

## PSYCHOLOGISTS LISTEN TO PSYCHOLOGISTS REGARDING SELF-CARE

APA's Advisory Committee on Colleague Assistance (ACCA): Promoting Prevention, Wellness and Coping with Challenges

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Why is this important for all Psychologists?

We all know that balancing a healthy mind, spirit and body enhances our personal and professional lives. If we follow our own advice everyone benefits!

Even as experts in mental health, psychologists, are not immune to the effects of a busy career, life's demands, normal variations in feelings, or mood and anxiety disorders whether via genetic &/or environmental sources. These factors in tandem with what can be equally rewarding and depleting reactions along with our ongoing efforts to hold, listen and attend to those with trauma and extreme challenges, mandates a need for an unusual degree of balance, nurturing & meaningful connection.

- \* Balance promotes being more present and effective with our clients
- \* It encourages more rewards in all aspects of our lives including fulfillment and engagement with our work.
- \* It allows for a modeling of healthy attitudes & behaviors for our clients, families, communities and our profession.
- \* Balance also assists in honoring our professional guild, APA's ethics' principle A, - "be aware of the possible effect of [our] own physical and mental health on [our] ability to help those with whom [we] work." (APA, 2002, p.3)

### LISTENING TO WHAT WE OFFER TO OUR CLIENTS:

- \* If you have a propensity for high levels of stress plan accordingly to keep stressors at a manageable level and tailor a plan for your specific needs. Borrow from guidelines we give our clients even though we are very familiar with the concepts we suggest to them, reminders are helpful. For example, journaling, keeping a record of triggers and what works best to anticipate or contain such precipitating variables, etc.
- \* If you have a history of, for example, a mood disorder, know the early warning signs, take regular self-assessments, check in with your own mental health professional, stay on meds if appropriate, be mindful of triggering issues, stay positive and appreciate it is normal for all individuals to have issues to be aware of, take responsibility for, and attend to.

\* Practice the “routine” we offer to our clients; adequate sleep, healthy diet, moments of joy, regular exercise, connecting with those important to us, time for yourself, give back to your community, and allow for quiet, reflective time. Do individualize your self-care regime.

\* Give priority to your own mental, physical and joyful needs. Explore the best and most effective way to attend to your own specific goals in these areas and place them at the top of your protected times “to do” list.

### LISTENING AND LEARNING FROM OUR COLLEAGUES

\* Professionally connect with a colleague on a regular basis for both relaxing time and conferring time to assist in lessening the isolation often experienced in independent practice. A coaching or mentoring of each other provides reciprocal support and a space to discuss and share vulnerabilities and joy.

\* Consider a more formal consulting group for ethical purposes, collegial support, as a way to stay current in the field and to share your professional insights with others.

\* Attend workshops for both currency of professional knowledge, replenishing of your interest in the field and connections with colleagues.

\* Appreciate that not unlike those we serve we will experience professional and personal issues at all stages of our lives, from graduate school/early career through retirement. It is normal and understandable to have such challenges, use your mental health wisdom to seek support and not feel weak but wise to avail yourself of what you know is beneficial to those we treat and deserving for you to access. Don’t judge yourself, recall we tell our clients and the public to not stigmatize others for needing mental health assistance, therefore we shouldn’t let stigma keep us from support. Hopefully, the field and our profession has evolved, and we are enlightened sufficiently, to now practice keeping ourselves and our colleagues healthy.

\* Vary the degree of difficulty of clients to better serve them and take care of yourself. You can’t and aren’t expected to be available to all clients at all times, set healthy boundaries and respect yourself for honoring your efforts, your professional guild and accomplishments.

\* Explore varied ways to contribute to the field; through local, State or National association efforts, writing an article for a local newspaper or chapter newsletter, giving a community presentation, holding a panel discussion of interest to your local area, facilitating a book group discussion, informally sharing materials on dealing with challenges or promoting wellness, consult APA’s public service campaign materials, etc.

\* Become familiar with your local, State and National Colleague Assistance Programs (CAP). They can provide support for you, or a colleague, with recommendations on how to best connect with a psychologist who may need assistance. Visit their web sites for self-assessments, handouts on self-care, effective coping strategies, confidential call-in lines, and as a reminder for nurturing protective factors to keep you more resilient. Also, consider joining a CAP as a provider for your colleagues.

\* Consider occasional self-assessments for due diligence. Visit the APA web site ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)) for resources and also see Bridgeman, D. (2009) informal self-assessment, "Balance, Boundaries & Benevolence: The Complexities of Psychologists' Self-Care, Coping & Wellness", <http://www.capclasp.org>

#### Selected References:

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Norcross, J. & Guy, J. (2007). *Leaving It at the Office: A Guide to Psychotherapy Self-Care*. The Guilford Press.

Stevanovic, P. & Rupert, P. (2009). Work-Family Spillover & Life Satisfaction Among Professional Psychologists. *Prof. Psych:RP*, 40, 1, 62-68.

Skovholt, T. (2001). *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout Prevention & Self-Care Strategies for Counselors, Therapists, Teachers, & Health Profess.* Allyn & Bacon.

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Also, visit the APA web site at [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) and see the "Tools of Engagement for Psychologists", Bridgeman, D. (2010), a toolkit on developing and maintaining a CAP with resources for psychologists from early career through retirement with respect to both personal and professional life, which can also be found at <http://www.cpaclasp.org> along with other resources.