Self-Care

School Resources to Support Military-Connected Students is a project by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness an applied research center at The Pennsylvania State University and is funded by the Department of Defense Education Activity Grant number HE1254-19-0009.

For more information click on the links below:

https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/

https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/

https://www.psu.edu/

https://dodeagrants.org/

Our goal is to provide school personnel with free, evidence-based resources to support military-connected students. This training is part of our *Suicide Prevention* series.

Important Reminders

Before starting this training, please read the items below carefully and check the box in front of each item to indicate your understanding.

- The following content discusses suicide and may be upsetting to some individuals.
- Follow all district, local, state, and federal regulations. This training is **NOT** intended to replace or override existing procedures or laws.

Introduction

What is the purpose of this training?

Taking care of oneself can be broadly conceptualized in two ways: personal wellness and professional development.

Typically, personal wellness techniques are the first strategies that individuals think of when they consider "self-care." Although personal wellness strategies are critical for well-being and avoiding burnout, there are strategies that professionals may want to carefully consider that can minimize stressors in the workplace and contribute to more work satisfaction. It may make sense to think of these two kinds of strategies as being in direct relationship with each other. It appears as though the cycle could be never-ending, and it may also seem that work demands are completely out of your direct control. There are, however, important ways that workplace demands can be lessened, or other tools that may minimize the ways in which work demands may contribute to toxic levels of stress.

Objective

The goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Identify work-related self-care strategies to prevent professional burnout.

How confident are you in your ability to do this now?

Please click on the link below to submit your response.

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Gp3iBHlvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide41

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below before proceeding with this training.

> Answered the survey question in the link.
> Clicked the arrow underneath the survey question to submit your response.
> Recorded the ID number provided after you submitted your answer to the survey question. You will need it to complete the survey at the end of this training.

Research

What is most important for me to know?

Working in educational settings can be very challenging. Student support personnel are often overwhelmed by multiple and competing demands on their time, limited resources to do their jobs, and sometimes a feeling of a sense of limited efficacy in their capacity to execute all of their responsibilities. It may seem that these realities are just "the way things are," yet there are important ways that student support personnel can ease some of the sources of their stress that could lead to burnout. Harvey (2005) recommends several work-related strategies for reducing the stressful realities of school-based practice.

Work-Related Self Care
- Set limits at work
- Manage your time
- Develop your network of professionals
- Learn helpful skills

Setting Limits at Work

Most educational professionals believe that limit-setting is outside of their scope or that to do so would lead to retribution or other negative consequences that could jeopardize their job. It is true that there are some procedural and policy guidelines that are not flexible (e.g., timelines for completing evaluations or submitting paperwork) yet there are other small ways that student support personnel can set limits. Many times, when professionals are feeling overwhelmed, there are simple explanations related to putting undue pressure on themselves (in addition to the realities of the job at hand). In order to set limits, professionals should compassionately examine for themselves what the expectations are of their role and which of these expectations are self-imposed and which are imposed by the realities of the job itself.

Examination of expectations leads to effective limit setting and can be fostered by the following strategies:

1. Setting clear boundaries between home and work by trying to limit the amount of time you work from home in the evenings or weekends. If you do find that you are frequently bringing work home, ask yourself if there are things that could help you manage your time in order to set limits. Also, if working from home is a strategy that helps you to be more efficient, think about whether or not you can at least set limits on the amount of time spent (e.g., only working for one hour each night) and keeping your work materials in an area of your home that is separate from your bedroom or living spaces.

2. Prioritizing the most important issues first is another important strategy. When you have competing demands on your time it is helpful to make a list of the following:
   a) Tasks that have "hard" (immovable) deadlines and list them from those due first to those tasks with movable deadlines
   b) Tasks that are related to critical issues that involve student safety, mandated reporting, or projects of the most need to your school

3. Fostering realistic expectations is one way to help ease the demands that you put on yourself and that others may put on you. Most other professionals will understand that you may want to get something done right away or participate in a new initiative, but that right now you are not able to or that it may have to wait. Not only is it helpful to consider managing the expectations of others, but also be kind to yourself in regards to what you truly believe is reasonable for you to accomplish and let go of the judgment that you cannot accomplish all goals at once.

