

The Importance of Having a Strong Self-Care Routine

Emphasizing balanced and consistent self-care practices

By Alicia Backer, PTA

I REALLY STRUGGLED TO CREATE A Q&A FORMAT that would capture the weight of this topic. I wanted to create something that people would not only read but “feel.” I wanted to write from my heart and personal experience with hopes of reaching others who are working to find a new or refreshed self-care regime. One that is strong in all areas to nourish the mind, body, and spirit. I am not a writer who prides myself on having a wealth of knowledge on the most recent evidence-based research or the stats that go along with it, but sometimes the best lessons can come from a personal story and a little or a lot of vulnerability. I am writing in the way I know best, from my sleeve, because that’s where my heart is.

MANY HATS

After a short 14 years in the profession, I have worn many hats, from clinician duties to leadership roles. Throughout these years, my self-care practices have evolved and reflected the needs of life in that moment. Job changes, relocation, and personal distress all force us to resort to practices that provide us with a sense of calm and security when life feels unfamiliar. Life-changing events, whether positive or negative, have a direct impact on our health and our ability to cope. Being proactive and having a strong self-care routine that is well-balanced will provide guidance and comfort in the harder moments of life.

To say that the last year has been extremely difficult is an understatement. Life after divorce, whether for better or worse, is hard. Being a single parent following a divorce is even harder. Even when the outcome is necessary for long-term happiness, healing isn’t instantaneous, and it isn’t easy. It was easy to identify the areas of self-care that needed more attention, but creating those healthy practices was not. Long-term neglect of emotional and personal self-care was apparent. These times of turmoil even caused struggles where I have always felt relatively strong, the physical, professional, and mental practices felt hard and exhausting. My needs for self-care changed, and new routines seemed

foreign. I was a full-time professional, mom, and coach who was trying to find time to take care of myself. Does this sound familiar?

HEALING

I couldn’t excel in any of my roles until I could heal, and healing required focus on myself and a better balance of self-care practices. In these times, I wanted and needed support from my safe spaces, family, friends, and work. These were my “ride or dies,” the ones I trusted and confided in to support the journey of reclaiming my health and happiness. Being intentional in my actions and using my support system saved me from a sad and dark path. The journey to sunnier days was long and felt unbearable at times, but having better focus, healthier self-care practices, and a support system always brought me back to where I needed to be mentally, emotionally, and physically. I reflected, read books, and used self-care assessments to learn and nurture my routines. The self-care wheel is a great resource to help define the areas requiring more attention.¹ The road to health and happiness is not linear, but being consistent in self-care routines makes difficult times much easier.

‘INSERT YOURS’

Step away from my story and “insert” yours. Did you experience similar challenges when faced with adversity? Were your self-care practices prioritized and balanced? Was your support system present? Did you feel supported at work and feel a sense of compassion and understanding? During many hours of self-reflection, I realized that self-care was never something that had been discussed in past or present work environments. There have been periodic check-ins, but specific topics of self-care practices have not been discussed.

Never in my professional journey have I ever been part of a conversation that addressed my own personal self-care practices and/or needs or that of colleagues. It has not been on meeting agendas or prioritized as a continuous

area of attention. I'm just as guilty as anyone else. In healthcare, we are in a position that requires us to always be "on." Bad days and personal stresses are put aside so that we can tend to the needs and hardships of others. What we do as healthcare professionals is really hard, but we are missing a very important part of our service to others if we neglect our own self-care needs and those of our team.

As a profession, we are abundantly aware of the detriments of burnout and compassion fatigue but are we doing enough for each other to reduce the negative impacts felt in our daily grind? And are we addressing the hardships experienced on a personal level that directly affect our ability to serve our clients best? Are we being supportive and considerate of others during times of struggle?

As a profession I believe that we need to be more proactive in taking care of each other and fostering cultures that facilitate best self-care practices for ourselves and our team. Dealing with hardship would have been a lot easier if I had practiced better and more balanced self-care routines and felt more supported and accepted during these times.

MORE PROACTIVE

What we know for sure is that self-care is essential for survival. Without it, the stressors of life will be too much for us as humans to handle. In current times, prioritizing our well-being has become a necessity. In a world where burnout is becoming all too common, we should be taking a more proactive approach in nurturing a healthy mind, body and spirit for ourselves and for our teams. The HEP for self-care looks different for all of us but should include each of the core areas. Be proactive in your health care journey and understand that it will also change and grow with you and life experiences. Understand that balance in all areas is important and will help you significantly through hardship. Check in with others, family, friends and co-workers, to help fill their cup in whatever way you can. Remember that a perfect balance is not realistic or necessary but including all areas of self-care will best impact your overall health and happiness. **I**

REFERENCE

1. *Self-care wheel: World's #1 self care tool!* Olga Phoenix. (2024, March 3). <https://olgaphoenix.com/self-care-wheel/>

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