee feedback is one strategy for increasing utilization.
- Invite employees to be part of the process that defines the benefits provided by the EAP vendor (behavioral health counseling, child care, elder care, legal needs, bereavement support, etc.).
- Regularly share updates about EAP benefits at staff meetings, in newsletters, etc. (you need to regularly promote your EAP)
- Incorporate EAP as one component of staff wellness program
- Invite your EAP provider to attend staff wellness events/days.



Learn more successful EAP strategies for your employees

FAMILY

GETTING MY PARTNER ON BOARD WITH SELF-CARE

Provide your partner with positive feedback for the things they're already doing to promote their own well-being and then invite them to do more of it!

Invite your partner to participate in your self-care practice. Be it exercise, diet, or mindfulness – share with your partner why you're doing it, how you find it beneficial, and ask them to join you. Consider offering to try one of their well-being practices, too!

Taking good care of ourselves, allows us to be better partners and often enhances our relationships. Keep an eye out for these relationship benefits and celebrate them WITH your partner.

Learn more about self-care in couples/relationships



GETTING THE KIDS INVOLVED

Consider a 30-day self-care challenge to kick-start your family's self-care commitment. If your family can stick with it for 30 days, there's a good chance that you'll make family self-care part of your regular routine. Here are some suggested activities to get you started as a family:

- Cook a meal together
- Create a family playlist with everyone's favorite songs
- Family movie or game night
- Plan a family picnic
- Set aside time to journal as a family
- Give each other alone time, together

More self-care ideas for the whole family



PRACTICAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

AVAILABLE IN LANCASTER COUNTY

If you've been part of any of Lancaster County's many collaborative initiatives, you may have heard "we have so many resources". Lancaster County certainly does have lots to offer, but keeping track of it all can be tricky. When it comes to caring for your whole self, here are a few resources we would like to highlight:

- Discover Lancaster County Parks and Trails
co.lancaster.pa.us/243/Parks-Trails
- Find fresh produce and more at Lancaster Farmer's Markets. Visit pafmnp.com to find a market near you!
- Explore the many faith traditions represented in Lancaster
lancasterpa.com/churches/
- Bikeit Lancaster is a new bike share program in Lancaster City
bikeitlancaster.com
- Check out some recreation options in Lancaster County – athletics, garden plots, camping, and more!
co.lancaster.pa.us/331/Recreation

Find more links for these and more resources in Lancaster County here



HAVE INTERNET; WILL PRACTICE

The internet can be a great way to try something new. Here are a few of our favorite go-to web resources:

- Yoga With Adriene
youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene
- Daily OM
dailyom.com
- University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality and Healing
csh.umn.edu
- HeartMath Institute
heartmath.org
- University of Buffalo School of Social Work Self-Care Starter Kit
socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html
- Little Flower Yoga – a groovy family friendly option
littlefloweryoga.com
- Mindful – FREE and paid options for the whole family
mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids/



If you have school age children, ask about GoZen or Harmony SEL resources that may be available through your child's school.



Find more online resources here

SOMEONE I LOVE IS IN RECOVERY. ARE THERE SPECIALIZED RESOURCES?

Many pathways and programs of recovery provide opportunities for individuals (and sometimes their loved ones) to learn to how to manage stress in healthy ways, how to communicate even when things are uncomfortable, and to find a sense of purpose.

Recovery, for many people, is a journey of self-discovery – much like a journey someone seeking to take better care of themselves may start on. Consider embracing your self-care journey as a way to support and deepen your connection with your loved one in recovery.

And, if your loved one has not yet begun their recovery journey – you can be a great role model by taking steps to improve your own wellness. Even if they are not ready to join you right away, you'll be better able to cope with their illness and to support them when they are ready.

To learn more about local addiction treatment recovery support options visit compassmark.org/find-help/in-lancaster/





JOINING FORCES FOR CHILDREN

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