
6. Self Care



Introduction

Busy, busy, busy. That seems to be the general theme and with it comes the reality that many people (primarily those in the people helping sector) are burning out and suffering from unaddressed long-term stress. Self-care is not only a good thing to do, it is essential in order to set examples and to demonstrate a healthy balance in ones life. It is difficult to be role models for healthy, active lives if we are not taking care of ourselves. While this may sound true, the question is how do we do it? To start with, we need to make it a priority. Self care is holistic and covers all aspects of our lives – from our homes, to our relationships and supports, to our work places.

Some recommendations to consider include; developing a personal plan for health and balance; supporting each other in our life stresses; learning more about self care; seeking professional help when it is needed and talking openly with each other about making our work places and jobs more nurturing and supportive than they are.

Professional development and training are connected to our self care as we spend a great deal of time in the work place and all have a role to play in making them healthy. The two top issues that employees identified as causing stress are: 1. Not having the skills or knowledge to do the job well and 2. Negative work place dynamics such as gossiping and back stabbing or being under appreciated.

It is important to understand that healthy, happy people influence how we feel about ourselves and our lives. The more positive role models we have, the more likely we are to stop procrastinating (the biggest issue in looking after ourselves properly) and get on with making changes – even little ones can make a big difference. It is all about walking our talk and being the role models we want to be for our community and our families and friends. The example used on airplanes is very true – put the oxygen on yourself first before you try to help anyone else.

Why This Section Is Important

Self care has become a topic of interest and need for most people who work to “help” their communities. We are increasingly hearing from front line workers who are talking about burnout and stress related to “too few people and too much to do”. Self care is part of walking our talk as community role models. We know that many community workers put their hearts and souls into their work and have very few places to unburden. They are expected to be many things to many people and are the “rocks” for others.

Self care is about looking after ourselves the way we recommend that others look after themselves. In the northern context, many people suffer from loss, grief and significant personal issues either directly themselves or within their families. It is the community helpers who need counselling and support and who often are the providers of this service. Our message is to look after yourself the best way you can, use your family and personal or work networks for support and get professional help when and if you need it. Do something for yourself – read, breathe, go to the cabin, spend time on the land or in the bush, whatever it is – do it for you. This section is just a small start on how to “do it yourself”.

“Never take life too seriously, nobody gets out alive anyway.” – Unknown Source

Personal and Professional Self Care Plans

Like many aspects of our lives, things won't happen until we plan it or make arrangements to do it. Self care does not make the high priority list for many of us until there is a problem or crisis, and yet, prevention is much easier and (often) cheaper. An investment in our own care and wellbeing is not a selfish act, but rather one of prudent management of our lives. Setting priorities in the following areas might be a good start, and can be considered a personal and professional self care plan that requires implementation and resources just like any other strategy or plan to improve things.

<p>SELF HEALTH & IMAGE</p> <p>Body Image Food and Exercise Relaxation and Sleep Mind – Emotional Support /Professional Development Attitude – what we value or think about our lives Sexuality – how we are as women or men</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>Family Parents, Kids, Grandkids Partners and Lovers Work place relationships Friends Social and Leisure Pets and Plants</p>
<p>HEART & SOUL</p> <p>Nature – Ecology Ethics and Integrity (walking our talk) Culture and Creativity Wonder – Awe – Hope – Love Dealing with Loss – Fear – Disappointment Spirituality</p>	<p>HOME & WORK</p> <p>House/Home Management Work Place Environment Career/Business/Job Financial Management Community Involvement</p>



The Northern Context

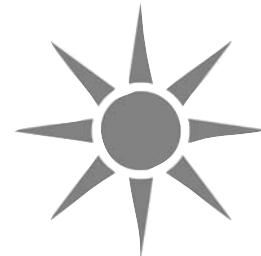
There are many social issues and people not taking care of themselves very well in the north. It's not something that we are very good at – particularly those who are “community helpers”. We have to change our actions and attitudes about self care and do more of it so we can set a good example. Many people go on the land or get away from work and stress on a regular basis – some have elders to talk to – and others have solid family and support from their friends. We all need to slow down a bit and do what makes us healthy.

What's Important to Know?

- ★ Your self care is as important as anything else you do, if you don't invest in yourself, who will?
- ★ Women often put others' needs first to the detriment of their own health.
- ★ Self care needn't take a lot of time or money, but it does require a commitment and a bit of support from others.
- ★ It is important to be role models of healthy living, starting with yourself.
- ★ Professional development is connected to personal development: how we view ourselves and function at work is a reflection of who we are at home.
- ★ Doing something positive everyday helps to reduce stress and fatigue.

Tips and Advice

1. Assess your current reality and prepare a self care plan – then implement it.
2. Don't over do it – start small and continue adding things as you are ready.
3. Keep a helpful eye on family, friends, and coworkers. Be there for them.
4. Telling someone that you are improving your life will often gain their support.
5. Get professional help if needed. Start by talking to someone you trust and respect.
6. Kids learn what they see. Treat yourself well so they know that is the way to live.
7. Talk to your employer and set and commit to some professional goals together.



Story

Erna Mercredi is the Director of Education in Fond du Lac. There had been a high turnover of principals at the school and there was a need for a committed supervisor for the Northern Community & School Recreation Coordinator position. Erna took on that role. Erna understands work and personal balance and holistic health. As a supervisor of staff, she is constantly aware of the importance of this balance and ensuring her employees are healthy and happy. This might include being flexible with work hours, providing time off for family urgencies or providing fun and healthy workplace initiatives such as physical activity or healthy eating policies or events.

“It is really important to balance your life and to remember the needs of yourself and your family. It is not healthy to get overly stressed about your job.” – Doris Sylvestre, Northern Community & School Recreation Coordinator, Dillon

“I like to paddle a canoe, swing a golf club or spend some time in the bush – after that I am ready to get back to work.” – Medrick Thomas, Kiskahikan Community School, Weyakwin

Toolbox Connection

In the toolbox you will find the following tools related to this section:

- Holistic Life Balancing and Management Process
- Healthy People, Families and Communities
- Personal Management Plan
- Conditions That Facilitate Change
- My Leisure Resources Inventory
- Healthy Workplaces