

*“The work we do on ourselves is the greatest gift we give to others.”*

(Vince MacDonald)

# Stress, Burnout and the Art of Self-Care



## Stress

Stress is the fight or flight response of your body to all demands made upon it. Your body responds to stress, both positive and negative, by trying to get back to normal. Stress is a part of life, and it is very important to learn ways to deal with stress effectively to avoid fatigue, burnout, and illness.

Stress in the workplace may include poor working conditions, danger to life, responsibility for people, level of responsibility, work overload, ambiguous roles, time pressures, role conflicts, over/under promotion, high job demands, and lack of resources.

## Burnout

Burnout has been described as a syndrome of **emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment** that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity. Burnout is not a ‘big breakdown’ but rather cumulative over time and the gradual shift of losing ourselves. Burnout influences all physical and emotional aspects of individual functioning.

## Compassion Fatigue/Vicarious Trauma

Referred to as the “**cost of caring**”. The profound shift in world view that occurs in helping professionals when they work with individuals who have experienced trauma. CF is the profound emotional and physical erosion that takes place when we are unable to refuel and regenerate.

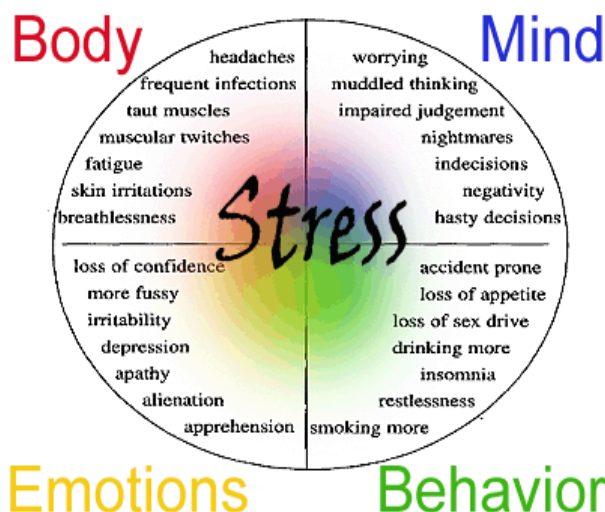
## Self-care

Self-care is an obligation, right, and responsibility to adequately attend to our own healthy functioning. Self-care consists of taking care of your mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Self-care is one of the primary methods of preventing and treating burnout.

## Self-Care Dimensions

1. **Physical Health:** physical activity, balanced healthy eating, addressing self-care needs, proper sleep, going to bathroom when need to, limiting intake of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and other drugs.
2. **Mental Health:** managing moods and feelings, personal perspective, self-talk and thinking patterns, worrying, resiliency (ability to bounce back).
3. **Social Health:** support systems, family connections, partnerships, friendships, community connections.
4. **Spiritual Health:** faith, values, compassion, and meditation.
5. **Intellectual Health:** creativity, problem-solving, willingness to learn new skills, education, training, and skill building.
6. **Lifestyle Health:** work and volunteering issues (inside and outside the home), finances, and environmental concerns.

## Signs/Symptoms of Distress or Burnout



### Physical

- Frequent headaches and other bodily aches
- Indigestion
- Muscle twitches
- Sleep disturbance
- Cold/sweaty hands
- Physical tension
- Sexual difficulties
- Tremors
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath

### Psychological

- Feeling trapped, overwhelmed
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Constant time awareness
- Dissatisfaction with self and life
- Memory loss
- Inability to concentrate
- Excessive worry
- Fear of losing
- Obsessive thought

### Behavioral

- Increase drug, alcohol, caffeine, tobacco use
- Appetite changes
- Irritability
- Relationship difficulties
- Increased rushing around
- Attempting to do too much
- Restlessness
- Inability to relax
- Social withdrawal

## Did you know...

**Your mind and body are connected. When your mind is healthy, your body can resist stress and illness better. When your body is healthy, your feelings are more positive.**

### Methods of Self-Care

There are many strategies and techniques available to help you achieve your self-care goals. Strive to reduce or eliminate personal and environmental stresses, and maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle. The following are methods/practices for self-care and treating and preventing burnout.

**Self-awareness** (self-knowledge) is central to preventing burnout. One needs to recognize the signs and symptoms of burnout and know when to seek help.

**Physical Health** – adequate rest and relaxation, diet and exercise helps to prevent and treat burnout as well as increases energy, sense of well-being, and ability to deal with stressors).

**Leisure Activities** – balance professional activities with enjoyable activities to replenish one's energy resources and reduce tension.

**Coping Techniques** - have adequate coping strategies (time management, acknowledging vulnerabilities, compartmentalizing life and work, meditation).

**Support Network** – develop a strong and healthy support network of friends and family, engage in personal therapy, supervision, and/or peer support groups.

**Modify the work environment** – modify environment to work for you rather than against you – you may need to change work patterns, styles, diversify professional activities, set limits/boundaries and/or join a peer support group.

**Cognitive Factors** – cognitions (beliefs, perceptions and thoughts) can contribute to burnout, a change may be needed in one's attitude toward responsibility and control for one's experiences.

**Self-Soothe** – use your five senses mindfully for relaxation: vision (notice what you see), hearing (pay attention to what you hear around you), smell (be aware of the memories smell can bring), taste (carefully savor flavors that the day brings), and touch (find comfort in touch).

### The A.B.C.'s of Stress Management

- A's** – **Alter It** – remove the source of stress by changing something, use problem solving skills, be assertive, manage your priorities, ask for help.  
**Avoid It** – remove yourself for the stressful situation, walk away, let go, say no, delegate, know your own limits.  
**Accept It** – equip yourself physically and mentally to deal with the stress.
- B's** – **Build Resistance** – develop a proper diet, get regular exercise, and learn relaxation techniques.
- C's** – **Change** – change your perception of the situation or yourself, change unrealistic expectations.

### **The Caregiver's Bill Of Rights**

#### **As a caregiver I have the right...**

- ... to be respected for the work I choose to do.
- ... to take pride in my work and know that I am making a difference.
- ... to garner appreciation and validation for the care I give others.
- ... to receive adequate pay for my job as a professional caregiver.
- ... to discern my personal boundaries and have others respect my choices.
- ... to seek assistance from others, if and when it is necessary.
- ... to take time off to re-energize myself.
- ... to socialize, maintain my interests, and sustain a balanced lifestyle.
- ... to my own feelings, including negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration.
- ... to express my thoughts and feelings to appropriate people at appropriate times.
- ... to convey hope to those in my care.
- ... to believe those in my care will prosper in mind, body and spirit as a result of my caregiving.

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### **The Eight Laws Governing Self Care**

- #1 By validating ourselves, we promote acceptance.
- #2 By validating others, we elevate ourselves.
- #3 By meeting our own mental, physical and emotional needs, we give care from a place of abundance, not scarcity.
- #4 By practicing self-goodwill, we manifest it throughout our lives.
- #5 By honoring past traumas and hurts, we allow ourselves freedom from the pain that controls us.
- #6 By "doing the work," we reclaim the personal power that is rightfully ours.
- #7 By naming and taking ownership of the core issues that limit our growth, we create authenticity.
- #8 By managing our self-care, we welcome happiness into our lives.

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