

SELF-CARE FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

Professional Practice Toolkit

The Maryland Psychological Association

Document Objective

This document provides an overview of subjects related to self-care for psychologists.

Background & Ethical Considerations

The topic of self-care is relevant to all practicing clinicians, as our ability to manage our own stress impacts our ability to provide effective services to others. Standard 2.06 of the APA Ethics Code (APA, 2002) states:

- (a) Psychologists refrain from initiating an activity when they know or should know that there is a substantial likelihood that their personal problems will prevent them from performing their work-related activities in a competent manner.
- (b) When psychologists become aware of personal problems that may interfere with their performing work-related duties adequately, they take appropriate measures, such as obtaining professional consultation or assistance, and determine whether they should limit, suspend, or terminate their work-related duties. (p. 1064)

What you need to know

The Prevalence of Distress and Impairment in Mental Health Professionals

Presumably, we got into this profession because we are good at taking care of other people. This does not mean that we are necessarily good at taking care of ourselves or recognizing that we need help. People in caretaking professions often have significant challenges in this area, as it may not be a behavior that comes naturally to them. A 1985 study by Deutsch found that 57% of practicing psychologists surveyed admitted to experiencing depression, 82% acknowledged recent relationship difficulties, and 11% indicated that they had problems with alcohol abuse.

Experiencing distress is a normal part of life and does not necessarily imply professional impairment. However, Pope and colleagues (1987) found that 59.6% of the mental health professionals in their sample admitted that they had seen clients at a time when they were “too distressed to be effective” (p. 1000). Similarly, 36.7% of the practitioners surveyed by Guy, Poelstra, and Stark (1989) reported that their distress had a negative impact on the quality of their services, while 4.6% believed that the care they provided when distressed was inadequate.

The self-care portion of the Private Practice Toolkit will contain articles on the following subjects:

- Peer consultation and support
- Risk factors and warning signs
- Substance use and abuse in mental health professionals
- Intervening with an impaired colleague
- Self-assessment
- Specific strategies for self-care and preventing burnout

Relevant Resources

The Maryland Psychologist, Volume 55, Issue 6. Self Care: The Foundation of Our Well-Being

<https://www.marylandpsychology.org/directory/Newsletter/2010JulyAugust.pdf>

The Maryland Psychologist, Volume 62, Issue 2. Self Care

https://www.marylandpsychology.org/directory/newsletter/2017/TMP_FullFinalSpring2017.pdf

https://www.marylandpsychology.org/directory/newsletter/2017/TMP_FullFinalSpring2017.pdf

2/6/2018