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A Handbook for School Psychology Graduate Students:
Building a System of Self-Care

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ABSTRACT

A HANDBOOK FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENTS: BUILDING A SYSTEM OF SELF-CARE

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Masters of Science in Counseling

School Psychology

School psychologists, like many others in clinical or service providing professions, experience significant stressors in their day to day professional functioning. The literature demonstrates correlations between chronic occupational stressors and burnout and indicates consistent self-care practices can help mitigate symptoms of burnout (De Vibe, Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tyssen, Hanley & Garland, 2018). Literature is lacking, however, in regard to graduate student stress for students enrolled in school psychology programs. Research conducted on psychology and medical graduate students indicate high degrees of stress and low levels of successful coping strategies; it is likely that similar trends would be found among school psychology graduate students given the similarities in program and training demands (Colman, Echon, Lemay, McDonald, Smith, Spencer & Swift, 2016; Goncher, Sherman, Barnett & Haskins, 2012; Shannon, Simmelink-McCleary, Becher & Crook-Lyon, 2014). The National Association of School Psychologists' ethical standards do not directly address self-care, though the ethical demand for such practices can be

derived from the standard directing school psychologists to “take steps to protect all students from reasonably foreseeable risk of harm” (NASP, p.2). Emphasis of self-care during graduate training can provide the basis for a successful self-care system as students enter the profession of school psychology.

This paper specifically addresses the emotional, cognitive and social aspects of self-care as they pertain to graduate students enrolled in school psychology programs. The information discussed in this paper supplies part of a handbook created for use by school psychology graduate students to assist in informing the creation of a personal self-care system. Information regarding the physical aspects of self-care, such as care of the body through exercise, sleep and nutrition, is supplied through the work completed by Burlinda Seals, a fellow CSUN graduate student enrolled in the school psychology program. The handbook is a cumulation of our collective review of the literature in the areas of burnout, stressors within graduate school as well as the profession of school psychology, and effective self-care practices.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF NEED

School psychology graduate students experience a myriad of stressors during their time in their programs. Many of these stressors are commonly experienced by students in any kind of graduate program. Such stressors may include: stress due to the intensity of academic demands and certification requirements, financial stress, difficulty balancing school and social expectations, and time constraints (Zahniser, Rupert & Dorociak, 2017). Other stressors come from the day to day expectations of fieldwork and internship, which are reflective of the job demands placed on practicing school psychologists. Stress may occur due to the pressures of legal timelines, multiple assessments, high counseling caseloads, and crises, among other things. Cushway (1992) conducted a survey of nearly three hundred clinical psychology trainees, which indicated that 75% of the trainees reported being moderately to very stressed due to their programs. Given the similarities of academic and training demands between clinical psychology programs and school psychology programs, it is likely that school psychology graduate students experience similar levels of stress (Myers, Sweeney, Popick, Wesley, Bordfeld & Fingerhut, 2012). To ensure that school psychology students can fully engage in training and perform all the necessary duties in their practicum or internship experience, it is crucial for the training program to assist them in the development and knowledge of self-care practices (Meyers et al., 2012).

In order to address and manage these stressors, graduate students are often advised to engage in self-care. However, very few graduate students enter their programs with self-

care skills developed enough to appropriately address the degree of stress experienced in school psychology programs (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawagdeh & Bufka, 2012). Research assessing the well-being of medical and psychology graduate students indicates these populations report low levels of life satisfaction with simultaneously high levels of mental distress while they are in school (De Vibe, Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tyssen, Hanley & Garland, 2018). Longitudinal study of these same graduate students reveals continued reports of high stress, symptoms of burnout, and suicidality when compared to the general working population (De Vibe et al., 2018). Providing self-care training to school psychology students while they are in their graduate programs may very well increase their capacity to manage stress in their professional endeavors after graduation.

Self-care encompasses an extremely broad set of practices addressing both physical and social-emotional concerns. For the purposes of this paper, self-care for school psychology students will be addressed within the broad areas of emotional health and social connection. The resulting handbook created for students within school psychology graduate programs will address the more physical aspects of self-care practices as well as the topics covered within this paper. Any information included in the handbook and not described within the confines of this paper will be supplied by Burlinda Seals, another student in the CSUN school psychology graduate program, and noted accordingly.

FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-CARE

Some researchers have described self-care science as a “foundational science” within the structure of helping professions while other definitions focus on one’s compassion toward the self in times of stress and suffering (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011, p29; Coaston, 2017). Despite the wide range of self-care definitions, the underlying

conditions for self-care remain fairly consistent within the literature: active participation in self-initiated practices that promote personal health and well-being (Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). Self-care is essential for those in the helping professions, whose work all too often leads to burnout (Coaston, 2017). There are many definitions of burnout found in the literature; one such definition by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter describes burnout as “a multidimensional experience consisting of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy” (Coaston, 2017). Consequences of burnout can include anxiety, irritability, lethargy, isolation, and demoralization, and can impact individuals at any point in their careers (Coaston, 2017). In order to lessen the impact of burnout and promote long-term effectiveness it is crucial for helpers, including school psychologists, to engage in self-care. Understanding of self-care begins with the knowledge of the human person, and within that knowledge, an understanding of the uniqueness of each person (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Actively seeking awareness of one’s own indications and symptomology of distress can help individuals recognize burnout as well as supply clues towards the best methods of self-care (Coaston, 2017). Self-care practices that nourish one individual may be depleting for another; it is important for each individual to understand the basics of self-care, but then explore different practices to determine the most effective self-care system for oneself. Results from Colman et al. (2016) found that the positive outcomes of self-care did not differ depending on the type of self-care activity that the graduate student engaged in, suggesting there is no singular way to engage in self-care for it to be effective.

Taylor and Renpenning (2011) describe general self-care requisites as the following: care of the body, balance between activity and rest, between solitude and social interaction, prevention of dangers to life, functioning and well-being, and promotion of normalcy

(Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Within these fundamental ideas, a self-care system can be built based on different means of engaging in self-care. For example, two individuals may both engage in spiritual practices as part of their self-care system, though one practice may be attending a more traditional religious service while the other may be meditating in nature. Self-care actions can also be understood as either internally or externally oriented; each set of actions provides meaningful self-care, but depending on the individual, one type of action may be more impactful than the other. Internally oriented self-care actions are used to control and regulate thoughts, feelings and orientation (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). These depend on one's crystallized knowledge, or their understanding of the origins and meaning of self-care as well as of self-care practices (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Conversely, externally oriented self-care actions are often problem-solving behaviors dealing directly with one's surrounding environment (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). This may include learning more about situations or new ways in which to approach them, assistance seeking, expressive social interactions, or direct changes to the environment (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Regardless of the type of self-care practice one might engage in, it is imperative that flexibility be maintained within each individual's self-care system in order to adequately address one's changing environment and demands.

AGENCY

Agency refers to one's ability to act. In this case, agency refers to one's ability to engage in self-care behaviors (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). If agency does not exist, then self-care deficits are inevitable; something must be done to meet the demands for self-care (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Taylor and Renpenning cite Orem's descriptions of actions related to self care, and describe three different operations that one undergoes to practice

self-care: estimative transitional, and productive operations (2011). Estimative operations refer to an understanding or awareness of self-care conditions and how to meet them (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Transitional operations refer to an ability to make decisions regarding self-care, including a selection of which practices may be most appropriate for oneself (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Lastly, productive operations refer to the actual engagement in actions to meet self-care demands (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Taylor and Renpenning indicate that each of these operations must occur for self-care to effectively transpire (2011). It is imperative, then, to ensure that those with a need for a well-established self-care system, including graduate students preparing to become school psychologists, are provided with an understanding of the need for self-care, a variety of practices, and supports for action.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

