

Appendix F: Ten self-care tips for Youth Workers

1. Look around and figure out what is going on.

The first step towards taking better care of yourself is knowing where your problem areas are. Identify specifically what it is that is adding to your stress levels. Ask yourself what you can change and what you would like to change the most. Perhaps share this with a friend and discuss strategies to minimise the stressors in your life.

2. Unwind every day

Daily rituals can be a great way to de-stress. Can you find ways to take small short breaks at work? This could be as simple as grabbing a coffee with a work friend or finding a quiet spot for ten minutes to unwind. Small everyday changes can make a big difference.

3. Ask for help

If you are feeling overwhelmed with your work load, are there things that others could help you with? Do you have difficulty letting go and letting others do it their own way? Don't expect other people to be able to read your mind. For things to change for the better you need to ask for support and consider new ways of doing things.

4. Create a transition ritual

It can be difficult switching from work to non-work or home mode. Having a transition ritual is a useful way to help you to mindfully put your work away when you arrive home. Some transition rituals include listening to your favourite music on your commute home, changing into comfortable clothes or going for a walk.

Being accessible 24/7 is one of the quickest ways to burnout. You need to create boundaries between your personal life and work and clients need to be aware of where these are.

5. Learn to say no (or yes) more often

Youth Work attracts people who are naturally giving. Being the person that all of your friends and family depend on can be very draining to deal with on top of other commitments. Being able to say no or at least not saying yes straight away is an important skill that stops you from taking on too much. Practice this and using statements like "I need to think about taking this on. Let me get back to you" if you do not want to say outright first up. If you feel you are not good at setting limits perhaps this is something that you need to explore. Can you think of areas in your life where you could say no more often?

On the other hand, you may have stopped saying yes, because you have been feeling drained. This may mean that you are missing out on new opportunities. Take some time to consider if you would be better off saying yes or no more often.

6. Minimise your trauma exposure.

When you work with young people who have experienced trauma it is important that you protect yourself from other external sources of trauma where possible. Consider where you absorb trauma from. Do you see it on the news or on other television shows? Do you listen to it on the radio? Do people close to you work with people who have experienced trauma and do you debrief with each other about your experiences?

There is a lot of additional trauma that you may be exposed to outside of your work that you do not necessarily need to absorb. Consider ways that you can reduce your exposure.

7. Understand more about burnout and ways to recognise and prevent it

Some common signs of burnout include; withdrawing from work or personal relationships, constantly feeling exhausted or experiencing a loss of motivation.

Workplace supervision or debrief sessions may provide an opportunity to talk about burnout and to identify burnout prevention strategies that can be implemented within your workplace.

8. Organise a support group

Not all workplaces have opportunities for formal supervision and support. Consider organising a small group of people to get together on a regular basis to debrief and offer each other support and guidance.

9. Commit to regular professional development.

Attending regular professional development helps with building skills and makes you feel as though you are on top of your game. There are also many other benefits including connecting with others in your field, learning new skills and hearing of new resources and tools.

10. Exercise

You have heard it 1000 times, physical activity is one of the best ways to reduce stress. Find something you enjoy and that is easy to do as you are more likely to do it regularly. It doesn't have to be high powered running or gym work. Brisk walking is a great start – you don't need special gear and you can do it anywhere. You might also want to try something new like start rock climbing or bush walking. Can you park further away from work and walk the rest of the way? The idea is to start small, enjoy it and turn it into a habit.

Adapted from: Mathieu. 2007. Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Compassion Satisfaction: Top 12 Self-Care Tips for Helpers.