

Crisis Counselor Self-Care

Whether you're new to the field or experienced, you know the importance of self-care. Some think this just means taking vacations or having spa days, and if you don't have enough time/money then you can't practice self-care. In actuality, self-care is more about how you weave wellness into your everyday life, including while working/volunteering. Self-care is important not just so you can be fully present and effective for individuals reaching out to the Lifeline, but also so your compassion satisfaction outweighs your compassion fatigue. Whatever your reason for becoming a crisis counselor, you want the work to feel rewarding.

Note: We recognize that while individuals have the ability to improve their own self-care practice, wellness also depends on systemic change within an organization and professional field.

Importance of self awareness

- As crisis counselors, the risks of experiencing [vicarious trauma](#), [moral injury](#), [compassion fatigue](#), and [burnout](#) are very real. Many factors can impact the likelihood of experiencing these, including one's boundaries.
 - Spend time reflecting on your expectations about crisis conversations, both for yourself and the individuals reaching out for support, and discuss these with your supervisor.
 - Remember: just because you can doesn't mean you should. Taking on too much responsibility "for" an individual and trying to "fix" them does not help the individual or you.
 - Practice self-compassion: give yourself the same kindness you would a loved one if they were in your position.
- Know your hot-button topics and consider how you would still effectively assist in these situations.
- Understand your early warning signs. How do you start to act, feel, and think differently when you feel stressed, angry, inadequate, or another strong emotion? When you recognize these before or during a shift, you can take action.
- Periodically take the Professional Quality of Life Measure (ProQOL) and discuss it in supervision. It can help identify changes in Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, and Secondary Traumatic Stress.
 - <https://proqol.org/proqol-1>

Self-care outside the crisis center

- Take time off. If you feel guilty doing so, speak with your supervisor.
- Establish set work/volunteer hours and stick to them, even if it's just day-by-day.
- Engage in Continuing Education trainings to feel better-equipped and re-energized.
- Identify activities you use for coping that make you feel better versus worse.
- Be aware of and schedule the following:

- Active mental relaxation
- Physical movement
- Sleep
- Social support and developing close relationships

Examples of self-care activities:

- Arts and crafts
- Attending medical appointments
- Calling/spending time with loved ones
- Engaging in hobbies
- Faith/spirituality/religious practices
- Journaling
- Listening to/playing music
- Planning a vacation/staycation
- Speaking with your own mental health and/or EAP professional
- Spending time outdoors/in nature
- Technology breaks

Preparing for your shift

- Take a temperature check: notice your current mood, stress level, and how your body feels physically. How might this affect your crisis conversations and interactions with peers?
- Make your workstation comfortable and ensure you have all needed tools within reach (writing utensils, sweater, water, tip sheets, etc.).
- Decorate your work area with things that inspire you and bring joy (if center policy allows).
- Prepare meals and snacks ahead of time if possible so you can enjoy more of your breaktime.
- Reduce clutter in your workspace and on your desktop, especially if mess causes you to feel stressed or overwhelmed. A clear space can help you to find things more quickly, experience less unimportant stimuli, and be overall more organized so that you can focus on your tasks.
- Plan end-of-day or end-of-week rewards. Having things to look forward to can provide you with extra motivation throughout your shift.

During your shift

See attached examples for more detail.

- Take breaks and use them to decompress versus catching up on other responsibilities.
- Stand up, stretch, and/or walk away from your workstation for a short time.
- Drink water and eat healthy snacks.
- Debrief with your supervisor and/or peers after challenging crisis conversations.
- Practice deep breathing exercises.
- Use fidget toys/stress balls.
- Doodle or color.
- For tightness in your body (jaw, shoulders, etc.), try stretches or tighten/release exercises.
- Communicate with peers (in-person or virtually) to connect and support each other.
- Show appreciation to your peers through a note, text, or simply by telling them.

After your shift

- Debrief with your supervisor and/or peers.
- Identify something positive you did on your shift. Recognize that you can make an impact in many ways, not just by “fixing” someone’s problem.
- If possible, find a way to unwind before moving on to other responsibilities.

Promoting healthy center culture/norms

- Encourage your peers to practice self-care and offer support. Be a role model for self-care practices.
- Sometimes, change needs to come from the top (or at least supported by leadership). Advocate to your center director/supervisor for improved policies/procedures/resources, such as practices around: time off, breaks, adequate staffing, team-building activities, peer support opportunities, debriefing/supervision options, training, physical working environment, appreciation events

Resources

- **988 Lifeline Cares Team.** A Vibrant 988 Lifeline program provides direct support to 988 network centers. <https://networkresourcecenter.org/display/LCTN>
- **Safe Space.** Vibrant Emotional Health's online resource for coping skills, distraction activities, and more. <https://www.vibrant.org/safespace/>
- **University of Buffalo School of Social Work.** Self-Care Starter Kit: <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html>
- **Insight Timer.** Free app for meditation, sleep, stress. <https://insighttimer.com/>
- **Self-Compassion website.** Guided meditations, training, and other resources. <https://self-compassion.org/>

Examples of Self-Care Exercises

<u>7/11 Breathing</u>	1.) Breath in for 7 counts. Be sure to breathe into your belly. 2.) Breath out for 11 counts.
<u>Box/Square Breathing</u>	Visualize a box and follow the sides in your mind for each step. 1.) Inhale through your nose for 4 counts. 2.) Hold for 4 counts. 3.) Slowly exhale for 4 counts. 4.) Hold for 4 counts.
<u>Progressive Muscle Relaxation</u>	1.) Get in a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths. 2.) Shift your attention to your right foot. 3.) Breathe in and tense the muscles and count to 10. 4.) Breathe out and relax your foot and notice the tension leaving. 5.) Take a few breaths before moving on to the next part of your body.
<u>Self-Compassion Break</u>	1.) Say to yourself, “This is a moment of suffering,” or a similar message. 2.) Say, “Suffering is a part of life,” or another message reminding you of your humanity. 3.) Place your hands on your heart and/or stomach. 4.) Say, “May I be kind to myself,” or another message of kindness/support.
<u>Stretching</u>	Practice seated or standing stretches. Stretching should not cause any pain or discomfort. Be sure to consult a physician with any questions.
<u>Visualization/Guided Imagery</u>	You can do this on your own or find an audio/video guide online. 1.) Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful environment. - a.) Examples: beach, bedroom, garden 2.) Imagine what you would see, smell, hear, taste, and feel.