Healing Through Self Care: How to Maintain our Humanity in Difficult Situations

Shonda M. Craft, PhD LMFT

MACMH Research-to-Practice Series

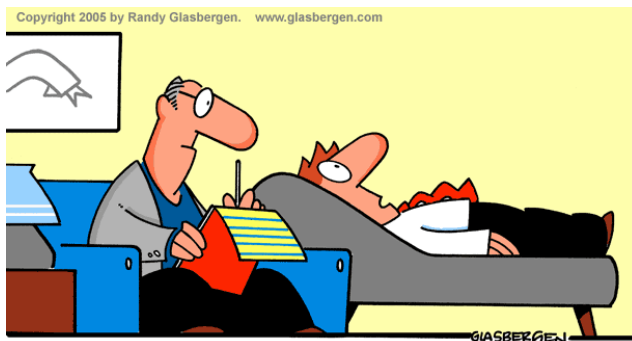April 28, 2015

Opening Reflection

▶ "Thinking about self care makes me feel…"

Introduction:
What does self care mean to me?

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What is self care?

▶ There is no widely accepted definition of self care; thus, conceptualizations of self care vary throughout the clinical care spectrum.

▶ In a study which examined definitions of self care used by health care professionals, Godfrey and colleagues (2011) found 139 different definitions across a variety of publications.

▶ The World Health Organization (1993) defined self care as "the activities individuals, families and communities undertake with the intention of enhancing health, preventing disease, limiting illness, and restoring health."

What is self care?

▶ Interestingly, the only clearly defined theory of self care in clinical literature is Dorothea Orem's self care Theory (1959), which pertains to the field of nursing.

  ▶ This multi-dimensional, multi-faceted theory defines self care, in part, as being "activities performed independently by an individual to promote and maintain personal well-being throughout life."

▶ Numerous studies have examined the connection between the practice of self care and increased health and wellness in clinicians.

▶ This research often focuses on trainees and experienced clinicians who choose to work with severely traumatized populations and/or who have not dealt with their own familial or personal trauma.

What is self care?

▶ In the mental health field, self care is often conceptualized as a way for clinicians' to effectively minimize their "risk for occupationally related psychological problems" (Shapiro, Warren, & Biegal, 2007).

▶ In other words, self care is the antithesis of compassion fatigue (Figley,1995), burnout (Freudenberger, 1974), and secondary traumatic stress/secondary traumatic stress disorder (Figley, 1993).

▶ Some researchers and clinicians conceptualized self care as being part of a more comprehensive conceptualization of health and work/life balance.

What is self care?

▶ For example, the Wheel of Wellness, created by Witmer, Sweeney & Myers (1998) depicts five interrelated and interconnected life tasks.

▶ According to this model, self care is one of eleven aspects of the self direction life task.

  ▶ http://www.mindgarden.com/images/WheelofWellness.png

▶ Norcross and Guy (2007) drew from various areas such as mindfulness practices, spirituality, lifestyle changes, positive psychology, and cognitive-behavioral therapy to develop twelve principles to guide self care for psychologists.

Small Group Activity

▶ "What do you do to take care of yourself in general?"

▶ "How do your ways of caring for yourself change in times of stress?"

Self care: A concept with many options

▶ Mindfulness-based practices

▶ Physical activity

▶ Diet and nutrition

▶ "Self-medicating" behaviors

▶ Spirituality and religion

▶ Therapy

▶ ….

Self care: the need for connection

- Let's go back to the Wheel of Wellness…
- Themes of connection to self and connection to others suggest that, in times of stress and discomfort, it is important to avoid isolation.
- In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell suggests that people who reside in communities which are closely connected may be healthier than people who live in more isolated settings.
- In other words, an essential component of self care is the creation, utilization, and maintenance of a network of other people who can provide support.

Self care: the need for connection

Self care: the need for connection

▶ Support is often more effective when it comes from who have similar values and characteristics, and who are facing or have faced similar stressors somewhat more successfully (Thoits, 1986).

▶ The type of support provided should be in alignment with the needs of the person reaching out for assistance.

▶ Kohlenberg, Tsai, and Kohlenberg (2006) suggest the following question when reaching out to a supportive colleague:

"I am feeling very upset, hopeless and helpless right now. I don't seem to be enough for my client. I feel inadequate, angry and upset. Will you help me understand my feelings better and develop a perspective that will be helpful to my client?" (p. 189).

Self care: the need for connection

▶ Based on previous research, Cutrona and Russell (1990) identified five types of support:

  ▶ informational (advice or guidance),

  ▶ emotional (comfort or security),

  ▶ esteem (confidence in one's ability to handle a problem),

  ▶ tangible (indirect or direct instrumental assistance), and

  ▶ network support (sense of belonging to an interpersonal network).

Self care: implications for relationships

- Reflective self care means that we are not asking more of our colleagues than we ask of ourselves. In other words, how we are living our lives is as important (if not more important) as what we say.
- When colleagues seek support, we should be present (focus on what they need), listen without judgment, create an environment of assurance and safety, and be comfortable with our own emotions.
- Share personal stories and experiences, not just information and advice.
- Share something you've learned rather than just telling people things.

Self care: implications for organizations
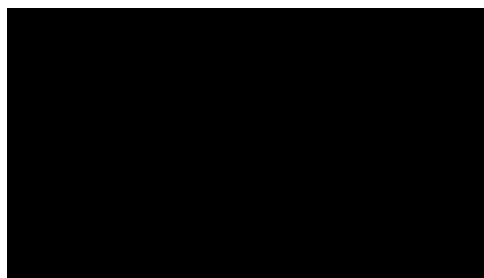
Self care: implications for organizations

▶ Maslach and Leiter (2008) posited that the work environment can play a key role in burnout based on six conditions:

  ▶ Workload - when overload becomes the norm, "there is little opportunity to rest, recover, and restore balance" (p. 500)

  ▶ Control - role ambiguity and role conflict both play a significant part in occupational exhaustion

  ▶ Reward – lack of feeling valued for our work by colleagues, supervisors, clients, and other constituents

  ▶ Community – feelings of support from a supervisor is correlated with exhaustion, which support from colleagues is associated with a sense of accomplishment

Self care: implications for organizations

  ▶ Fairness – "the extent to which decisions at work are perceived as being fair and equitable" (p. 500)

  ▶ Values – "When there is a values conflict on the job, and thus a gap between individual and organizational values, workers will find themselves making a tradeoff between work they want to do and work they have to do" (p. 501).

▶ It is important that organizations create and promote a work environment that is "psychologically healthy" (Meichenbaum, 2007) in order to mitigate these risks.

Small Group Exercise

▶ What is one thing you intend to do to promote self care
  ▶ for yourself?
  ▶ at your organization?

Media Example

▶ http://www.ted.com/talks/
  jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_y
  ears_of_life

Closing Reflection

▶ "Thinking about self care makes me feel…"