Practice What You Preach: How to Maintain Counselor Wellness in Professional Practice?

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Learning Objectives

- Participants will understand the importance of self-care and stress management as key factors in the mental health profession.
- Participants will explore definitions of burnout and compassion fatigue.
- Participants will explore the signs and symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue.
- Participants learn how to assess burnout and compassion fatigue in themselves, colleagues and students.
- Participants will review strategies & techniques for preventing and managing burnout and compassion fatigue.
- Counselors and Counselor Educators will develop wellness interventions at the individual, organizational and program levels.

Byas & Greenidge (TCA, 2015)
“Everyone in the helping professions, especially counseling, wants to help people. But it’s all meaningless when the instrument — you — isn’t OK.”

~Dr. Gerard Lawson~
What Does Wellness Mean To You

- **Group Discussion**
  - What do you do to attain personal wellness?
  - What activities bring you personal joy and fulfillment?
  - Discuss methods for attaining balance in all aspects of personal wellness (mental, physical, spiritual, financial, family, social, career)

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Added Stressors

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Negative Stress

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- Generally, negative stress is broken down into four categories:
  - Basic day to day stress
  - Cumulative stress
  - Critical event stress
  - Acute stress reactions and Post traumatic stress disorder
Burnout: Statistics

- About 21-67% of mental health workers
- Study of 151 mental health workers in N. California
  - 54% had high emotional exhaustion
  - 38% reported high depersonalization rates
- Rohland’s 2000 study of directors of community mental health centers
  - Over two-thirds reported high emotional exhaustion and low personal accomplishment
  - Almost half reported high levels of depersonalization

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Burnout

- Encompasses three dimensions:
  - Emotional Exhaustion
    - Feeling depleted, overextended, fatigued
  - Depersonalization
    - Cynicism: Negative and cynical attitudes towards one’s work
  - Reduced Personal Accomplishment
    - Efficacy: Negative self-evaluation of one's effectiveness

(Maslach et al., 1996)
Impact of Burnout

- Health complications
- Negative organizational measures
  - Absenteeism and turnover
  - Negative attitudes
  - Reduced commitment
- Negative feelings about clients
  - Distant; rejecting
  - Poorer outcomes among clients with severe mental illness

_Gowdy, Carlson, & Rapp, 2003; Holmqvist & Jeanneau, 2006_
Compassion Fatigue

- Describes the overall experience of emotional and physical fatigue that helpers experience due to the chronic use of empathy when treating clients who are suffering in some way. (Figley, 2002b)
- Often used interchangeably with secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma
- Combination of the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress and professional burnout
- Like burnout, it tends to occur cumulatively over time; whereas vicarious trauma in secondary traumatic stress have a more immediate onset (Newell & MacNeil, 2010)
- Not limited to those who work in crisis/trauma situations

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Burnout & Compassion Fatigue

- Can occur together but experienced in different ways
- **Burnout**
  - Generally accompanied by emotional and physical exhaustion that impacts excitement about a profession
- **Compassion Fatigue**
  - Often experienced within the context of the therapeutic relationship when counselors become overly impacted by highly stressful or emotionally challenging content.

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Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Don’t Discriminate

- New and inexperienced counselors
  - Role of Counselor Educators?
- Experienced and seasoned counselors
Why is this important?

- Both can impact a counselor’s mental, emotional, and physical well-being.
- Both personal and professional lives may be affected.
- May lead to unethical practices.
- Further Impact:
  - Inability to develop empathetic therapeutic relationships.
  - Inability to implement appropriate interventions.
  - Struggle with being present, or creative & spontaneous.
  - Can be psychologically damaging to clients.

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What is Impairment?

- Impairment occurs when a counselor’s personal wellness has a significant negative impact on professional functioning and negatively affects client care.
- What types of issues can cause professional impairment?
- What are the potential impacts of impairment?

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“STOP MASKING YOUR PAIN FOR IT WILL BLEED THROUGH SOMEWHERE ELSE IN YOUR LIFE.”
~Sherna Benjamin~
## Your Stress Profile Self-Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things That Stress You Out</th>
<th>Warning Signs You Are Stressed Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Stress</strong></td>
<td><strong>Positive Stress</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Strategies</td>
<td>Management Strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## Signs of Burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Physical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Inability to stop thinking about crisis</td>
<td>• Overwhelming/chronic fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of objectivity</td>
<td>• Sleep disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impaired decision making</td>
<td>• Gastrointestinal problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal identification with crisis victims</td>
<td>• Eating problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## Signs of Burnout

