NASW Social Work Care Share

"Professional self-care is an essential underpinning to best practice in the profession of Social Work. Self-care has relevance to all social workers in the setting within which they practice. NASW supports the practice of professional self-care for social workers as a means of maintaining their competence, strengthening the profession, and preserving the integrity of their work with clients.”
NASW Social Work Speaks, 2011-2014

What is Self Care?

A focus on self care is becoming increasingly important as the demands within the social work profession seem to be intensifying. Self-care is any activity of an individual that is done with the intention of improving or maintaining wellness. Professional self-care can be defined as the incorporation of skills and strategies by social workers to preserve their personal, familial, emotional, and spiritual needs while serving the needs of their clients (Newell & MacNeil 2010).

Categories for self-care can include 1) physical: body work, adequate sleep, nutrition; 2) psychological: effective relaxation time, contact with nature, forms of creative expression, balance between work and recreation; 3) social/interpersonal: supportive relationships and knowing when/how to obtain help; and 4) professional: balancing work and home life, setting boundaries and limits, and getting help/support through peers, role models, and supervisors (Charles Figley interview, 2005).

Self-care has been identified as the greatest strategy to prevent or reduce the undesirable effects of Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Vicarious Traumatization and Burnout. Social workers are at much higher risk than other professionals of experiencing compassion fatigue due to the nature of our work (Radey & Figley, 2007).

Compassion is a very important element in the success of a social worker engaging the clients in direct practice work. In order to gain the trust of the clients we must develop a positive working relationship and be able to empathize with the client. Sometimes our hearts go out to the clients to the point where we feel their pain and suffering, which can lead to mental, physical, and emotional fatigue (Radey & Figley, 2007). Chronic exposure to others’ traumatic events is also a factor that puts social workers at higher risk of experiencing compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue can lead to burnout, a condition of emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual exhaustion that results from practicing with people who are vulnerable or suffering (Newell & MacNeil, 2010).
References


The Kansas Chapter, NASW thanks chapter member Suzie DeVaughn, LMSW for the information on Self Care

The National Association of Social Workers is a membership organization advocating for the practice and profession of Social Work. If you are not already a member, you are invited to join! Join online at www.socialworkers.org

If you are an association member, thank you!!

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“Social Workers Help”