The literature suggests that high levels of self-compassion can mitigate the effects of burnout (Coaston, 2017). The concept of self-compassion is consistent with Rogers notions of humanistic self-acceptance, which focuses on one's emotions, calling for a mindful awareness of emotions and a sense of understanding and self-kindness especially when the emotions are negative (Coaston, 2017). Mindfulness is one of the tenants of self-compassion, and mindfulness practices have become an accepted means by which to engage in self-care (Coaston, 2017). Mindfulness-based stress reduction has been shown to be effective in fostering psychological and physiological well-being among college and graduate students (Felver, Morton, & Clawson, 2018). Specifically, these techniques can support psychological health, reduce overall stress, decrease harmful substance use, and prevent the development of psychopathology (Felver et al., 2018). A 2009 study completed

by Chrisman, Christopher & Lichtenstein found that students enrolled in a master's level psychology program who completed a 15-week course on mindfulness reported increased feelings of calmness and relaxation after completing said course (Meyers et al., 2012). Mindfulness brings an awareness of pain as it occurs, and self-compassion is the consequent act of taking that awareness and practicing kindness toward the self (Coaston, 2017). Denial or suppression of negative feelings may cause the individual to miss indicators of the need to practice self-care, whereas mindful recognition of such feelings allows space for the feelings to be normalized or validated (Coaston, 2017).

In addition to self-compassion and mindfulness, the literature notes the importance of religion and spirituality as meaningful self-care practices. Spirituality is conceptualized as a central component of wellness that impacts one's physical, psychological and emotional functioning (Coaston, 2017). Healthy spiritual life has been suggested to be nourishing to oneself, thus preventing symptoms of burnout (Coaston, 2017). Spiritual, religious, or moral practices and beliefs can offer reprieve for those overwhelmed by personal and professional distress (Coaston, 2017). Such practices can include prayer, meditation, connection with the earth, and engaging in creative and expressive arts (Coaston, 2017). Personal therapy has also been found through research to be helpful in alleviating professional stress for practicing counselors and therapists as well as for graduate students pursuing helping careers (Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012; Carter & Barnett, 2014). Even if one does not enter into a counseling setting as part of their self-care practice, utilizing counseling strategies or activities have been found to be helpful (Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). Pakenham and Stafford-Brown specifically cite techniques adapted from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive

Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction; they note that these specific therapeutic strategies foster well-being and self-reflection for the practitioner, and allow them to use the same techniques with clients more effectively (2012).

SOCIAL CARE

Meaningful relationships are another key component to self-care (Carter, 2014). Such relationships provide outside perspectives, opportunities to take respite from academic and professional work as well as a sense of safety, companionship and stability (Carter & Barnett, 2014). Tomkins, Brecht, Tucker, Neander & Swift describe social support as the “perception or experience that one is cared for, esteemed, and part of a mutually supportive network” (2016, p. 103). Correlational studies have shown that social support is indicative of stronger mental and physical health when compared to the general population, and due to such studies, researchers affirm the potential self-care to be achieved in part through social support (Tomkins et al., 2016; Newman & Roberts, 2013).

Research regarding social interactions and mental health indicate that strong social ties are associated with longer lifespans (Newman & Roberts, 2013). Even the belief that one has an accessible network of supporters is associated with better stress regulation (Newman & Roberts, 2013). The literature indicates that both personal and professional relationships are conducive to providing necessary socioemotional support for students in graduate school (Tomkins et al., 2016). Consistently interacting with colleagues and other psychologists has been found to be nourishing both personally and professionally (Weiss, 2004). Fellow psychologists offer a unique understanding that leads to friendship, support, and sharing in ways that individuals operating outside of the field cannot (Weiss, 2004).

The research further indicates that nourishment that can be gained from maintaining personal relationships both while in graduate school and while in a helping field (Carter & Barnett, 2014). As previously stated, personal relationships provide a means of escape from the stressors of professional demands and stressors, and help maintain a healthy work-life balance (Carter & Barnett, 2014).

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

Carter and Barnett purport that current self-care education in graduate programs is often limited or completely absent (2014). In their book, they site the following statistics obtained through a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association: 82.8% of graduate student responders indicated their training programs were wanting of written materials on self-care and 63.4% responders indicated their program did not provide activities promoting self-care (2014). A separate study conducted in 2012 by Myers and colleagues found that 44% of students reported frustration with their program's lack of emphasis of self-care (Tomkins et al., 2016). Similarly, school psychology graduate students are often told to practice self-care in order to mitigate stress, but rarely receive formal training or professional guidance on how to do so (Bamonti, Patricia, Keelan, Larson, Mentrikoski, Randall, Sly, Travers, Mcneil, 2014). Without this explicit instruction, many are unsuccessful in their self-care practices. Among graduate students, avoiding the stressor tends to be the most actively utilized coping skill, which does not lend itself to long-term stress management (De Vibe et al., 2018). Self-care should be included among the professional skills taught in graduate programs; if students are provided tools by which they can begin to practice meaningful self-care while completing graduate school, these skills can then be effectively generalized to their careers as part of their professional

competency (Bamonti, Patricia, Keelan, Larson, Mentrikoski, Randall, Sly, Travers, Mcneil, 2014).

