

Self-care is an important part of ensuring well-being for people who are providing recovery supports and other behavioral health services. One recent study showed that over half of behavioral health care providers reported experiencing symptoms of burnout.¹ Further research shows that employees who do not attend to—or who are less comfortable discussing—their mental health are also “more likely to report feeling burnout and their mental health suffering because of work.”² Self-care practices should be individualized and culturally informed. Both *individuals* and *organizations* have a role to play in promoting self-care and overall well-being.

This fact sheet is part of a series issued by the SAMHSA Office of Recovery through its SAMHSA Program to Advance Recovery Knowledge (SPARK) initiative. To learn more, visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/spark>.

Defining Self-Care

Many people and communities define *self-care* in different ways. Recent definitions suggest that self-care is inherently community-centered. There is a growing shift toward regarding self-care as a workplace focus that amplifies the need for collective practices and workplace well-being.³ Varying definitions of self-care emphasize the importance of valuing individualized approaches that are historically rooted, healing-centered, trauma-informed, holistic, ecological, and culturally nurtured.⁴ There is agreement that self-care is important and that we should prioritize it. In general, self-care is an **essential practice to nurture and care for our physical and psychological wellness**, and behavioral health care providers should assess their personal tools for wellness.⁵

Why Focus on Provider Well-being?

Behavioral health care providers are committed to serving and helping others toward well-being, recovery, and optimal behavioral health. Professional demands often result in service providers reducing their focus on their own wellness needs.⁶ The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA)⁷ reminds us that wellness involves these aspects of health:

- purpose in life
- active involvement in satisfying work and play
- joyful relationships
- a healthy body and living environment
- happiness

To advance wellness, SAMHSA embraces the eight dimensions of wellness model (see Figure 1). Developed by community partners and peers in collaboration with Margaret (Peggy) Swarbrick, PhD, the model defines dimensions that are important to a person’s overall well-being, self-care, and quality of life.⁸

It is “more important than ever” to focus on wellness and well-being among professionals working in recovery and behavioral health settings.

Without a focus on individual self-care and a commitment to well-being from employers and organizations, service providers risk experiencing a range of consequences. These can include burnout, job loss or changes, and damaging influences on relationships and physical and mental health. Other potential side effects include secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue. Daily practices, combined with organizational support, can increase a person’s overall wellness and improve well-being.⁹

Tips for Checking In

One helpful practice of ongoing self-care is to check in with yourself periodically about areas that support your goals for self-care and well-being, and those that may need improvement. These areas can be both professional and personal.

It is important that program administrators and organizational leaders create an environment for wellness within the workforce. It is equally important for individuals to consider their wellness and well-being in relationship to their work environment and to assess areas within their control where they can make changes.

Figure 1
Eight Dimensions of Wellness Model



Note. Adapted from “A Wellness Approach” by Margaret Swarbrick, which appeared in the spring 2006 issue of the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*.

Figure 2

Examples of Personal Activities for Self-Care and Community Care

Self-Care	Community Care
Find opportunities to demonstrate gratitude	Pair up with a colleague for regular check-ins and support
Take time off to refresh and recharge	Check in with friends and family
Practice mindfulness	Take time off to be in community
Use positive self-talk	Volunteer and give to charity

Individuals and leaders can use these strategies¹⁰ to check in:

1. Individuals can establish and evaluate a personal definition of self-care and wellness. Leaders can provide materials and resources on self-care for employees and follow up to learn what additional supports employees may need.
2. Individuals can assess the formal and informal supports they have around wellness in their workplaces. Leaders can similarly assess these supports and provide regular updates on available trainings, peer support groups, and debriefing sessions to support team wellness.
3. Team members can partner in assessing the personal activities that individuals and communities do—or could engage in—for wellness (see Figure 2).
4. Team members can evaluate opportunities for cultural expression, professional development, and self-reflection. Leaders can encourage employees to make connections and support one another through team meetings, events, and buddy systems.
5. Team members can evaluate and support the ability to set aside intentional time, quiet time, and opportunities for nourishment, reflection, connection, and rest in both personal and professional settings. Supervisors and team leads can plan regular meetings with team members to exchange experiences, concerns, and reflections.

While there are many ways that we can participate in self-care and wellness practices, it is important that we have opportunities to explore what works best for ourselves. Considering our differences and diverse needs, there is a great need to center well-being for recovery and behavioral health care professionals. The wellness of providers is important, and we want to nurture and care for our mental, physical, and psychological wellness.



Learn More

SAMHSA's [Understanding Compassion Fatigue](#)

SAMHSA's [Tips for Healthcare Professionals: Coping with Stress and Compassion Fatigue](#)

SAMHSA's [Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services](#)

National Academy of Medicine's (NAM's) [Resource Compendium for Health Care Worker Well-Being](#)

NAM's [National Plan for Health Workforce Well-Being](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS's) [Addressing Health Worker Burnout](#)

HHS's [Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being](#)

National Association of County and City Health Officials' [Joy in Work Toolkit](#)

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