

Self Care in Public Service

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Trigger Warning

Mention of mental health disorders:

Common signs and symptoms of mental health being left unchecked

Mention signs of Burnout:

What can happen when burnout is left unchecked

Brief mention of:

Self-harm, drug use and abuse, bullying, eating disorders

Agenda

Why is Self-Care in Public Service Important?

Mental Health and Neurodivergence at Work/School

Burnout


What CAN be done?



Why is Self-Care in Public Service Important?

What is Self-Care?


Self-care isn't just about eating right, exercising, and getting enough sleep




Self-care is about taking initiative in caring for your emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being



Self-Care is about being preventative, and not reactive to our general health and well-being



“Nourishing yourself” means taking care of yourself first before you can take care of anyone or anything else



Self-care was initially a concept used for patients to either prevent or manage ailments

4 Dimensions of Self-Care

Physical	To live, move, breathe Ensuring an overall healthy lifestyle (nutrition, cleanliness, exercise)
Emotional	To love, care, and be in relationship with yourself and others Setting boundaries on time and energy
Psychological	To learn, think, and grow Personal and professional development
Spiritual	To connect with purpose, and meaning Non-material aspects of life

Why is Self-Care SO Important?

Self-care is a way for Public Service professionals to preserve longevity and happiness in both their relationships and their careers

As Public Service professionals, we need to accept that it essential to put our own needs first

Hoping and waiting until you have time to do something for yourself means you rarely have the time to do it

Scheduling time for self-care is just as important as scheduling time for anything else

We must participate in self-care, so we have the energy and tenacity to face systems that don't favor marginalized populations

Proper self-care can manage stress and prevent burnout

Why can Public Service be Daunting?

- Striking the right balance between civil servants, contractors, non-profits, and other third-party service providers
- Managing multiple generations in your offices
- Managers and employees are struggling to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of our work
- We face a significant risk that many public organizations will not have the workforce capacity necessary to achieve their critical missions and provide services to the public
- Consistently changing demographics
- Limited salary flexibilities

Public Service Common Stressors

- Public Service can be emotionally/mentally/socially exhausting
- Large caseloads/high needs and inadequate staffing can leave us feeling overworked
- Thinking about inequity and injustice can be a lot of weight to bare
- The levels of empathy required in our positions can lead to compassion fatigue
- We regularly experience challenges while providing services such as:
 - Clients in crisis
 - Legislative changes(think of the FAFSA Delays..)
 - Resource scarcity



Mental Health and Neurodivergence at Work/School

Mental Health Disorders

1 in 4 adults suffer from at least one mental health disorder

1 in 6 take psychiatric drugs

BIPOC and women often go underdiagnosed/misdiagnosed before they receive adequate care/ medications