The purpose of this project is to provide school psychology graduate students with a self-care handbook that makes the concepts of stress and burnout accessible, while providing tools for the students to learn about different areas of self-care to prevent the negative impact of experienced stress. Worksheets and explanations within the handbook are intended to assist students in building an awareness of current stressors and self-care tendencies as well as to provide an overview of various self-care techniques from which they can begin to build their own self-care systems.

TERMINOLOGY

Self-care

Ref: Colman, D. E., Echon, R., Lemay, M. S., McDonald, J., Smith, K. R., Spencer, J., & Swift, J. K. (2016). The efficacy of self-care for graduate students in professional psychology: A meta-analysis. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 10*(4), p. 188-197.

Self-care has varying definitions within the literature, though the description of self-care procured by Colman et al. covers the necessary action, behaviors, and consequences described in the literature pertaining to self-care. Colman et al. describe self care as “the process of actively initiating a method to promote holistic well-being” (2016, p. 189). They describe the implication of a variety of activities falling under the category of self-care, including healthy eating, exercise, mindfulness and meditation, engaging in leisure activities, ensuring, and seeking a social support system. More importantly, they include the idea of action, or

purposeful effort to engage in these activities across domains, determining that one must move forward with a direct intention to practice self-care.

Burnout

Ref: Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011, p. 148; Plieger, Melchers, Montag, Meermann & Reuter

Burnout is defined by Maslach as “the index of dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit and will.” She describes a separation between individuals and their work caused by a weariness in belief, a lack of pride, and exhaustion. This exhaustion is further described by Plieger et al. in their work; they describe this exhaustion as the product of work stress resulting in three primary symptoms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment.

NASP: National Association of School Psychologists

Ref: <https://www.nasponline.org/utility/about-nasp>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Association_of_School_Psychologists

NASP is a professional organization that represents over 25,000 school psychologists, graduate students and other related professionals throughout the United States as well as in 25 other countries. It is the world’s largest organization of school psychologists and works to advance effective practices to improve students’ learning, behavior and mental health in the school and home settings. The four main purposes cited by this organization are to promote the interests of school psychology, advance professional standards, secure necessary conditions for effective practice, and to serve the academic and mental health needs of all students.

It provides standards for ethics and practice as well as approval of graduate training programs.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

FOREWORD

The goal of this chapter is to present a selected review of the literature in the field of school psychology and mental health provision that pertains to the contents in the handbook developed for the target audience of graduate students enrolled in School Psychology programs. The following topics are included: Self-care for Professionals and Graduate Students, Burnout and Barriers to Self-care, and Effective Self-care Practices.

SELF-CARE FOR PROFESSIONALS AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

Self-care has been described as “the process of actively initiating a method to promote holistic well-being (Colman, Echon, Lemay, McDonald, et al 2016).” Other researchers have opted to define self-care by detailing activities thought to represent self-care (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). In 1999 Carrol, Gilroy and Murra classified self-care as involving “intrapersonal work, interpersonal support, professional development and support, and physical/recreational activities” (Richards et al., 2010, p. 248). Self-care can be comprised of a wide variety of activities ranging from basic healthy living, such as eating well, exercise, and sleep maintenance, to more intentional experiences, such as mindfulness exercises, meditation, and spiritual or religious practices. The literature indicates that self-care must be rooted in intentionality; a planned routine is much more effective than sporadic practice of random techniques (Colman et al., 2016). The current understanding of self-care incorporates a balance between personal and professional stressors, with a holistic and overarching theme of wellness (Colman et al., 2016). While a consistent self-care practice will not eliminate stress, it has been found to

help reduce or address stressors one may experience. Self-care benefits have been found to include gains in self-compassion, decreased psychological distress, and increased satisfaction with both work life and home life (Colman et al., 2016).