### Affective
- Suicidal ideation/Depression
- Irritability
- Intense cynicism/pessimism
- Excessive worry about crisis victims
- Upset/jealous when others intervene
- Compulsion to be involved in every crisis
- Significant agitation & restlessness after interventions

### Behavioral
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Withdrawal
- Impulsive behaviors
- Unnecessary contact with crisis victims and families
- Inability to complete/return to normal job responsibilities
- Attempts to work independently of the crisis intervention team

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Signs of Burnout

- Spiritual
  - “Why me” struggle
  - Loss of purpose
  - Profound existential questioning
  - Disillusionment
  - Loss of meaning
  - Loss of life’s objectives
  - Feelings of alienation
  - Changes in one’s value system

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What Challenges Do We Face?

According to Skovholt (2001), there are several factors that impact our ability to maintain wellness. These include:

- Our inability to say no
- Emotional Stress
- The Covert Nature of Counseling
- Compassion Fatigue

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More Challenges

According to Skovholt (2001), there are some special challenges to wellness that are specific to counseling:

• Defining Client Success
• Regulation and Oversight by External Entities
• Negative Colleagues and Supervisors
• Legal and Ethical Concerns

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Steps for Building Resilience to Stress

- Maintain flexibility and balance in life
- Allow yourself to experience strong emotions, and also realize when you may need to avoid experiencing them at times in order to continue functioning
- Step forward to take action, and also step back to rest yourself
- Rely on others, and also rely on yourself.

Daniel, 2007

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What Strategies Can You Employ to Maintain Wellness?

- Keep a sense of humor
- Maintain an active social support network
- Maintain balance between professional and personal lives
- Continuous self-assessment
- Seek consultation and supervision

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Counselor Self-Care

- Self-Monitoring
- Self-care Activities
  - Hobbies
  - Time with friends
  - Quality, uplifting time with family
  - Spiritual Practices
  - Exercise
  - Mindfulness Activities
- Support
  - Personal Counseling
  - Supervision
  - Varying caseloads

“Self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others.”

- Parker Palmer

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Managing and Preventing Burnout

- **Personal Factors:**
  - Know your limitations – set realistic goals
  - Practice saying “no” - every opportunity is not for you
  - Engage in self-care activities
  - Adopt healthy coping mechanisms
  - Ask for support and accept it
  - Maintain healthy eating habits
  - Periodic rest breaks
  - Get restful sleep
  - Debriefing
  - Be kind and gentle on yourself

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 Managing and Preventing Burnout

• Diversify
• Keep work at work
• Maintain a professional distance from clients
• Practice stress relieving techniques
• Avoid excessive news coverage of the event
• Use a buddy system
• Continuing Education
• Utilize employee assistance programs when needed

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Managing and Preventing Burnout

- **BALANCE**
- Practicing what we preach
  - Personal Counseling
- Good Supervision
- Journaling and self-reflection
- Finding Renewal
- Stop!

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The bottom line: in a career where your heart and brain are your most valuable resources, nurturing those commodities should be top priority. Don't just practice what you preach, model healthy boundaries and self-care for your clients. Your actions speak louder than words. Therapy can be an incredibly fulfilling career if you take proper precautions.

~Dr. Ryan Howes~

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Activity - Reflection

- Talk about how your program/organization addresses self-care?
- What are some immediate strategies you can implement?
- Think about the courses you are currently teaching, how can self-care be incorporated? How can you help ensure that self-care becomes a value of the Department and Counseling Program?
- Discuss self-care plans.

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Resources

Books
- Amazon.com:
- The Therapist’s Workbook: Self-Assessment, Self-Care, and Self-Improvement Exercises for Mental Health Professionals by Jeffrey A. Kottler
- APA publications

Web Sites
- www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-therapy/200811/therapist-burnout
- www.apa.org/monitor/julaug02/normalizing.aspx
- helpguide.org/mental/burnout_signs_symptoms.htm
- www.counseling.org/wellness_taskforce/tf_wellness_strategies.htm

Continuing Education Opportunity Websites
- www.e-psychologist.org (Caring for Ourselves as Psychologists)
- www.continuingedcourses.net/active/courses/course058.php (Leaving It At The Office – Taking Care of Yourself)
- www.zurinstitute.com/burnoutcourse.html (Therapist’ Burnout: Professional, Personal and Familial Aspects of Burnout)
- www.siteceu.com/runningindex.html (Running On Empty: Self Care for Therapists)

Byas & Greenidge (TCA, 2015)
THANK YOU!!

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