

# SELF-CARE FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

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Christine Elliott, PhD, Clinical Psychologist

LifeStream, LLC, Hudson, OH

# Mental Health and The Marginalized

- Post-COVID Mental Health Crises
- Poverty, discrimination, racism all deepen these crises
- Lack of information, access and follow-up in marginalized communities
- Lack of community support for mental health and recovery
- We are bringing our skills and experience to meeting these needs

# BURNOUT – WHAT IS IT?

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# What happens in Burnout?

- Common signs of Burnout
- Challenging situations that lead to Burnout
- Staff environments that contribute to negativity
- Legal and societal factors

# Partner Exercise - Burnout

- Turn toward a partner next to you
- Share with your partner a recent difficult interaction with a client
- How did you respond?
- Are there other ways you could have responded more effectively?
- What will you need next time to be able to respond more constructively?

# THE 8 BASICS OF SELF-CARE

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# FRIENDSHIP

- Includes social support and sense of belonging
- Do you have 1 or 2 “2:00 a.m.” friends you could count on in a crisis?
- Do you spend time regularly in enjoyable activities with others?
- Can you share your joys and problems with your friends?

# RELAXATION

- “Chill out” time, down time, time to let your mind drift
- How often do you feel compelled to check your cell phone?
- Your mind needs to rest from constant electronic information
- Is your phone with you every moment on vacation?



# EXERCISE

- Regular and consistent
- Elevate heart rate for at least 30 minutes, 3 – 4 days per week
- Find a type of exercise you actually enjoy
- Invite a friend or join a class for more motivation

# SLEEP

- Good Sleep Hygiene starts an hour before bedtime
- Wind down with quiet activity
- If awake in the night, get up after 15 minutes
- Don't keep checking the clock in the night
- You're getting more sleep than you realize
- Get up at your regular time even after a bad night's sleep

# HUMOR

- Often overlooked
- Looking at the funny side releases tension
- Times out with good friends, laughing and reminiscing, lighten the burden
- Actively seek the humorous part of situations

# ELEVATE

- What lifts you up emotionally or spiritually?
- If you are a person of faith, regular participation in worship, prayer
- Could also take the form of meditation, quiet reflection
- Feeling spiritually uplifted on a nature walk
- Giving and receiving kindness

# NUTRITION

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables, lean meat or protein, whole grains
- Less sweets, salt, and fat
- Try planning meals ahead, packing lunches the night before
- Have healthy snacks available
- Less of eating out and fast food

# SELF-CARE IN EMOTIONALLY INTENSE SITUATIONS

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# Effects of Client Backgrounds

- Remember, clients affected by growing up in poverty, chaos, having to fend for themselves and younger siblings
- Results often include trauma-based reactions
- Anger, abandonment, hopelessness
- Effects of racism, rejection, discrimination
- Cultural humility
- Attitude of respect for learning about client's experiences

# Emotional Contagion

- Very hard not to get drawn into the distress of upset clients
- Their anger, outrage, sadness, grief can pull us into their experience
- This is Emotional Contagion



# Handling Emotional Contagion

- Set your boundaries. Remind yourself, “Whose feelings are these? Whose problem is this?”
- Visualize a “bubble” around you insulating you from other person’s emotions
- Don’t try to “fix” the problem immediately. Listen and reflect back.
- Let the other person state their objections and point of view. Don’t interrupt right away or dismiss their reactions
- When you respond, be direct, but without getting pulled into an argument. Be firm but calm.

# Contagion Example #1

- A client becomes angry and upset with you during a session. Becoming increasingly loud, vehement, and outraged, she says, “I can’t believe you just said that! I thought you were a kind person who understood me. You seemed different, like you really were interested in me. Now I see that you don’t really care after all. You’re just like everyone else. You acted like you cared, but really, you’re just going to leave me all alone, like everyone else has always done.”
- How do you respond without getting pulled into the client’s despair?

# Contagion Example #2

- A co-worker has decided to leave your agency. She has let the department head know this, and has two weeks left as an employee. She now is complaining frequently to you about how poorly the agency is managed, how she can't imagine why anyone would tolerate working in such an environment, and that she can't wait to leave. The daily recital of negatives is having a bad effect on your mood and influencing you to doubt your own place in the program.
- How can you combat the effects of her unhappiness on you and your work performance?

# VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND SELF-CARE

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# Effects of Client Trauma

- Our clients' abuse backgrounds, graphic stories of abuse
- Emotional "triggering" can result for us
- We become exhausted, overwhelmed, or frequently emotionally "on edge"
- Know your own "hot buttons": Being dismissed? Scolded? Ignored or talked over? Treated disrespectfully?
- Going into a flashback of your own trauma?
- Awareness of these reactions is the first step

# Respond to Triggering

- First, take some deep breaths
- Notice what is happening in your body
- Observe your physical sensations with awareness
- Tell yourself, “It’s all right to have strong feelings here. I don’t need to act on these feelings. I can just breathe through them until I calm down”

# Client First

- Remember, though, that therapy is about the client's experience, not yours.
- Unwise to blurt out your own emotions, or impulsively share your own trauma history
- This can switch the therapy dynamics to the client feeling they must take care of you
- Be very careful with self-disclosure
- Should be brief, and always in the service of helping the client feel understood and not alone in their struggles
- Never about your own need to receive support

# Don't Overload

- If you are able to have any control over your own caseload
- Try not to overload with challenging clients with massive trauma, borderline personality disorder, uncontrolled rage reactions
- Balance these with less intense clients who don't require the same level of intense responding from us



# “RAIN” Exercise for Handling Intense Emotions (Tara Brach, PhD)

- Reflect: Your intense thoughts and feelings reflect a belief. What are you believing right now?
- Allow: Take a breath, pause, and just be aware of those thoughts and feelings
- Investigate: Seek to understand, by asking yourself, “Is this really true? What is it like to live with this belief? How has living with this belief affected my life? What does the most vulnerable part of myself need?”
- Nurture: Seek to connect with your most living and wise self, to find what message, energy, or image might bring the most healing and comfort in this moment. Offer that to the vulnerable part of yourself.

# EFFECTS OF ENTITLED AND DISENGAGED CLIENTS

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# How to respond?

- Clients who are entitled, distant, don't want to engage in therapy or a treatment program
- Clients who seem to sabotage their own progress, act out impulsively and ruin their successes
- Change your internal self-talk away from:
  - “She is just selfish. She just wants to grab whatever she can”.
  - Or, “There he goes again. He’s just determined to wreck anything good that happens.”

# Clients repeat what they know

- It's helpful to remember that clients repeat what they know, what was modeled for them.
- Includes deprivation, lack of love and caring, seeing bad treatment of others
- Children adapt to unhealthy or abusive situations with what they can do at the time
- This results in behaviors that don't work well in adulthood
- "This is what she knows. We can show her something different in our program."

# Entitled/Disengaged Case #1

- You have just completed the Intake Evaluation for a new client at your agency. His whole attitude seemed to be, “I really don’t belong here with these other messed-up people. Man, some of these guys are in sad shape, real losers! I sure haven’t wrecked my life the way these dudes have! I can see now, I’m not doing badly at all with my alcohol/drug use! OK, I’ll stay here for the program, but I don’t think I really need it. I hardly have a problem at all compared with anybody else here.”
- How will you help yourself not to overreact to this client’s disengagement?

# Repeating Behaviors Case #2

- You have been seeing a woman for a while who is in an abusive relationship. It has taken a long time for her to realize that her partner's behavior is controlling, demeaning, and self-centered. However, she has been making progress on developing her own strengths, and has been moving toward leaving the relationship. Today she came in and said, "Well, my partner texted me and was sorry for all the bad behavior lately. They need me to be there for them. I'm sure they have changed and won't treat me the same as before."
- How do you move beyond your discouragement at this client's decision?

# COMPASSION AND SELF-COMPASSION

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# Compassion

- We want to bring compassion and caring into our work
- Create a space that is welcoming and accepting
- Emotional safety so that clients can open up and express feelings
- Our focus is on understanding them
- However, don't over-identify with clients, feelings their emotions
- We then lose our objectivity



# Self-Compassion

- Not self-pity, but learning to be tender and gentle with ourselves
- Treat ourselves as we would an upset child
- “This is really hard for you. It does make you feel afraid, or sad, or angry”.
- “Just rest for a bit here. You are loved and cared for”
- “In a little while the feelings won’t be so strong”.

# FINDING MEANING AND PURPOSE

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# Meaning and Self-Care

- Helping others move into recovery, make progress in mental health, find stability can be so rewarding
- Remember this meaning and purpose can be preventive for burnout
- Take a moment to allow yourself to feel gratitude and be glad for your client's success and your use of your gifts with them