The Self-Care Imperative in Caregiving

Caring can be tough sometimes and fatigue can occur when we focus on the needs of others without devoting time to our own wellbeing. As helping professionals, it is imperative that we balance giving and receiving to alleviate stresses and a sense of depletion. When we practice healthy caregiving, we have a feeling of joy in our work and the profound satisfaction that comes from helping others.

All of us can feel challenged or off-balance during our working day. We are constantly interacting with each other and our environments in an out of work and it’s normal to feel drained, overwhelmed, scattered, or frazzled at times. We can also experience strong emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration, fear etc.

The link between stress in the mind and the body means that a joined up thinking approach is needed for effective stress management and wellbeing. Self Care for Carers’ training encourages a whole person understanding of stress on both the cognitive and physiological levels. Therefore the body wellness skills taught in Self Care for Carers’ sessions are proven techniques for stress reduction. Simple yet powerful, these techniques can change how you feel, and reduce fatigue. By working with our innate ‘instinct to heal’ these practices can help us to return to centre and feel back in balance.

According to Eric Gentry the two keys for staying afloat in caregiving are:

- The development and maintenance of a non-anxious presence in and out of work.
- The development and maintenance of self-validated, guilt-free self-care.

Simply put, this means that regular relaxation and committed self care practice are essential for truly healthy and sustainable caregiving.

Your Body is Wise – Listen to its Messages

The first and most important thing we can do is attend to our bodies. Though stress is a physiological response, both our emotional and physical responses should be considered as one. If we don’t feel well – for example if there is tightness here, a recurring pain there, allergies that won’t clear, shoulder knots that don’t go away, or have recurrent illnesses we suspect maybe stress related, then the time to take action is now.
Body wellness techniques such as the EFT – Emotional Freedom Technique (or Tapping), Body Holds, Heads Up 7, Tai Chi, etc are quick and easy ways to unblock congested stress energy which gets trapped in the body. Learning how to do this on a continuous basis as part of our daily lives is one of the most powerful acts of self-care we can do.

**MINDFUL FINGER HOLDS to BALANCE EMOTIONS**

The following practice is based on polarity and originated in Indonesia. It is a simple way to manage emotions by holding the fingers. Emotion is like a wave of energy that moves through the body. Often with strong emotions the energy of the body becomes blocked, congested or frozen. Through each of the fingers runs a meridian or channel of energy. Holding each finger with the opposite hand for 2-5 minutes can move and drain blocked energy, which brings back a sense of balance and harmony to the body. Deep breathing while holding each finger can also help to return the body-mind-spirit to a state of peace and harmony.

![Hand diagram showing finger holds for balance emotions]

To avoid the loss of energy and hold one’s energy field, join together the fingertips and cross the ankles. This can also be accompanied by deep breathing. This is a very helpful position to avoid losing energy in conflict situations or to avoid being drained by other people. This can be useful during emotional or challenging meetings, traumatic situations or to aid restful sleep. Because it is so subtle, it can be used intentionally and privately at almost any time.

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The Rocking Movement
Stand with feet separated shoulder-width apart, hands at sides. Raise your heels and with palms facing upwards raise your hands to the level of your chest. Turn your palms downward and move your hands downward while you lower your heels and raise your toes in a rocking movement. Continue slowly rocking back and forth, breathing deeply. With each move drop your shoulders, relax your arms and fingers, doing this exercise smoothly and slowly.

Breathe deeply and imagine that your feet are planted securely on the earth. As you raise your hands, imagine that you are able to bring down into your body and mind healing energy to cleanse and fill you. This is a very beneficial movement for trauma, depletion and fatigue.

The Shower of Light
With left foot forward, raise your hands up over your head, then move them downward as if showering yourself with light. Feel the energy cleansing and filling your being. Repeat on the right side, with right foot forward. Breathe in the shower of light, and then exhale and let go of any negativity within you. Feel the light cleansing and renewing you. This is an excellent for persons who are depressed or dealing with past wounds of trauma.

PUSH PULL - Let Go of the Past and Open to Receive
With left foot forward, palms curved softly downward, push your hands outward in a gentle arc, letting go of all tension, negativity, and violence within you. Turn palms upward and draw them back towards the chest, breathing in peace and healing. Repeat with right foot forward. Breathe out the pain and violence. Breathe in peace and healing.

Passing Clouds – Staying in the Present Moment
Starting with hands over elbows, slowly bring right your hand up towards face in a circular sweeping movement. Keep head straight; allow your right hand to move to right in front of your face watching the tips of your fingers drift out of sight. As right hand is at head level, allow left hand to follow in sweeping gentle move. Just as clouds pass through and ever changing sky, so too do the things of our lives, both good and bad. Thus this gentle movement reminds us to stay in the present moment.
HEADS UP! 7’s

In this practice, we are using our finger tips at specific acupressure points in the upper back, shoulders, then neck and finally head to release and unblock pain, tension and congestion. This area of our bodies tends to hold on to tension and stress with a feeling of being blocked or frozen. This is a really nice practice to do for someone else either sitting in a chair or lying down with face up. But remember to keep clear boundaries and keep an intention of wellness, space and peace for the person you are working with.