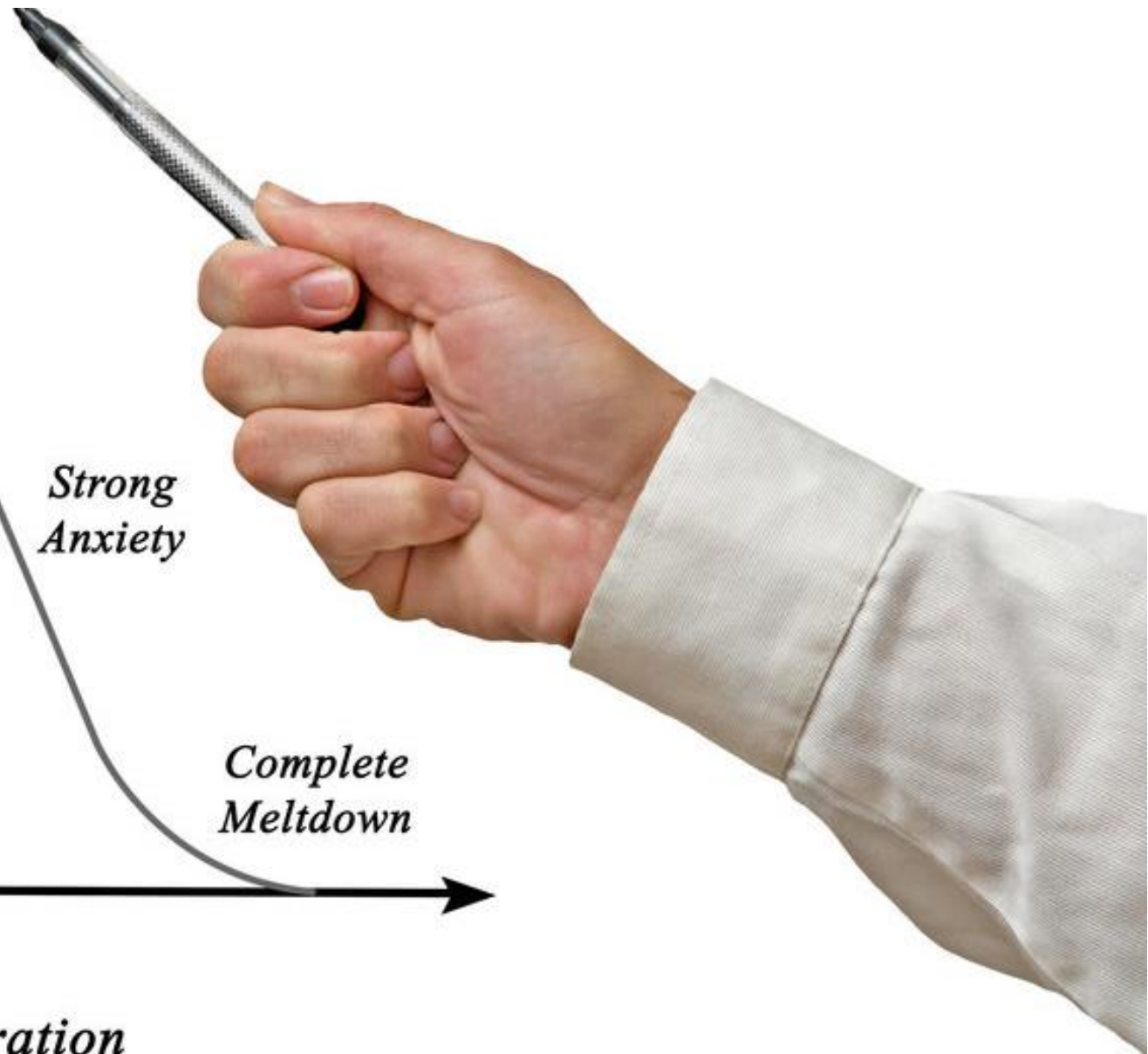
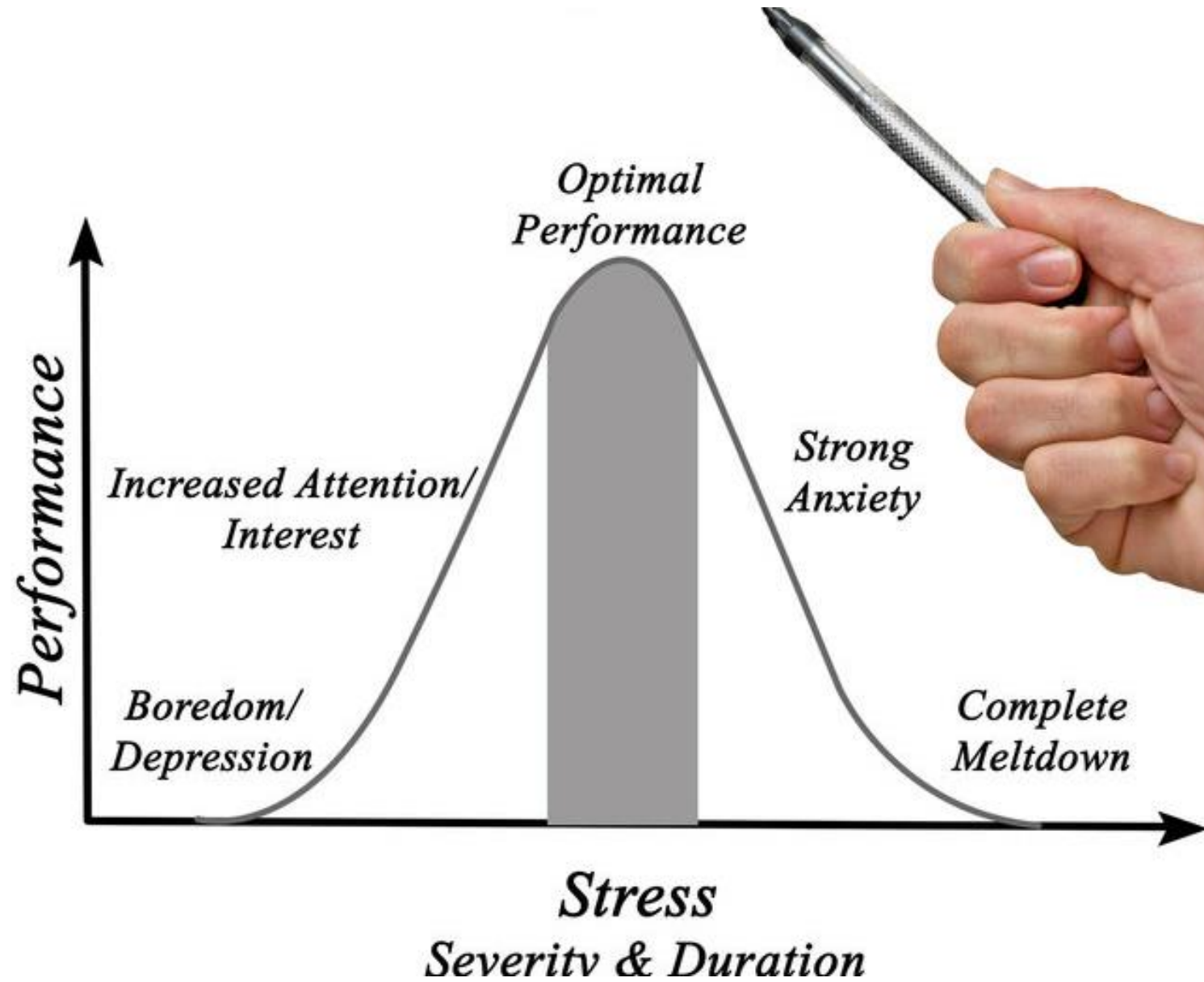
- Up to 30% more likely to be misdiagnosed than white men

