

# Suicide Prevention: Self-Care for the Care Givers

Patricia A Burke, MSW, LCSW, BCD, CCS  
pab@patriciaburke.com  
www.patriciaburke.com



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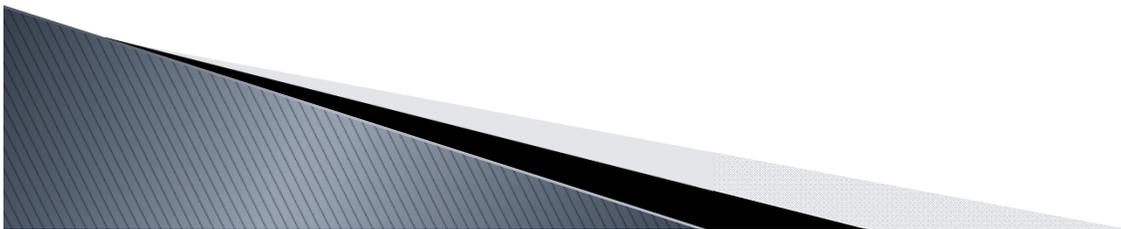
# Landscape of Meaning

- ▶ Primary Stress Reactions
- ▶ Secondary Trauma
- ▶ Compassion Fatigue
- ▶ Vicarious Traumatization
- ▶ Burnout



# Importance of Self-Care

- ▶ Stress of high pressured treatment contexts
- ▶ Stress of working with suicidal people
- ▶ Complexity of working with people with co-occurring conditions



# 4 Steps to Well-Being

1. Tracking the Stressors
2. Enhancing Self-Care/ABCs
3. Building Resilience & Coping Skills
4. Making a Commitment to Self-Care

(Adapted from Mathieu, 2012)



# Tracking the Stressors

| Stress of Working with Suicidality | Typical Responses |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1)                                 |                   |
| 2)                                 |                   |
| 3)                                 |                   |
| 4)                                 |                   |
| 5)                                 |                   |
| 6)                                 |                   |
| 7)                                 |                   |



# The ABCs of Self-Care

▶ *Awareness*

▶ *Balance*

▶ *Connection*

(Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1996)



# *Awareness*

- ▶ Being in tune with one's needs, limits, emotions and internal/external resources
- ▶ Quiet time and space that supports self-reflection
- ▶ Mindfulness: Non-judgmental Awareness



# *Balance*

- ▶ Diversity of activities at work
- ▶ Work and play
- ▶ Activity and rest
- ▶ Focus on self & focus on others
- ▶ Provides stability
- ▶ Provides grounding during high stress



# *Connection*

- ▶ Connection to oneself, to others, and to something greater decreases isolation and increases hope.
- ▶ Connection provides an anchor that supports us to be able to witness tremendous suffering.



# What is Mindfulness?

- ▶ Non-judgmental awareness
- ▶ Alert yet relaxed consciousness
- ▶ Compassionate witnessing of experience
- ▶ Curiosity



# Mindfulness Enhances

- ▶ Witness stance
- ▶ Acceptance and tolerance of strong feelings
- ▶ Compassion for self and others
- ▶ Resilience (ability to rebound from adversity)
- ▶ Relaxation
- ▶ Peace of mind



# Self-Care Activities

- ▶ talk with colleagues
- ▶ attend workshops
- ▶ social activities
- ▶ exercise
- ▶ limit client sessions / balance caseloads
- ▶ take vacations / take breaks
- ▶ listen to music / walk in nature
- ▶ seek emotional support



# A Holistic Self-Care Plan

## Personal

- ▶ 1) physical
- ▶ 2) psychological
- ▶ 3) emotional
- ▶ 4) spiritual

## Professional

- ▶ 1) physical
- ▶ 2) psychological
- ▶ 3) emotional
- ▶ 4) spiritual



# Physical Self-Care

- ▶ What are non-chemical things that help my body relax?
- ▶ What supports my body to be healthy?



# Psychological Self-Care I

- ▶ What helps my mind relax?
- ▶ What helps me see a bigger perspective?
- ▶ What helps me break down big tasks into smaller steps?
- ▶ What helps me counteract negative self-talk?



# Emotional Self-Care I

- ▶ What helps me feel grounded and able to tolerate strong feelings?
- ▶ What helps me express my feelings in a healthy way?
- ▶ Who helps me cope in positive ways and how do they help?



# Emotional Self-Care II

- ▶ Who are at least three people I feel safe talking with about my reactions/feelings about clients?
- ▶ How can I connect with those people on a regular basis?
- ▶ What helps me feel connected to others?



# Spiritual Self-Care

- ▶ What helps me find meaning in life?
- ▶ What helps me feel hopeful?
- ▶ What sustains me during difficult times?
- ▶ What connects me to something greater?



# Making a Commitment to Self-Care

Make a formal, tangible commitment: Written, public, specific, and measureable promises of self-care

– Green Cross  
Standards of Self-Care



# Self-Care is an Ethical Imperative

There must be a recognition that the duty to perform as a helper can not be fulfilled if there is not, at the same time, a duty to self care.

– Green Cross  
Standards of Self-Care



# Final Thoughts

- ▶ Self-care is not a selfish action
- ▶ It is an action of self-acceptance and self-compassion
- ▶ It is an ethical imperative
- ▶ It is an acknowledgement of our humanity
- ▶ It allows us to continue the important work we are doing in the world



# Selected References I

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