

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION BRIEF

How Self-Care and Mindfulness Strengthen Your Work



Initiating and achieving a sustainable mindset and lifestyle of self-care, empathy, and self-compassion is an important commitment for all family strengthening practitioners. It is not only the responsibility of an individual employee, but also of the supervisors and administrators that support an organization. Self-care is an important set of intentions necessary to mitigate possible stress and challenges experienced in the field of family strengthening. It is a sophisticated set of skills intended to help manage emotions and provide better services.

A valuable first step in achieving and supporting self-care is to recognize the stress responses in yourself and in the families you support. While it is normal and healthy to experience moderate forms of stress, when one's stress response is extreme, frequent, or results in extended activation of the body's stress response it is referred to as toxic stress, as described by Harvard's Center on the Developing Child, which can have damaging effects on development, behavior, and long-term health. Self-awareness of one's stress responses allows for an individual to check-in and intervene as needed in order to maintain wellness and reduce the risk of unmanageable stress before it occurs.

Self-care describes the effort of building an environment around you that helps you move in the direction of becoming your best self while improving your physical, mental and spiritual needs. It is engaging in long-term well-being, for example, meditating every day, as opposed to temporary well-being, for example, getting a massage. While warm bubble baths and walks outside can be helpful ways to reduce stress, true self-care comes from organizational systems that are designed to support every worker's safety and well-being. This includes manageable caseloads and a comfortable salary.

Additionally, on an individual level, commitment to self-care is a daily practice and mindset that embodies mindfulness and requires self-compassion.



Source: <https://www.naswoh.org/>

- Mindfulness is being able to pay attention to your internal experiences (thoughts, emotions, sensations) without judgement. Practicing mindfulness will allow for the capacity to find a sense of balance. The ability to direct your attention to the present and to preserve that focus is a critical skill needed for your health, wellness, and connection with children and families (Gehl, n.d.). Mindfulness helps family strengthening workers recognize when they are experiencing stress or being self-critical which then allows them to apply self-compassion.
- Self-compassion is the awareness that everyone is imperfect and makes mistakes. It requires individuals to stop and recognize their own suffering and involves wanting health and wellness for oneself. Rather than punishing yourself for your mistakes and failures, self-compassion allows you to let go of the unrealistic expectations you've placed on yourself and open the door to real and lasting satisfaction (Neff, 2011).

Family strengthening workers often embrace and embody compassion for others, especially in this field of work. However, practitioners must have self-compassion and embody a trauma-informed approach with themselves before they can be fully compassionate and trauma-informed with others. This inside out approach provides family strengthening workers an opportunity to model and teach self-care to the families they support through their own practice.

Take Action

- 1) Consider starting your work day by focusing on the present moment with a mindful minute exercise to set intentions as you begin each day.
- 2) Create a personal vision for your work and personal life to help you stay focused on what's important in your life. While we may not always live up to the personal visions we set for ourselves, it is something we can strive for which can help us when challenges seem overwhelming.
- 3) Research has shown that taking the time to be grateful every day has enormous physical and mental health benefits. It helps build our immune systems, keeps us in touch with the positive aspects of life, and connects us with others. Try practicing gratitude by sending a thank-you note, keeping a gratitude journal, or taking time for reflection.



Strategies 2.0

Strategies 2.0 is a multi-dimensional initiative to help professionals and organizations make a bigger impact.

We train, support, and link professionals and organizations together to more effectively support families as well as build power to advance equity and opportunity in our communities.

Resources

[The Self-Care Assessment](#) is a worksheet that can be used to gauge your current self-care practices. Use it to understand your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more of in your life.

[Finding Meaning and Purpose in Your Work](#) – Visit this site hosted by Dr. Susan Biali Haas, MD in partnership with the Office of Child Abuse Prevention for tools and resources on managing stress, reducing burnout, and living a resilient life.

References

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