


Self Care
Caring for the Carers

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Self-Care - Why?

- Actively looking after your own mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing, as you care for others
- Jesus said "Love your neighbour as yourself" He did not say "Love your neighbour instead of yourself"
- Our ability to healthily care for others will be determined by:
 - Our own security in who we are – we do not need to have a caring role to make us feel valued
 - Our ability to take in for ourselves and have our own needs met before trying to meet the needs of others

Self-Care - Why?

Jesus knew how to self-care and did it

- He was able to wash the disciples feet and do the lowliest of task because He was secure in who he was – it says "He knew, who he was SO he got up"
- He took time away from people, he went off on his own to pray, He allowed others to care for him, He had fun, friends, etc

When you self-care well:

- you are in a much stronger place to give your time & energy to others without burning yourself out
- you will have more energy for family, friends other activities

Self-Care: Why? Specific issues for people in caring roles

- compassion may be the greatest strength that we bring to our roles, but it can also make us most vulnerable
- confidentiality often means that we cannot receive immediate empathic input from colleagues, family, church members, etc.
- we work with an ever-present element of not knowing what issues / emotions / demands may arise at any time
- we may have to manage something that feels beyond us or faced with something that personally feels too close
- we often cannot control the outcome of caring nor fix the problems – not matter how well we care
- we need to remember are not responsible for other people’s lives, just for what we offer them

Self-Care : Why? Specific issues for Now

Self-care is important for those of us who work in caring roles at any time, but in the current Corona Virus situation there are some added issues:

- The current situation is causing more issues to rise / intensify – loneliness of the isolated, domestic abuse, family tensions, etc.
- We may have to deal with more traumatic situations – more deaths and / or deaths that are more traumatic because of not being able to be with relatives, etc.
- The way in which we care has had to change or stop and we may feel helpless to meet the needs
- The level of anxiety and stress in society in general is rising
- We as carers have our own stresses, concerns, etc. that we need to deal with

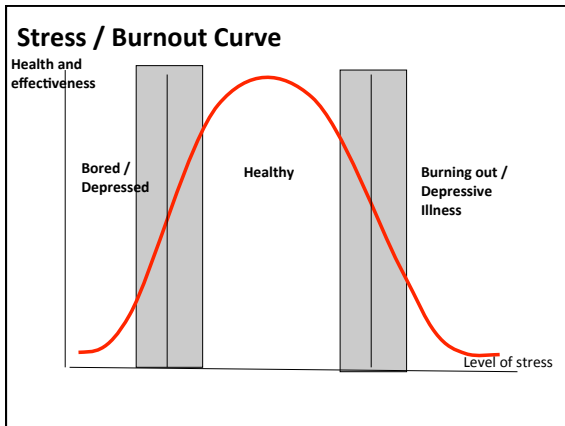
Impact of Not Self-Caring

Compassion fatigue:

“the profound gradual emotional and physical exhaustion that helping professionals can develop over a period of time . It eventually affects our ability to tolerate strong emotions and difficult stories in others, in both our professional and personal life. “ Francoise Mathieu, Founder of Compassion Fatigue Solutions

Burnout

“ the exhausting of the inner resources that enables a carer to go on caring. The using up of the essential “inner you”, rendering the individual in a serious condition of dysfunctionality. The spending of self on others in such a way that the “inner bank balance” has gone into red.” Freedom to Lead by Rev Colin Buckland

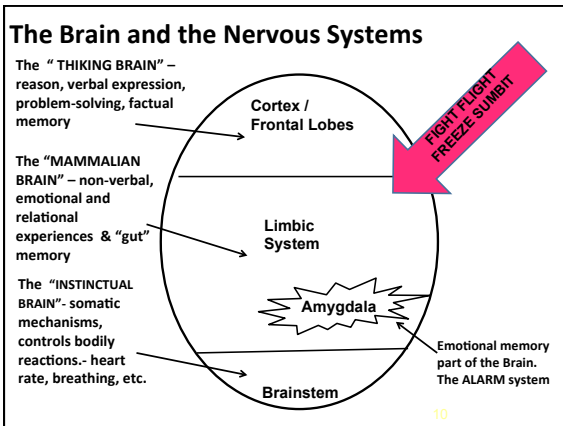


STRESS CURVE

Everyone has an individual Stress Curve
 We need certain amount of pressure to perform at our best.
 In the middle is the **OPTIMUM PRESSURE** level, a level of stress where we will be our optimal **long-term** healthiest & most effective
 It is OK to move into the grey areas from time to time – but being permanently in them or beyond them is where problems begin
 Too little pressure / stress - permanently in the boredom level with no stimulating pressure / achieve little – can lead to depression.
 As pressure increases, we move along the stress curve & our body naturally reacts – increased the heart-rate, blood pressure & breathing to prepare the body to react. We can achieve more, feel energised, stronger etc.
 The body however, expects a period of relief and recovery and returning to a “steady state”
 When this steady state is not achieved quickly enough or for long enough or at all, the body’s systems act as a fuse, the body has been overloaded and “blows”.