Self-Care for Graduate Students

Upon enrolling in a graduate school program, students are told to make self-care a priority to assist them in their success in the program. Oftentimes, the insistence of professors and other administrators to practice self-care is the entirety of the support that graduate students receive; there is a general lack of support for implementing and making a habit of practical self-care practices. A myriad of other skills used in the field are introduced and explained at length throughout the program, but self-care is often left for the students to figure out for themselves. Self-help strategies are expected to be pursued as part of a student's individual responsibilities as a graduate student in the program, though the expectation is that students pursue self-care outside of the formal curriculum (Tarrasach, 2015). Tarrasach's research found that training programs emphasize the importance of self-help strategies to mitigate burnout, but the demands of the program leave little room for direct instruction on these strategies (2015). Despite the knowledge of the importance of self-care and the general consensus amongst professional organizations of helping fields, an analysis of over 100 graduate programs in clinical psychology found that only 32% of the graduate handbooks issued by these programs mentioned self-care (Zahniser, Rupert, and Dorociak, 2017). Even in those handbooks that mentioned self-care, the emphasis was on psychotherapy for distressed students (Zahniser et al., 2017). In a recent American Psychological Association survey of professional psychology graduate students, more than 70% of students surveyed reported a stressor that interfered with their functioning

(Zahniser et al., 2017). Such stressors included academic pressures, finances, anxiety, and a poor work/life balance (Zahniser et al., 2017).

Expectations of the Profession

Throughout their careers, school psychologists must strive for well-functioning while actively avoiding impairment. Well-functioning is defined by Coster and Schwebel as a consistent quality of professional functioning over time despite mounting professional and personal stressors (1997). Conversely, impairment is described as the consequent inferior performance brought on by a decline in one's professional functioning (Coster & Schwebel, 1997).

School psychologists fulfill two roles, experiencing unique influences and conditions in both their personal and professional lives (Coster & Schwebel, 1997). The personal role comes with its own positive and negative experiences, as well as its own set of goals that one sets for themselves to fulfill (Coster & Schwebel, 1997). The separate role of psychologist demands that the individual cope with the incredible pressures of the field: serving clients, maintaining best practice, navigating school systems and expectations, and developing new specialties (Coster & Schwebel, 1997).

With these relentless demands and high expectations also comes an ethical responsibility to work to the benefit of one's clients, or students. Both the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA) maintain a code of ethics to which practicing psychologists must adhere to in order to continue their practice. Within each code is a call to avoid unnecessary harm to clients. NASP's Principles for Professional Ethics states the following in Standard II. 1.3 (2010):

School psychologists refrain from any activity in which their personal problems may interfere with professional effectiveness. They seek assistance when personal problems threaten to compromise their professional effectiveness (p. 6).

This call to “seek assistance” to prevent any compromise of professional work is a mandate to practice self-care. Though the words “self-care” are not explicitly stated, this standard implies that it is the responsibility of the psychologist to prevent personal difficulties and stressors from negatively impacting one’s work (Dearing, Maddux, & Tangney, 2005).

BURNOUT AND BARRIERS TO SELF-CARE

Burnout

The term “burnout” was coined in the 1970s by psychologist Herbert Freudenberger to describe the consequences of high stress and ideals among helping professions, such as counselors, therapists, teachers, health professionals, and clergy (NCBI, 2017; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). A leading burnout researcher, Christine Maslach, defines burnout as “the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will” (as cited by Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011, p. 148). A review of the literature indicates no singular, statistically consistent definition of burnout. Although burnout has been conceptualized in many different ways, the common characteristic found in each definition is this: an exhaustion of the individual caused by work stress (Plieger, Melchers, Montag, Meermann, & Reuter, 2015). The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was created to assess characteristics of burnout across diverse occupational groups, with its three subscales addressing the primary three symptoms agreed upon with burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment (Plieger et al., 2015). Research has found

a moderate correlation between burnout and depression (El-Ghoroury, et al., 2012; Plieger et al., 2015; Schonfeld & Renzo, 2016). Pronounced burnout can lead to psychological distress, depression, suicidal ideation and/or behavior, anxiety, as well as other personal and professional difficulties (El-Ghoroury, et al., 2012).

