Self-Care: Is it an Ethical Responsibility?

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Objectives
- Self-Care: Is it an Ethical Responsibility?
- Increase knowledge of the NASW Code of Ethics
- Increase knowledge of the Supplemental Ethical Standards for School Social Work Practice (SSWAA)
- Understand Compassion Fatigue
- Understand Social Work Impairment
- Develop at least one SMART Self-Care goal

Primary Mission of Social Work Profession
- Enhance human well-being.
- Meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.
(NASW Code of Ethics, 1999)
“Because of the nature of our profession, we are at a higher risk than other professions of fatigue and professional impairment. I’ve made it my mission to inspire social workers to take preventative measures and methods of self-care.” Terricka Hardy, member of NASW’s National Ethics Committee

**My Why?**

**What is our ethical obligation?**

- Code of Ethics - Ethical Principles
  - Value: Dignity and Worth of the Person
  - Value: Integrity
  - Value: Competence

- Code of Ethics - Ethical Standard 1.01 Commitment to Clients
- Code of Ethics - Ethical Standard 2.09 Impairment of Colleagues
- Code of Ethics – Ethical Standard 2.10 Incompetence of Colleagues
- Code of Ethics – Ethical Standard 4.05 Impairment
  - Concern is for the protection of the client.
  - If quality of service is impacted by the impairment then the client is at risk.
  - Obligation to address impairment of colleague.
  - Do we not then have an obligation to deal with our own impairments?”
Supplemental Ethical Standards for School Social Work

- Ethical Responsibilities
  1. School social workers have a primary ethical responsibility to students and secondary ethical responsibilities to other stakeholders.

- Ethical Decision Making
  13. School social workers utilize ethical decision-making processes to help manage ethical predicaments in the best interests of clients and stakeholders, such as proposed by Raines and Dibble (2011).

  1. Know yourself and your professional responsibilities.

School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) March 2015

- How often do we neglect our own needs and sacrifice them to address the needs of others?

- Social work practices requires:
  1. apply “informed judgment” to decision making
  2. “discern moral questions and in good faith, seek to make reliable ethical judgments”;
  3. “be aware of any conflict between personal and professional values.”

Practicing good self-care benefits the clients and agencies we serve.

Conscientiousness

- Attending to one’s job duties in a manner that is careful, attentive, thorough, and ethical:
  1. Have I been showing up to work on time?
  2. Have I been completing all my work tasks?
  3. Have I been maintaining a professional appearance?
  4. Have I been adhering to the highest principles of ethical practice (respect, confidentiality, appropriate boundaries)?
  5. Have I been following best practice and evidence-based interventions?
Compassion Fatigue

Compassion Fatigue is: “A state of tension and preoccupation with... traumatized patients [characterized] by reexperiencing the traumatic events, avoidance/numbing of reminder of the event, persistent arousal (e.g., anxiety), combined with the added effects of cumulative stress (burnout) associated with the patient.”

“When helping others precipitates a compromise in our own well being we are suffering from compassion fatigue.”

Also known as secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, or empathy fatigue.

Compassion fatigue can lead to impairment or post traumatic stress disorder.

Most vulnerable to develop Compassion Fatigue

- Individuals who will work to achieve results even if it results in a risk to personal health.
- Highly dedicated individuals.
- High demand for personal competence.
- Low self-compassion.
- Personal trauma/loss history.
- Large and complex caseload or work demands.
- Lack of comprehensive trauma training.
- Working in an unsupportive workplace.

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue include:
- Irritability and anger
- Blaming others or self-blame
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Mood swings
- Compulsive and obsessive behaviors
Symptoms continued

- anxiety or panic attacks
- nightmares or flashbacks
- physical symptoms—headaches, etc.
- loss of motivation or interest in job or other activities
- a sense of hopelessness, value of work

Compassion Fatigue is the result of doing good work, not a weakness.