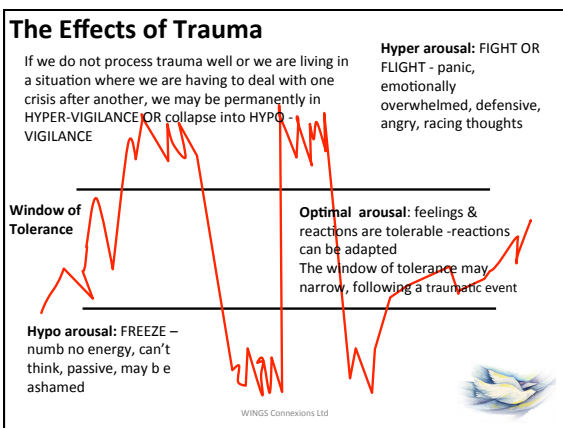
Impact & Warning Signs

<p>Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enjoy work less - find it less rewarding, meaningful bored, disinterested, or irritated by the people you work with / care for feel as though daily challenges are too much 	<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> feel rundown, tired, low energy disturbed sleep & diet headaches, pains, aches more prone to illness, viruses, old injuries return
<p>Relational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> feel isolated from family, friends, find it difficult to separate personal life from work life. increased irritation & conflicts 	<p>Psychological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> disturbed concentration in everyday life stress, anxiety and depression less able to deal with everyday problems
<p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> feel emotionally exhausted / drained loss of sense of humour outbursts of emotion that appear out of proportion easily startled / anxious 	<p>Spiritual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> less interest in spiritual life & practices question own faith less hope



Impact of Trauma

- Frontal Lobes –the seat of our thinking capacity and our ability to judge, deliberate, contrast, and compare. We use this in non- traumatic situation in most of our everyday life when we are thinking about what we are doing , saying, etc.
- The limbic system is central to survival, being the area of the mid-brain that initiates our instinctive response to danger or trauma fight, flight, freeze or submit responses.
- The amygdala is our early-warning system. It stores emotional memory and processes emotion even before the cortex even gets the message that something has happened.
- Our brainstem also comes into play, which actually starts preparing our body to react by releasing hormones to start somatic reactions – "to fight/flight/ freeze" – we can actually feel physically reactions – heartbeat, stomach tension etc.
- If we do not process trauma well enough, the next time there is a situation that triggers memory of the trauma(does not have to be a real trauma situation) are amygdala starts a reaction so we feel we are back in the trauma



Trauma Reactions

You may react and develop traumatic stress because of:

- your own personal traumas
- but also to the stories that you hear or the situations that you see of other people’s trauma – this is called vicarious trauma

May be slow build up or a one-off reaction

Both may cause us to experience:

- intrusive images, nightmares, flashbacks - recreating the scenes in our minds.
- difficulty in disengaging from the traumatic story or scene OR refusing to process / think about it
- the world feels unsafe – we are increasingly hyper or hypo vigilant
- physical responses related to trauma reactions – heart rate, breathing, muscle,

Self-Care: What Stops Us?

- We view self-care as an indulgence rather than a necessity
We live in a society that only values “doing” and “achievement”
- Feeling that everybody counts but the carer – this may be the view that we hold about ourselves as carers
- We think we do not have the time
- The lives & problems of the people we care for can seem so serious, that we dismiss our concerns and problems as being insignificant
- We do not want to let people (ultimately God) down
- We can grow “comfortable” in our discomfort – it feels “safe” simply because it is the norm – we are addicted to stress hormones

Self-Care: What Stops Us?

Our Christian ethos:

“Those drawn to work in caring (*are Christians*) may have learned at an early age to become other-focused rather than self-focused. As a result, they may not feel they need or deserve the same nurturing that they accept others need and deserve. They may have exceptionally high standards for themselves and yet be compassionate and forgiving of the shortcomings, mistakes or inconsideration of others.” Elizabeth Venart, American Counselling Association

If we don’t self-care we may try to cope in the wrong way:

- self-medication - alcohol, drugs, food, etc.
- keep taking on more / working harder to fill our time and avoid the symptoms
- minimise the level of stresses – ignoring the “alarm bells”
- switch off completely – go into hypo-vigilance

What Can We Do?