Common Disorders Include, but not limited to:

- Depression, Anxiety Disorders, Dissociative Disorders, PTSD, Personality Disorders, Mood Disorders, Eating Disorders, Psychotic disorders, Neurodevelopmental Disorders, etc

Chronic Stress Outcomes

- Chronic stress, which is constant and persists over an extended period, can be debilitating and overwhelming
- Chronic Stress affects our physical and psychological well-being including insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure, weakened immune system, heart disease, depression & anxiety, and obesity
- The long-term activation of the stress response system and too much exposure to cortisol and other stress hormones can disrupt almost all the body's processes
- 63% of US workers are ready to quit their job to avoid work-related stress



Mental Health in the Workplace

More than half of all employees are afraid to talk about mental health at work or with their boss

Fear being questioned by superiors over:
How it will affect your work
Whether you are reliable

30% fear being fired

29% fear not getting promotions

Fear of being seen as weak, incompetent, different

35% talked with coworkers while 21% talked with direct supervisors

How to Tell when Mental Health is Taking a Hit

- Forgetting to take meds
- Not keeping up with hygiene/
housework
- Not keeping up with work tasks/
school tasks
- Changes in appetite
- Mood changes
- Emotional outbursts
- Being triggered easily
- Sleep changes (too much or too little)
- Excessive fear, worry, guilt
- Excessive spending
- Impulsivity
- Self harm

