



Burnout and compassion fatigue

Therapists, counsellors and anyone in the helping professions can appreciate both the rewards and hazards of their respective career choices. We can give people advice on how to care better for themselves, while at times not applying the same self-care principles to ourselves. At the worst, a lack of self-care can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue.

I believe that a lot of the difficulty lies in our deep-rooted beliefs and values about work, leisure and what constitutes self-care. 'Helpers' generally work hard, tend to focus on other's wellbeing above their own, and want to make a difference. It's our job to offer an outside professional perspective to our clients/ patients, but it can be challenging to approach our lives with the same objectivity. That's why therapists also need therapy!

We are required to engage in continuing professional development, supervision and personal therapy and to abide by rigorous ethical standards. This is all in the service of ethical practice and self-awareness. These are valuable tools to help keep us in check and maintain an outside perspective on how we are doing as professionals.

However, self-care goes beyond this and needs to extend to our lives outside work. Achieving a well-balanced life is a work of art and an ongoing process. Knowing the principles of self-care is just the beginning. I've recently re-read an old article which was handed to me when I was still a trainee therapist. At the time, I couldn't fully appreciate what it meant to self-care and have a balanced life. Now I believe it's a fundamental part of my work, and ironically, one I had to work hard to put in place.

How to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue

The article, written by Vivian Baruch, cites research by other authors into prevention of compassion fatigue and burnout. For therapists (and other professionals) to stay motivated, an interest in activities unrelated to their work, engagement in spiritual and personal development and social support were some of the main factors cited. In addition to this, she listed some of the strategies for prevention of burnout below:

Don't go it alone

Developing a sense of community and belonging both in our professional and personal lives to combat isolation and 'refuel'.

Maintain a beginner's mind

Learning something new such as a sport or hobby relieves us of the burden of being experts. Maintaining a beginner's mind helps us stay open and curious in relation to our clients, loved ones and the world around us.

Prioritise

As a society we increasingly work harder and for longer hours. Simplifying our lives involves a shift in mindset from economy-driven fears to prioritising a less stressful life.

Brighton and Hove Psychotherapy



Heal and nurture yourself

Looking after ourselves physically and emotionally is a daily task. Recognising when it's time to go back to therapy when old issues resurface, eating well, exercising and having a spiritual/mindful practice are all ways to 'keep in check'.

You are not 'it'

Ultimately, burnout involves losing touch with our needs and our centre. We all need ways to reconnect with ourselves and a sense of meaning and purpose. We are responsible *to* and not *for* others.

Sam Jahara is a UKCP Registered Psychotherapist, Certified Transactional Analyst and supervisor, working in private practice in Hove and Lewes.