We cannot change many of the risk factors, but we can look after ourselves better in them.

So it is important to:

- understand the risk and recognise the potential impact on us
- develop a self-monitoring process to recognise own warning signs
- work out and carry out preventative action
- look at how we manage our time of caring and keep good boundaries
- if burnout, compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma occur know what action we need to take and take it

Two aspects of self-care:

- Short-term – emergency situations
- On-going care that will live more healthily for the long-term

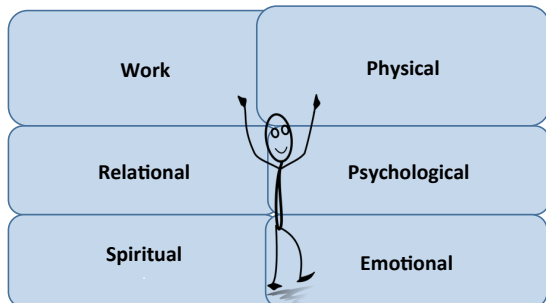
Emergency Self-Care : Grounding Techniques

When experiencing anxiety, stress, panic attacks, etc. it is vitally important to be able to bring ourselves back into the present - “the here and now” - get the frontal lobes back into action

Some techniques

- Calm physical movement - stand up, sit down, have a drink of water, stretch, stamp feet, rub arms & legs, clap, walk around
- Focus on concrete, safe objects - notice the colours, shapes, etc.
- Tensing / relaxing muscle
- Take slow, calm breathes
- Talk to yourself “it is OK, I am safe....”
- Count backwards from 10, taking steady breaths
- Carry a **grounding object** - a stone, small object, etc.
- Use **5,4,3,2,1**: Think about 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch (and touch them), 2 things you can smell or like the smell of, and 1 slow, deep breath

How to Self –Care: Holistic Wellbeing



On-going Self-Care

Work

- Are there ways in which you work that could be changed to reduce stress?
- How well do you support each other – talking about problems, tackling difficult situations together, knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are
- Having a break in the day to just unwind and do something different in them

Physical

- Listen to your body – do not ignore physical symptoms
- Have as healthy diet as you can
- Think about how much sleep you get and also how disturbed it is
- Take regular exercise
- Build-in some time each day to de-stressing & relax for a few moments – listen to music, read, draw, knit, sing, breathing exercise, etc.
- Avoid self-medication
- Seek medical / other professional help if needed

On-going Self-Care

Relational & Emotional

- Have good supportive relationships where you can talk about work & life demands & people that make you laugh
- Do things regularly that really gives you pleasure, energy, a sense of satisfaction
- Take breaks during the day, each week and holidays
- Make allowances for when you are going through difficult times – there is no shame in asking for help
- Learn to say “NO” without feeling guilty

Spiritual

- Regular personal spiritual input that works for you, where you receive from God- either alone and / or at church, etc.
- Go to places “virtually” where you are not always in the caring or leading role
- Prayer partner or group
- People who pray for your work

On-going Self-Care

Psychological

- Pay attention to physical sensations & emotional reactions
- Have ‘rituals’ to ground yourself during and after a difficult situation
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do and let go of what you cannot do
- Be careful of stress /trauma you expose yourself to – constant news about corona, it is the topic that everyone talks about – limit exposure to the news/ deliberately have “non-virus” times / conversations

Psychological

- When you are hearing traumatic stories you can be sympathetic & attentive without being absorbed into it
 - try not to picture it
 - every now and then take a “mini-time-out” from conversation – do a grounding technique
- Stay attuned to the impact that the traumas are having on you
- Practice and regularly use relaxation exercises

Making a Self-Care Plan

- Make a commitment to prioritise your health & wellbeing
- Look at each of the six aspects of your life
- Assess what you currently do that lowers stress, re-energises you, etc.
- Think about some new activities if there are gaps
- Be specific & realistic about what you can do
- Think honestly about whether you have any negative / maladaptive coping mechanisms and how you can minimise them
- Think about what you hope these actions will achieve
- Keep the plan visible - perhaps share it with someone who will support you
- Stick to it & do the activities regularly –even when you are feeling fine
- Self-care is a discipline to be done every day, week, month. Not once in a while or when you hit a low point
- Re-assess how you are getting on after one month and three months.
- After a time do the exercise again to see how effective it has been / how it may need to change
