

Self-Care Key Concepts

Stress Response: the body's physical and mental response when we **perceive** a threat or stressor. More commonly known as Fight, Flight, or Freeze. Heart rate quickens, breathing becomes shallow and quick, blood flows to the major muscle groups, adrenaline is released.

Acute Stress: a stressor that is brief, typically lasting 30 minutes or less. The stress response is turned on when the threat is perceived, then off when the threat is gone. For example, being mugged on the street.

Chronic Stress: a stressor that is on-going. The stress response is turned on, and stays on because the threat is always around. For example having a tyrannical boss, or a loved one with cancer.

Burn-Out: Physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.

Compassion Fatigue: Indifference to charitable appeals on behalf of those who are suffering, experienced as a result of the frequency of number of appeals. Can feel numb, annoyed, angry or apathetic when asked for support, help, etc.

Self-Care: is any activity that you do voluntarily which helps you maintain your physical, mental or emotional health. It can help you feel healthy, relaxed and ready to take on your work and responsibilities. It is LEARNED, PURPOSEFUL, and CONTINUOUS.

Mindfulness: The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.

How To Do Self-Care

- 1. Make it a priority!** You've got to make time for yourself, both long and short. Have a regularly scheduled "day off". Take small breaks throughout your day. Remember the "airplane speech", where they tell you to fasten your oxygen mask before helping others with theirs. If you aren't taking care of yourself, you won't be able to take care of anyone else. While it may sound strange, you need to make yourself the #1 priority on a regular basis.
- 2. Don't Double Book....**GUARD your "you time"! Try not to sacrifice your lunch to work, or agree to do something instead of your you time. You don't get much of it, and sacrificing it to others will only build resentment and not result in anything good.
- 3. Learn to switch off.** This will be hard at first. You're used to GO GO GO, so it may feel really weird to slow down and even stop. There may even be a voice in your head telling you that you should be doing X, and that there's something wrong or inadequate with you for needing a break. There is nothing wrong with you for needing a break. Give yourself enough time to adjust. Remember that some days will be easier than others. Try activities that grab your attention such as solving a puzzle, reading a book for fun.
- 4. Learn both quick and slow fixes.** Learn what you can do in the moment to take care of yourself and guard against stress, as well as know what activities you enjoy for longer time away. You may have to "trial and error" it at first. Find what works for you most days, and have various options should something not do the trick.
- 5. Have "Technology Free" Time.** The internet, and social media have become a very strange type of stressor. We can get sucked in for hours reading news stories, doing research, etc because there is always another article or link to click on. Social media shows us only a glimpse of other people, and it's usually the happy parts. It can give us a distorted perception of how life is for others, making us feel inadequate, lacking, or left out. Taking a break from technology allows you to reconnect with the world around you, and adjust your perception of that world.
- 6. Take advantage of support and/or resources:** Take advantage of a friend's offer to drive your loved one to an appointment or two. Utilize patient assistance programs. Case Managers can help to navigate tricky paperwork. Get connected with professional emotional support, whether a group, individual therapist, spiritual counseling. They can help you develop and strengthen coping skills. Your loved one has a team of doctors, nurses, techs, etc to care for them, you need a support team as well!
- 7. Be GENTLE with YOURSELF:** You are doing something that is scary, difficult, and has the possibility of an unhappy ending. Being hard on yourself will only make this journey harder, scarier, and most stressful. Learn to tune into your self-talk and change any unhelpful messages. You cannot do everything all of the time and that's ok!