



FREAA

FINDING RECOVERY & EMPOWERMENT FROM ABUSE

Self-Care for Therapists and Caregivers

Reducing Burnout -- Increasing Effectiveness

As therapists and caregivers, we talk with our clients every day about the importance of proper self-care:

- sleep
- exercise
- nutrition
- healthy relationships
- healthy boundaries.

It's ironic then that the #1 reason why caregivers leave the field is "burnout" – the stress that comes from caring too much, trying to do too much, and not taking good care of ourselves. Burnout also can result from counter-transference: expecting our clients to "get better," and taking it personally and blaming ourselves when they don't get better as fast as we'd like.

It's time we started "walking our talk" and taking a dose of our own medicine.

Care for ourselves needs to happen BEFORE care for others. Airline personnel say it perfectly: "Place the oxygen mask over yourself BEFORE providing assistance to others." What good can we be to others, when we aren't so good to ourselves?

Self-fish or Self-full

As a mom of two wonderful teenage boys, I recall a time when they were much younger and one of them wanted my immediate attention. I told him he'd have to wait since I was in the middle of something. He said "*Mom, you're so selfish.*" I remember how upset and defensive I felt. I started listing ALL the things I do for him (and his brother) on a daily basis. I stopped mid-sentence and replied "*You're right, I AM selfish and I've got to be – I've got to care for myself before I can care for anyone else.*" I said those words for my benefit (not his) to remind myself: it's not only OK to put my needs first, it's necessary.

I now say selfish is really being SELF-FULL. If I'm not filled up, I've got nothing to give another person. And if I give when I'm not filled up, I'm in depletion mode and that's not helpful for anyone, including myself.

The Hero in YOUR Own Story

Becoming the HERO in your own story means finding the solutions and resolutions to your life stories rather than remaining the VICTIM. This starts with valuing yourself. One way to do this is by putting your name at the top of your "to-do list" and give yourself the same loving support you do for others. In addition, paying attention to what you say to yourself makes a profound difference. Would you say those things to your closest friend if s/he were struggling? Likely not.

Being the HERO in your story includes doing simple things to lessen your stress throughout your day so your stress bucket doesn't get too full. Making time to address your own emotional baggage and unresolved traumas will have life-changing results for you, your family and your clients.

Tapping is a very effective technique for self-healing and self-empowerment ---- you can tap on your own traumas and issues yourself. EFT founder Gary Craig recommends the "Personal Peace Procedure." It involves making a list of traumas and "negative" experiences from your whole life. Set up a designated "tapping time" --- a time for your own self-care --- every day. Then during your "tapping time" select one, or two or three (no more than three in one sitting) hurtful memories or traumas to tap on. Tap tap tap! until the hurt and pain are released and desensitized.

This may take several months --- especially if you have a list of 50 or 60 or 100 traumas! But if you do this every day, practicing positive self-care, you will find yourself feel lighter, clearer and happier than perhaps you ever thought possible.

Helping Others Become the HEROES of THEIR Stories -

People need help. They need support. They need us to be the strong, compassionate, resilient, and resourceful human beings we are when we are at our best. But when we're feeling stressed, resentful, and overwhelmed, we become less than effective in helping them with their issues.

It's not our job to fix them or their problems; that's their job. Our work is to provide hope, and to share ideas and techniques to help them regain their power and take back control of their lives.

Remember the old saying?

*"Give a person a fish and you feed her/him for a day.
Teach a person to fish and you feed her/him for a lifetime."*

Said another way -

*"Take away a person's problem and they feel good for a day.
Teach a person to self-regulate and they live a happy and healthy life!"*

Self-Regulating Emotions

We are all familiar with stress. No one is immune from it and it's next to impossible to completely avoid it.

We can consciously engage the Relaxation Response (and lessen the Fight/Flight Response) with activities such as yoga, mindfulness meditation, deep breathing, walking and listening to soft music.

In addition, there are simple ways to change how you are feeling that can be done anywhere/anytime. Emotional self-regulation refers to the ability to adjust (regulate) your emotions in the moment; to calm yourself down when upset (stressed) and lift yourself up when you're feeling down or depressed. It starts with being mindful of how you are feeling in any given moment, and then practicing simple self-care techniques.

For more information on ways to self-regulate, including tapping, see the articles **EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION** as well as **INTRODUCTION TO THE SELF-HELP TECHNIQUES**.

Incorporate Self-Care During Sessions with Clients

Using self-care techniques during sessions with clients is a great way to model and practice their usefulness. Just as athletes warm up and stretch before strenuous activity, in order to perform at their best; we also can “warm up and stretch” using these positive self-care techniques. *Practicing the self-care techniques with your clients* will help in four ways:

1. keeps you calm and balanced so you're less likely to be triggered by your own emotional upsets
2. prevents the likelihood of experiencing secondary trauma from hearing their stories
3. helps prevent burnout
4. models positive self-care to our clients.

Caregiver Care for Self -- Physician Heal Thyself

When we take care of ourselves we are more alert, more compassionate and ultimately more effective: able to accomplish more with less effort.

Consider how you'd like to provide self-care to the ONE person who has been with you every step of the way and will ALWAYS be there with you – YOU! Put self-care on your calendar so you can check it off your “to-do list”. By taking care of ourselves, we can then take better care of others.

Self-care is a profound form of Self-Love. Practicing positive self-care demonstrates that we are worthy and deserving of love, respect and consideration. It is putting ourselves first, rather than last; of taking care of ourselves, so we can better care for others. By taking care of ourselves first, we will grow into the joyful, loving compassionate healers and humans we know we can be.

As Gandhi said, “*We need to be the change we wish to see in the world.*” If we want our clients, our partners and our children to love and respect themselves, it is up to us to model that. We will all be better human beings for doing so.

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