



## Introduction

As part of self-assessment, it is important for registrants to ensure that they are taking time to review factors that may contribute to their stress load or in some other way affect their ability to perform professionally, assess the impact of these factors on their competence and ability to meet professional obligations, and engage in self-care sufficient to mitigate the negative impact of any factors identified or take steps to reduce or withdraw from professional activities, as appropriate. Because of the personal nature of self-examination, College members may elect to use a formal self-assessment tool or determine their individual risk factors in a manner of their choice. There will be no requirement to submit any documentation created. The purpose of this process is to enhance and facilitate self-assessment and create an effective proactive strategy for members to attain and maintain wellness. Members who wish to use another method of planning for self-care may do so if it helps them to identify specific personal risk factors and mitigation strategies.

## The Need for Self-Care

Psychological practitioners can experience high levels of work-related stress including psychological distress, burnout, and vicarious traumatization (Smith & Moss, 2009; Barnett, Baker, Elman, & Schoener, 2007). Pope and Vasquez (2016) categorized some of the resulting consequences of professionals' distress and describe, for example, those who may begin to disrespect clients; lose their sense of empathy and kindness; trivialize their work by viewing it as empty and meaningless; make more mistakes; lack energy; become anxious and afraid; use work to block out negative feelings, and lose interest, commitment, meaning, and excitement in the profession as a whole (Pope & Vasquez, 2016). Everall & Paulson (2004) write that burnout has been associated with several ethical violations such as dual roles, over-involvement with clients, and meeting the needs of the therapist rather than the client. Preservation of wellness requires adequate self-awareness and the ability to acknowledge one's weaknesses and blind spots in practice. It also requires self-compassion (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2009). Although there may be a modest relationship between self-view and actual behavior/performance (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004; Kruger & Dunning, 1999), self-assessment is the first step towards wellness.

## Self- Assessment

### 1. Precipitating and Aggravating Factors

Reviewing the following items may help identify areas of personal and professional life that require attention. Please identify any of the following signs and symptoms that could indicate a need for greater attention to self-care:

#### Personal

- Social isolation
- Relationship conflicts, increased isolation from or conflict with intimates
- Inability to focus or concentrate; forgetfulness
- Anxiety
- Substance use/abuse or other compulsive behaviors engaged in to manage stress
- Depression (e.g., sleep or appetite disturbance, lethargy, negative mood)
- Current life stressors (e.g., illness, bereavement, moving, job change, changes in marital status, birth or adoption of children; other psychosocial, physical, vocational or financial challenges life presents)

## Workplace

- Inadequate organizational or managerial supports
- Poor fit with colleagues
- Administrative/legal/regulatory/financial and /or business concerns
- Professional Isolation/different frequency of contact with colleagues than desired
- Workload too heavy or too light
- Insufficient balance/ variety in caseload
- Feeling unappreciated or undervalued for the work done
- Increased cynicism, negativity, irritability, impatience
- Increased reactivity and loss of objectivity and perspective in work
- More frequent clinical errors
- Unprofessional behaviors
- Ethical violations

## Role

- Challenges managing the intimate, confidential and nonreciprocal nature of the client/therapist relationship, e.g.,
  - Are there clients you struggle to work with? Why?
  - Are there particular client problems that are particularly difficult to deal with, e.g.: loss, traumatization, neglect, isolation, situations that you have experienced yourself?
  - Are there clients you think about frequently, between appointments?
  - Are there clients you express very strong feelings of concern or anger on behalf of?
- Negative social/political/cultural attitudes to the population served or services provided
- Dislike of the work
- Poor personal fit with the work
- Inadequate knowledge, skills or training for specific work
- Mismatch between the work and your own values and beliefs

## 2. Perpetuating Factors

- Inadequate professional supports
- Inadequate personal supports
- Poor self-care
- Inadequate leisure and non-work activities
- Stigma within the profession for professionals who acknowledge distress or impairment
- Unrealistic self-expectations
- Unhelpful coping strategies

## 3. Mitigating Factors/ Remedies

Please identify any of the following factors that you either utilize already or believe would be helpful to you:

- Self-awareness; honest assessment of psychological and physical health
- Prevention, including activities that are personally restorative such as adequate sleep, good nutrition, regular exercise, yoga, meditation, massage
- Satisfying hobbies, nurturing of interests apart from psychology
- Satisfying close relationships, social supports
- Personal psychotherapy/counseling
- Spiritual practice
- Strong professional support network
- Regular vacations or breaks from work
- Monitoring of substances and/or processes used for relaxation or entertainment
- Realistic expectations about workload, responsibilities and capabilities.
- Familiarity with literature on occupational risk for psychologists (e.g., burnout, vicarious traumatization, compassion fatigue, colleague assistance and professionals in distress).

**Strategy for Self-Care**

| <b>Personal Risk Factors Identified</b> | <b>Mitigation Plan</b> | <b>SMART* Objectives</b> |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
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\*Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time Bound

## References

1.

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- Overall & Paulson (2004)
- Di Benedetto & Swadling (2009)
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