Neurodiversity

Not a specific diagnoses, just a divergence in mental/developmental/neurological functioning

Including, but not limited to: ADHD, ADD, Autism, OCD, Down Syndrome, Depression, Anxiety, etc.,

1 in 6 people are neurodivergent

BIPOC and women are often underdiagnosed/misdiagnosed

Most Neurodivergent people are also considered to have a disability

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers/schools are required to provide reasonable accommodations

Bias Amongst Employers

- Over half of employers say they would NOT knowingly hire Neurodivergent individuals....Why?
 - Stigma, ableism, ignorance, and bias!
- 50-60% of neurodivergent people reported that people in their workplace behave in a way that excludes them
- There is an absence of neurodiversity in diversity and inclusion, and bullying and harassment policies and procedures, and very little training available on neurodiversity inclusion

Neurodivergent Strengths at Work/ School

Pattern recognition

Creativity & innovation

Strong sense of justice

Hyper-focused when working in areas of interest

Keen accuracy

Thinking outside the box

Challenging old norms/processes

Neurodivergent Struggles at Work/ School

Executive
dysfunction

Extra work of
“Masking”
neurodivergent
traits to fit in

Lack of support

Can be subject to
bullying, exclusion,
isolation

Generalized anxiety

More likely to
experience
burnout, and
burnout lasts longer

How to Support Neurodivergent Employees/Students

Educate yourself and from credible resources!

Do NOT judge ND processes

Direct communication is best, avoid being passive or indirect

Provide time between and before tasks to help with transitioning

Instructions/agendas in writing helps individuals with Auditory processing disorder (common in ND)

Some ND people don't really like small talk, and that's okay, don't force it if it does not feel natural!

Some ND people prefer written over oral communication (email and text, over phone calls and zoom)

Provide inclusive environment

Burnout

The background features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes, primarily triangles, in various shades of blue and maroon. The shapes are layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The colors range from light, airy blues to deep, rich maroons. The overall composition is modern and minimalist.



What is Burnout?

A state of mental/physical/emotional exhaustion that leads to feeling empty, devoid of motivation, regression in skills, withdrawal

Contributors to Burnout

Work

School

Family/Relationship Dynamics

Lifestyle

Personality Traits

Work

Feeling like you have little or no control over your work

Impossible workloads that never seem to end

Lack of recognition or reward for good work

Unclear or overly demanding job expectations

Doing monotonous work

Chaotic or high-pressure environment

Toxic coworkers/bosses

School

School/
work/ life
balance

Too many
classes

Learning
Disabilities
(esp when
not
accomodate
d/
diagnosed)

Masking at
school

Toxic
environment
(teachers,
professors,
students)

Family/ Relationship Dynamics

Having kids
(especially
multiple)

Pile-up of
housework

Relationship
issues

Codependent
family
members/
friends

Toxic/Abusive
family dynamic

Toxic/Abusive
relationships

Lifestyle

Working too much, not having enough time for socializing or relaxing

Lack of close, supportive relationships

Too many responsibilities

Not enough sleep

Poor nutrition

Excessive use of alcohol/ drugs

Personality Traits

Perfectionist
tendencies

Pessimistic view

Need to be in
control,
reluctance to
delegate to others

High achieving

Type-A

People pleasing

Signs of Burnout Approaching

- Productivity Decline
- Missing or late to meetings (esp. if it's not common)
- Sense of failure, feeling helpless
- Regression of skills- public speaking, problem solving
- Loss of motivation
- Decreased satisfaction and sense of accomplishments
- Detached / dissociated
- Withdrawn/ isolated
- Taking frustration out on others
- Tired/ stressed/ drained
- Appetite/ sleep changes
- Frequent Illnesses
- Using food, drugs, alcohol. Etc., to cope

If Burnout is Left Unchecked?