Three main symptoms considered to be signs of burnout are exhaustion, alienation from work activities, and reduced performance (NBCI, 2017). Maslach alternatively labels alienation from work activities as cynicism, and reduced performance as ineffectiveness, though her descriptions are quite similar (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Exhaustion is described as physical and emotional fatigue and an inability to cope; physical symptoms such as stomach pain or headaches may accompany exhaustion (NBCI, 2017). Alienation from work activities, or cynicism, may include frustration about task demands, cynicism regarding working conditions and colleagues, and physical or emotional isolation from others (NBCI, 2017). Reduced performance, or ineffectiveness, refers to an individual not meeting the requirements or expectations of their job, or meeting it poorly (NBCI, 2017). In assessing the causes of burnout, Maslach and Leiter recognize the work environment as a leading factor (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Within the work environment, six specific factors were identified as catalysts for burnout: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, unfairness, breakdown of community, and value conflict (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Further types of identified burnout are meaning burnout and caring burnout (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Meaning burnout refers to when a job focused on caring and giving to others no longer provides sufficient meaning and purpose for the individual working; the meaning and purpose of the work no longer exists (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Meaning burnout can also describe when a

practitioner no longer sees the work as helpful to their client (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Conversely, caring burnout relates to the cycle of professional attachment, involvement, and separation that helping professionals experience with their clients (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). When this process drains the practitioner, they become unable to healthfully attach and be involved with their clients (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

Burnout is a significant concern in the field of psychology, due in part to professionals' consistent inability to prioritize self-care (Wise, Hersh & Gibson, 2012). Up to one third of practicing psychologists may demonstrate symptoms of burnout at any given time, and the literature indicates as much as 50% of psychologists report clinically significant levels of depression difficulties (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawagdeh, & Bufka, 2012). Factors such as heavy workloads, issues with control (e.g. micromanagement or lack of accountability), lack of reward, lack of community or conflict with other staff, issues of discrimination or favoritism, ethical conflicts, and meaningless paper tasks have been linked to burnout among psychologists (McCormack, MacIntyre, O'Shea, Herring & Campbell, 2018). Jobs that require high levels of sustained physical, emotional, or cognitive effort over long periods of time have also been shown to lead to practitioner or employee burnout (McCormack et al., 2018). Additionally, school psychologists are at risk for experiencing compassion fatigue and secondary trauma due to the nature of their work. Figley defined the concept of compassion fatigue as "the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (as cited by Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011, p. 147). Figley determined that compassion fatigue leads to increased levels of helplessness and feelings of isolation (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

Wicks' research suggests that individuals most vulnerable to burnout include those who work with distressed persons, those who work intensively with demanding people, those who are charged with the responsibility for large numbers of individuals, and those who feel strongly motivated to work with people but are limited by administrative and other paper tasks, all of which may describe aspects of a career in school psychology (2008).

However, despite the wealth of literature warning against helper fatigue and burnout, self-care is not necessarily mandated by any professional psychological organization (Wise, Hersh, & Gibson, 2012). Wise, Hersh and Gibson (2012) state that the closest direct commentary offered by professional psychological organizations is the mandate to function within one's competency. Competency is explicitly outlined in the NASP ethical code as "a legal as well as an ethical obligation to take steps to protect all students from reasonably foreseeable risk of harm" (NASP, p. 2). In functioning within individual levels of competency as well as protecting students from harm, school psychologists must understand a professional mandate to take care of themselves (Wise, Hersh & Gibson, 2012).