Addressing Compassion Fatigue

- On-going self-reflection
- Let go of self-blame, shame, or judgment
- Know your limits
- On-going supervision
- Professional Development (NASW Code of Ethics)
- Know when to approach, refer, or report
- Act early and be proactive
- Make time for self-care

Code of Ethics

- 4.05 Impairment
  - (a) Social workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility.
  - (b) Social workers whose personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties interfere with their professional judgment and performance should immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect clients and others.
Social Work Impairment

- One who is unable to function adequately as a professional social worker and provide competent care to clients as a result of a physical or mental disorder or personal problems, or the inability or desire to adhere to the code of ethics of the profession. These problems most commonly include alcoholism, substance abuse, mental illness, burnout, stress, and relationship problems. (Social Work Dictionary)
- Impairment may result from personal stressors, challenges and trauma either experienced directly or vicariously.
- Difference between incompetence and impairment.
- Impaired social worker may have previously worked at a high standard but no longer can do so because of medical, mental health, or personal challenges.

Impairment

- High levels of unrecognized personal and professional stress – impairment – unethical behavior.
- Impairment can be caused by compassion fatigue.
- Early signs of impairment:
  - Coming to work fatigued on a regular basis.
  - Using negative coping skills (overeating, smoking, not sleeping, etc.)
  - Bringing personal issues to work, causing lack of focus with clients.
  - Increasing complaints about and feelings of resentment toward work, clients, and colleagues.
  - Perceiving your social work as a job rather than a calling to serve others.
  - Feeling relieved when clients cancel an appointment.

Next Steps

- Purposeful prevention
- Paradigm shift
- Resiliency skills – self-regulation, intentionality, self-validation, connection, and self-care

That which is to give light must endure burning.

- Viktor Frankl
Self-Care: Yes, it has ethical implications

- Incorporate into DAILY routine.
- Set boundaries with clients and work responsibilities.
- Separate your professional life from personal time.
- Take breaks from work (take a walk, use sick and vacation time).
- Limit time on social media.
- Body retraining – calmness, breathing
- Let go of self-blame, shame, or judgment.

Self-Care

- Physical Care
- Psychological Care
- Social Care
- Professional/Academic Care

- SMART self-care goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely)

SELF-COMPASSION SCALE
Kristin Neff, PhD.
**Self-Care Planning Form**

**The A-to-Z Self-Care Handbook**

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**Barriers to Implementing Self-Care Strategies**

- Procrastination
- Poor time management
- Fear of change
Myths about self-care

- Self-care is all or nothing.
- Self-care required resources that you don’t have.
- Self-care is optional.
- We have to earn the right to practice self-care.
- Self-care is anything that soothes you.
- Practicing self-care means making a choice between yourself and others.

Psychcentral.com/blog  By Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S. (May 7, 2013)

- Self-care is giving the world the best of you, not the rest of you.
  -Katie Reed

What can you do today to help give the world the best version of yourself tomorrow?

- Understanding and being aware of compassion fatigue enhances positive client outcomes, facilitates emotional resiliency, improves physical health, and increases job satisfaction.
- 70% of people have experienced a trauma in their lifetime.
By Deysi Torres — MSW graduate student at California State University, Long Beach.
I believe in the power of love
As love knows no boundaries
Love is patient, love is kind, love is pure.
I believe in the power of hope
As hope is what drives us, hope is comfort, hope is strength.
I believe in the power of change
As change is what keeps us moving forward.
I believe in the power to do good in the world, to fight for justice, and for human rights.
I am a social worker and I believe in my ability to impact the lives of those I serve.

Self-care isn’t always chocolate cake and trips to the spa. Sometimes, it’s meal planning, going to bed early or letting go of a bad friend. It’s forgiving yourself for not meeting your own impossible standards, and understanding that you are worthy. Always, Self-care isn’t just luxuries, but a means for survival.
Author unknown.

“Self-care isn’t always manicures, bubble baths and eating healthy food. Sometimes it’s forcing yourself to get out of bed, take a shower and participate in life again”.
—Meredith Marple

“Boundaries are a tool that empower us two become more productive, happier employees. Employees who are less prone to burnout, overwhelm and mistakes. Employers value your talent not your stamina”.
—Carley Schweet
Elkins, Kathy & Murray, Andrea. Ethics 8 Series. 8 Considerations for Addressing Social Worker Impairment. NASW Texas Chapter.
Lipschutz, Ruth. NASW IL, March 1, Ethics Corner: Self-Care – An Ethical Responsibility.
National Association of Social Workers. The code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. Approved by the 1996 NASW Delegate Assembly and revised by the NASW Delegate Assembly in 2017.
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