We incline the tips of our finger slightly in this practice and press on the points 1-7 for a minute or two. During that time you may feel some pulsing or throbbing in some points as many are over stimulated and tension is ready to flow. Some points may feel very tender. Breathe deeply whilst doing this practice and imagine a feeling of tension moving up from your upper back through your shoulders neck and out through the top of your head.

SETS OF POINTS:
1. Use your fingers to locate a point about 1-2 inches outside the bottom of the shoulder joint where the arm connects to the trunk of the body.

2. At the top of the inside curve of shoulder blades about 2 inches from the centre of the spine. Place your fingers at top of the inside curve of your shoulder blade. You may rotate your shoulder and feel around to find the point which may be quite sensitive.

3. Point three is at the trapezius muscles on the tops of the shoulders and the bottom of the neck.

4. Point 4 is halfway up the muscles at the back of your neck about and inch of two from your spine. You can use your middle finger for these points.

5. Press on point 5 which are the sensitive points slightly above where the ear means the head.

6. Point 6 is the thumb rests which are the depressions at the bottoms of the skull on either side of the head, usually quite sensitive also.

7. Place your fingers gently along the line of points at the crown of your head.

Breathe deeply for a few moments enjoying the feeling of relaxation, if you are working on someone else hold the top of their feet. If you are working on yourself, feel your feet rooted to the ground and connecting with a nourishing energy of the earth. Open your eyes, take a moment to take a few more breaths and rise slowly to continue with your day or if you’re in bed nod off to sleep.
EMOTIONAL FREEDOM TECHNIQUE - Tapping

Problems, traumas, anxiety and pain can cause a block in the energy flow of the body. The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) was developed by Gary Craig, Ph.D., is very useful for unblocking and healing strong emotions, fears, anxiety, emotional pain, anger and alleviating body symptoms and pain, such as headaches & body pain. It is based on the theory of the energy field of body, and meridian theory of Eastern medicine. Tapping or pressing acupressure points connected with channels or meridians can help move blocked energy in congested areas & promote the healthy flow of energy in the body, mind and spirit.

**Tap the sequence of Acupressure Points 7-9 times**

1. Points above where the eyebrows begin
2. Points at the side of the eyebrows
3. Point below pupils of eyes on cheekbone
4. Point below the nose
5. Point below the lips on the chin
6. Points below armpits (about 4 inches down)
7. Points below clavicles on sides of sternum

Now tap point A on the side of your hand and say “in spite of the fact that I have this problem, I am ok and I accept myself.” Repeat this sequence twice (or more often if you are feeling quite stressed) allowing your mind and body to relax. Note the reduction in your stress level, take a breath and move on with your day.

“Never give from the depths of your well, but from your overflow” Rumi
Self Care for Carers is Ireland’s leading organisation providing healthy caregiving strategies for staff in health care settings. We provide a practical, solution-based approach to assist staff identify stressors in the workplace and develop strategies to effectively deal with them.

In feedback, over 90% of past participants said they would either “recommend” or “strongly recommend” our training to other colleagues working in caring roles.

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Available from Self Care for Carers

* Staff Wellbeing Training
* Research and Consultancy
* Compassion Fatigue Workshops
* In-house Wellbeing Programmes
* Team Relaxation Sessions
* Online Self Care Support
* One to One Coaching

Compassion Satisfaction in Action By facing and working through the effects of fatigue at group level, staff are enabled to reconnect more deeply with the rewards of their work. Here are some powerful insights nurses and midwives (working in the same hospital) shared with each other as a group.

“I get great support from my colleagues”.

“Makes you feel good to be able to help people when they are feeling vulnerable. It’s so lovely to get a thanks.”

When someone comes back in to say thanks, maybe after their family member has been discharged and they take the time to come back in to say thanks”.

“The people I work with from the girl in the kitchen to everyone else support each other.”

“There are so many positives I can’t just pick one, from the roar of a new born baby, to getting someone through something so difficult”.

“The fact that your work makes a difference because you do your job well and what you do makes a difference”.

“It’s making a difference for vulnerable patients and something that we give to them, a kind word to the person in the bed, can mean so much”

“I’ve wanted to do nursing always and I never regretted it a day in my life. What you give out you get much more back.”

“You get great support from colleagues, very decent people work in hospitals”

“I really like coming to work, I enjoy every day, of course it is stressful at times, but I love my job”