

Self-care for the Caregiver

Why a self-care plan is important

Self-care is a personal matter. Everyone’s approach will be different. The plan should include what you do at work and outside of work to look after your holistic wellbeing so you can meet your personal and professional commitments. Without self-care, our abilities to be compassionate can shut down.

Compassion fatigue is commonly thought of as “burnout”. Compassion fatigue occurs when we absorb feelings through the experience of another person’s trauma, and these feelings then affect our own physical and mental health, our ability to reason, and how we relate to others. Self-care helps prevent burnout.

A self-care plan can help you enhance your health and wellbeing, manage your stress, and maintain professionalism. While stress relieving activities are a vital part of a self-care plan, the plan should include more than a common list of stresses and activities to relieve them. Will you do better with a self-care buddy or sponsor to encourage you to stick to your plan? Or do you need to post your self-care plan so that you will be reminded to take care of yourself? Plan for how you will get past everyday obstacles and stick to it.

Build your plan

Step 1: Recognize symptoms

An important part of self-care is acknowledging how you feel. Read each list and think about how you feel in both your personal and professional life. To start building your self-care action plan, check off all the symptoms you are experiencing.

Emotional Signs of Stress		Physical Signs of Stress	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disturbed Sleep
<input type="checkbox"/>	Depression	<input type="checkbox"/>	Back, shoulder or neck pain, muscle tension
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moodiness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Headaches
<input type="checkbox"/>	Butterflies	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stomach/digestive problems
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irritability, easily frustrated, road rage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weight fluctuation (gain or loss)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Memory problems and lack of concentration	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of hair
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increased substance abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fatigue
<input type="checkbox"/>	Phobias	<input type="checkbox"/>	High blood pressure, Chest pain
<input type="checkbox"/>	Argumentative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perspiration
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeling of isolation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skin disorders (hives, eczema, tics, itching)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Job dissatisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weak immune system (colds, flu, infections)

Step 2: Identify strategies you already use

Write down a list of self-care strategies you currently use. Below are some examples of activities; think about which of these are meaningful to you as you make your list.

Examples of Self-care

Physical Self-care	sleep, nutrition, exercise, regular health care visits
Emotional Self-care	maintaining personal and professional support systems, counseling and/or therapy as needed, journaling, talking about feelings in healthy ways
Cognitive Self-care	reading for pleasure or work, writing, engaging in continued education for additional knowledge/skill
Social Self-care	spending time with people you enjoy, having fun and playing, belonging to groups and activities that encourage positive social connections
Financial Self-care	balancing a checking account, planning for the future, spending money in thoughtful and productive ways
Spiritual Self-care	meditation, contact with nature, prayer, participating in worship

Step 3: Identify new strategies

Are there strategies you think doing more of that will help relieve your stresses? Make a list.

Step 4: Identify obstacles of self-care plan

List any obstacles that may be preventing you from practicing better self-care.

Step 5: Identify concrete steps to overcome your obstacles

Make a list of how you can overcome your obstacles.

Step 6: Commit!

Remember – you are important and so are the children you care for. Using your self-care plan will help you in making a conscious effort to prevent the negative consequences of compassion fatigue. Self-care is necessary for good job function, so give it a high priority. View your self-care as a mindset and a professional approach. Use the form on the next page and create your own “My Self-care Plan”.

My Self-care Plan

Use this form to create your own self-care plan. Write down your current self-care practices and list practices you plan to try. Remember to include strategies to use both at work and in your personal life. Think about how you will overcome obstacles and incorporate your plan into everyday life. Post your plan to help remind yourself to use it every day.

Area of Self-care	Current Practices	Practices to Try
Physical Self-care		
Emotional Self-care		
Cognitive Self-care		
Social Self-care		
Financial Self-care		
Spiritual Self-care		
Self-care obstacles:		
Overcoming my obstacles:		
Self-care partner:		