- Extreme fatigue
- Excessive stress
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Worsening of other mental health issues
- Heart disease
- Immune system disorders
- Type 2 diabetes
- Nervous system dysregulation
- Substance Abuse
- Relationship difficulties
- Job loss
- Isolation
- Self harm

How to Help Prevent Burnout

- Ask for a mental health day, or two, or even a week if you need it
- Plan days off in advance during busy seasons
- Ask for a lighter load
- Delegate tasks if possible
- Take short scheduled naps
- Take bigger projects in smaller steps
- Ask for organizational tools that others have had success with
- Ask a friend/ colleague you think may be experiencing burnout how they are doing
- Offer support if able and available
- Re-center physical health in your life
- Re-center mental health in your life

Why it can be Difficult to seek Help



Lack of time: When you feel like you don't even have time to fulfill all the responsibilities of your job, finding time to access therapy and other mental healthcare services can seem impossible



Perceived stigma. If your job is to help others, getting help for yourself may seem like it undermines your qualifications for the work at hand. If you cannot help yourself, how can you help others?



Continuous work travel. Some public servants find themselves traveling nonstop for work, making it seem like they can't afford to take time away from their home time to indulge in self-care



Tight finances. It's no secret that many public servants do their jobs because they're passionate about helping others rather than earning a massive paycheck



Feeling exhausted. After working, taking the extra effort to go to the gym or schedule a workout class can simply feel too overwhelming



Lack of community. Some public servants work in less-than-supporting environments, making it feel difficult to lean on co-workers during rough times

Questions to Ask Yourself/Others to Check for Burnout

- Have you become cynical or critical at work?
- Do you drag yourself to work and have trouble getting started?
- Have you become irritable or impatient with co-workers, customers, or clients?
- Do you lack the energy to be consistently productive?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate?
- Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
- Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
- Are you using food, drugs, alcohol, etc., to feel better or to simply not feel?
- Have your sleep habits changed?
- Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, stomach problems, chronic pain, or other physical complaints?



What CAN be Done?

Framework for Workplace Mental Health (Surgeon General)

Protection from harm

- Security
- Safety
- Anti- gossip
- Anti- bullying

Connection and Community

- Social support
- Support groups
- Belonging
- Fostering relationships

Work-Life harmony

- Autonomy
- Flexibility
- Managing demands

Mattering at work

- Incentives
- Meaning
- Praise/ Value
- Dignity

Opportunity for Growth

- Raises
- Career movement
- Learning and development
- Accomplishment

Boundaries at Work

No email/teams at night or after certain hours

USE time off benefits REGULARLY

Decide how much personal information you want to share with colleagues/supervisors

Avoid office gossip

Going for a solo lunch break if needed

Set away messages if in deep work mode

Communicate needs

Ask for accommodations (if applicable)

Move!

Movement of any kind helps dispel negative feelings, emotions, and energy from your body

Find movement that works for you: Yoga, Dance, Walk, Swim, Lifting weights, hot girl walks

Participate in group sports- Soccer, Basketball, Football, Badminton

Get a gym buddy

We spend 8 hours at our desks every day, find some time to MOVE

Say NO



Resist the urge to take on new commitments especially if you are already struggling



Decline to do tasks that will add extra stress to your life



It's OK to say no because it means you are saying yes to your health



For Public service professionals, this can be difficult because they don't want to disappoint people who are relying on them

Allow Emotions to take up SPACE



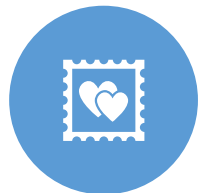
Sit with the emotion you are feeling, take time to identify the emotion, let the emotion pass through your body naturally



If you are sad, let yourself cry



If you are angry or frustrated, let yourself scream into the abyss



If you are nostalgic, practice gratitude and remember today's joy can be tomorrow's nostalgia



Practice being present even when emotions are overwhelming



If you are regretful, take time to ponder the lessons you've learned from that situation, and move forward