Time Management

Time management skills are essential for keeping workloads from becoming unmanageable and to foster opportunities throughout your day to take breaks that may allow for renewal. What can be difficult about time management is that there are often scheduling constraints that are beyond a person's immediate control (e.g., team meetings, crisis issues, or parent constraints). Despite some of the limitations on having total autonomy within your individual schedule, there are ways to consider how to streamline your day in other ways. Examples of strategies for time management include:

1. **Setting office hours** – Office hours (even if you don't have a designated office or share an office) may be a single hour a day when professionals can dedicate their attention to being available for "drop in" consultation by teachers, administrators, and other colleagues. Office hours may be a good time to commit to returning phone calls, printing necessary materials for sessions or other activities, answering emails, or other seat work that can pile up. Committing time to these "housekeeping" tasks is also a way to avoid the desire or tendency to answer calls, emails, and other activities that can become scattered throughout the day that can take away from report writing, program development, professional learning, or student contact. Try to find a way to schedule your housekeeping or office hours when you are not able to do other tasks that require careful attention, such as working with students, attending meetings, or completing reports. In addition, consider email-specific guidelines, such as only checking your email two times per day and turning off smartphone notifications after a certain time of day so you are not checking emails at 10 PM.

2. **Protect your peak hours** – All professionals have task demands that require concentration, quiet, or larger blocks of time. Most professionals, through many experiences, are already self-aware enough to know which times of day are best for them to be productive on more difficult tasks such as writing or testing. To the best of your ability, try to block these times in your calendar and be strict about protecting it. Protecting your peak blocks of time may also minimize your need to take work home or spend undue time on tasks because they become fragmented.

3. **Have materials at the ready** – Preparation time can serve as the ounce of prevention that make your days less stressful. Finding regular times to prepare materials for your day or week such as case files, testing protocols, other papers, and office supplies, can make it easier for you to transition between activities and be prepared for all of your day's tasks.

4. **Take breaks (and schedule them if necessary)** – Eating lunch at your desk, skipping meals, not going outside, and running from task to task are all signs that your time is not managed to help keep you healthy. Once you have had a chance to organize your time to the best of your ability, it is important to schedule regular breaks to stretch, walk, and eat. It is tempting to skip breaks because it seems as though "pushing through" a tough day will ensure that the work will be done more quickly. The reality is, that when you skip opportunities to recharge, your productivity actually decreases as you become more tired.

Learning Helpful Skills

Most educational professionals complete regular training to maintain certification, licensure, or other credentials. Typically, professional development activities are thought of as part of the list of responsibilities that compound the difficulties of your job, however, depending on the kinds of skills you are able to seek out, they may contribute in important ways to your satisfaction with your job. Consider the following:

1. Investing time in professional development activities that are in content areas in which you feel you need the most support and guidance.
2. Participating in professional development courses that are in allied fields that may inform how you understand the responsibilities of other professionals (e.g., occupational therapy, speech pathology, or other discipline). Understanding their work may provide ideas for how you can network and collaborate with more effectively.
3. Going to live professional development experiences such as a two- or three-day workshop away from your school. The opportunity to have a change of scenery, dedicated learning time, and a chance to network with other professionals can provide support for your work long after the experience is over.

Developing Your Network of Professionals

Educational professionals are often the lone adults in a room and rarely see colleagues. School psychologists, counselors, and nurses may also be the only person in their role in their building or district and experience a sense of isolation in their already-overwhelming roles. Geographic isolation related to school locations can exacerbate the problem of professional isolation as well. Although it can be challenging to build a professional network under these circumstances, it is important to have colleagues that you can reach out to who may be able to offer advice, support, and consultation when needed. Try to make an effort to connect with other professionals in your school building (even across disciplines). Similarly, make it a priority to utilize your professional organizations, the network, and even social media to connect with other professionals in your role or in similar circumstances. Having several professionals whom you can call on for ideas, materials, a listening ear, or even to have lunch with will ultimately support your overall wellbeing in your professional role. For example, district ISSs may be able to provide more frequent, supportive contact through Skype or other remote meeting technologies.

Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

The objective of this training is to:

Identify work-related self-care strategies to prevent professional burnout.

Read the following scenario, then answer the questions that follow.

This school year, Unsa often wakes up in middle of the night with cold sweats and her heart racing. She has several students with severe behaviors, traumatic histories, and distressing home lives. For one child in particular, whose early experiences reminds her of her own, Unsa wishes she could just take the child home with her. She meets with other school personnel as a part of the team process but feels like they only talk about the problems and the necessary supports aren't available. The classroom teacher evacuates the room weekly due to safety concerns and Unsa feels like no one else on the team is willing to see the positive characteristics of this particular child. She feels like she's failing, so she has thrown herself into learning new trauma-informed behavior management strategies online. She then works in the classroom attempting to implement the strategies she's learning and consult with the teacher. While she feels that this has been successful, she spends at least half of her day with this one student. When she gets home, she is emotionally and physically exhausted but still tries to catch up on all of the paperwork and emails she wasn't able to attend to during the school day while providing intervention.

1. Which of the following work-related strategy for self-care is Unsa attempting.

    a) Managing her time
    b) Learning helpful skills
    c) Developing her network of professionals
    d) Setting limits at work

    Correct answer: b) Learning helpful skills

2. Which of the following limits should be addressed first for Unsa and why?

    a) Fostering realistic expectations because Erika is demonstrating symptoms of emotional exhaustion and a sense of ineffectiveness.

b) Prioritizing the most important issues first because Erika is overly concerned with student safety.
c) Setting clear boundaries between home and work, because keeping work materials in her bedroom might be affecting her sleep.

Correct answer: c) Setting clear boundaries between home and work, because keeping work materials in her bedroom might be affecting her sleep.

Implementation

How can I effectively implement this content in my professional practice?

Please review the considerations below regarding potential implementation strategies, barriers to implementation, and collaboration strategies related to this content. This will help you coordinate the next steps as you begin to incorporate the information presented in this training into your professional practice.

This information can also be found on a handout that you will be able to download at the end of this training.

Implementation Strategies

- Examine your daily workflow and identify areas where you can take breaks for eating, stretching, or getting outside.
- Examine your deadlines and overall calendar. Think of ways that you could institute office hours or "do not disturb" times (except student crisis) to ease strain and minimize working from home.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Discuss with your colleagues and supervisor your daily or weekly schedule. Describe to them the reasons for having dedicated quiet work and office hours.

Collaboration Strategies

- Consult with colleagues about strategies that they use that help them with workflow.
- Post your schedule, send email reminders, and communicate frequently with colleagues so they can be aware of your availability (and times when you are unavailable).

Resources

Are there any resources available to help me implement this content?

Click on the link below to download a tool that you can use to implement this content in your professional practice.

https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:182d5363-09d3-43e2-ad59-fe3381c5d06f

Feedback

How can I help improve this training?

The objective of this training was to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Identify work-related self-care strategies to prevent professional burnout.

Answer the questions in the link below to let us know how well this training increased your confidence in your ability to accomplish this objective. Once you have answered all of the questions, click the blue arrow button underneath to submit your responses.

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below.

> Answered all of the survey questions above. You may have to scroll to see all of the questions.
> Clicked the arrow underneath the last survey question to submit your responses.

Additional Readings

Where can I learn more about this content?

The following resources were used to create this training. If you would like more information about the information presented in this training, we encourage you to start here.

> Harvey, V. S. (2005). *The effect of supervision variables on school psychologists' job burnout*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Atlanta, GA.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this training. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at schoolresources@psu.edu.

Proceed to the next training

Click on the link to move on to the next training titled *Maintaining Wellness*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to develop a self-care plan.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_42-maintaining-wellness_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/modules/