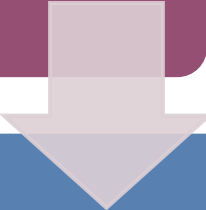
Try NOT to avoid/numb negative emotions

Normalize Failure and Minimize Negativity


- Employees are most productive and creative when they aren't afraid of failing or making mistakes at work
- Make failure visible in lives that are also full of success
- Limit the moralizing of mistakes e.g., product of laziness or lack of effort
- Approach failure by discussing how to learn from our mistakes
- Learning how to grow from failure is a key aspect of emotional intelligence and a strong growth mindset
- Those who fear failure are also scared to innovate, ideate, and suggest
- Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will

Give Grace

Daily maintenance is the bare minimum, and it is OK if that is all you do for the day



Give yourself permission to forgive someone- or not!

- Would forgiving someone help you find peace?
 - Will not forgiving them help you find closure with the relationship ending?
 - Accept that others may not provide the apology you are looking for
- 

Be gentle and forgiving with yourself

- As humans, we tend to be the hardest on ourselves, give yourself the grace you give others

Write it Down and Throw it Out

- Find unique ways to get rid of old energy/emotions/items attached to old situations
- Throw it out, burn it, break it/rip it, flush it down the toilet, donate it
- Get rid of anything that reminds you of a specific time-period that may be triggering for you including clothes, mementos, gifts, etc.,

Practice Mindfulness and Gratitude

Meditation, Guided Meditation, even 5 minutes every couple days does wonders with quieting the brain

List off 5 things you're grateful for in the mirror

Practice breathwork

Immerse yourself in a group activity

Spend time with loved ones while practicing being present

Use frequencies, binaural beats, Lo-fi music

Express it Creatively!



Energy, positive or negative, can be channeled creatively



You can paint, draw, write, vlog,
create a dance, arts and crafts

Anything that represents the emotion/
situation you are dealing with



Take some time to learn a new
skill

Sign up for classes, peruse YouTube
tutorials, learn a skill you've always
been interested in

Focus on What you CAN Control

- Not my circus, not my monkeys
- Free up your time, skills, and resources to spend them on what deserves your attention
- Be more forgiving towards yourself by not allowing perfection get in the way of getting things done well enough
- Show kindness to others and yourself by letting go of resentment, jealousy, impatience, grudges, and other negative burdens

Create 3rd spaces

- Create physical or virtual environments that connect employees who share common interests
- Creates a sense of belonging, boosts employee engagement, promotes team building, and improves productivity
- A sense of belonging is an inherent motivator
- For example: a book club, boardgame club, support groups

Talk it Out



Therapy is a great way to process difficult life circumstances and emotions



Talk with trusted loved ones



Find a support group for your specific situation

How to Fight Mental Health Stigma

Talk openly

Research and
ask questions

Educate self
and others

Be conscious
of language

Don't label

Don't make
assumptions/
stereotype

Creating a Self-Care Culture

Leaders need to continue setting a good example by showing vulnerability, prioritising their own wellbeing, and demonstrating positive self-care decision making to employees

Having honest conversations about mental health in the workplace can also increase help-seeking behaviour

Set rules for appropriate meeting times and encourage employees to turn off work devices after hours

Offer flexible work arrangements so people can access the support they need

Creating Self-Care Culture Ctd.

Peer support can be one of the most effective strategies to treat declining mental health

- Peer supporters are carefully selected, trained, and supervised co-workers, who can provide basic support and mental health first aid for their colleagues

Check in with each other:

- WFH can be isolating and make it harder to read someone's energy and how they are doing

Asking others if they have capacity to:

- Help with a task
- Lend an ear
- Talk about mental health

Questions to ask Yourself

Do you have healthy ways to process your emotions?

Do you incorporate activities into your life that help you feel recharged?

Are you getting enough face-to-face time with your friends?

Are you giving yourself enough time to engage in emotionally fulfilling activities?

Are you engaging in spiritual practices that you find fulfilling?

Am I satisfying each of the 4 dimensions of Self-Care? Is one of them lacking?

Want to continue the conversation?
Get in contact with me:
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