Graduate School Demands

The combination of limited self-care training and the levels of stress experienced by graduate students makes it especially difficult for grad students to accurately monitor and assess their levels of distress (Carter & Barnett, 2014). Stressors specifically associated with attending a graduate program geared towards professional psychology can impact various domains including physical health, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, academic success, and professional burnout (Colman, Echon, Lemay, McDonld et. al, 2016). As there is a unique set of stressors that grad students experience, understanding

contributing factors to graduate student stress is important for the development of self-care habits (Carter & Barnett, 2014). Beginning a graduate school program brings along with it a new environment, new people, and new expectations (Carter & Barnett, 2014). A recently published APA survey indicated over 70% of surveyed graduate students reported a stressor interfering with their functioning (Zahniser, Rupert & Dorociak, 2017). These stressors included the following: academic responsibilities/pressures, finances/debt/student loans, anxiety, poor school-life balance, family issues, lack of social support, depression, and physical health issues (Zahniser et al., 2017). Both the high frequency as well as the quantity of varied stressors graduate students experience throughout their programs negatively impacts them (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

Academic and program stressors are apparent from the start of the program; the material is challenging and the level of mastery demanded of those in the program makes mere completion of tasks difficult when students are asked to excel. Additional complications arise from the interplay between social support systems outside of and within the school program. Oftentimes students' relationships with family and friends are strained due to the demands of the program and the need to build professional relationships and support systems. Balancing relationships between these dichotomous settings is a difficult task that may prove to be futile, which is particularly concerning when these positive and supportive relationships are considered to be protective factors against stress and burnout. Students in school psychology graduate programs also face unique financial stressors as programs require the completion of fieldwork and internship hours, often unpaid, which detract from time students are able to work to pay for tuition and other academic expenses such as required textbooks. The unique constraints of time and financial

within such graduate programs tend to be the primary sources of reported stress (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

Very few graduate students enter masters and doctoral level programs with adequate self-care practices in place. Currently, there is extremely limited literature on stress and coping for psychology graduate students, but the research that exists suggests that graduate students are lacking the coping and self-care strategies necessary for success, particularly when required to complete clinical activities and internships (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Longitudinal studies assessing medical and psychology students indicate that these graduate student populations report high levels of mental distress concurrent with low levels of life satisfaction while they are in school (De Vibe, Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tyssen, Hanley, & Garland, 2018). Upon entering the respective professional fields, medical doctors and psychologists that reported high mental distress and low life satisfaction while in graduate school continued to report high levels of stress, burnout, and suicidality when compared to the general population (De Vibe et al., 2018). The literature suggests that among graduate students, avoidance focused coping – or the strategy of actively avoiding the stressor- is the most commonly reported form of coping (De Vibe et al., 2018). This type of coping strategies has been found to be associated with increased levels of perceived stress, lower satisfaction in life, and increased postgraduate mental health problems (De Vibe et al., 2018).

Research suggests that nearly 80% of graduate students in programs preparing them for careers in psychology demonstrate better outcomes if they engage in self-care when compared to peers who do not (Colman et al., 2016). If students are taught to build and utilize positive self-care practices while they are in their graduate programs, they are more

likely to continue these practices when working in the field. Research has shown that a core competency for entrance into a professional psychological career is the ongoing use of self-care and self-awareness of one's functioning (Goncher, Sherman, Barnett, & Haskins, 2012). Self-care is imperative to trainees, graduate students, and practicing psychologists, therefore programs that educate and train future psychologists should provide a meaningful foundation for self-care training (Goncher et al., 2012) Yet, many graduate students report that their programs are wanting of formal training or policy regarding the use of self-care (Goncher et al., 2012).

Lack of Self-Care Among Professionals

The literature reveals a dichotomy in the field of mental health: the necessity of self-care for competent functioning as opposed to the alarming rate at which psychologists fail to engage in self-care practices despite obvious and impactful stressors. Research indicates what Dattilio describes as a “chronic disregard for the self-care of mental health workers” (Dattilio, 2015, p. 353). School psychologists, like those in other helping or mental health fields, experience a variety of stressors in daily professional demands that make it especially important for them to take the time and effort to take care of themselves. However, even with knowledge of self-care practices and an understanding of its importance, school psychologists often sacrifice self-care in an attempt to meet impending professional and personal demands. This sacrifice may come unknowingly; psychologists have been found to experience significantly higher levels of emotional distress than reported through their own self-perceptions and self- assessments of stress levels (Carter & Barnett, 2014). For others, the negative impacts of poor or absent self-care practices are obvious, but changes are not made. An APA poll conducted in 2015 found that 59% of

respondents admitted there were times they could have benefited from mental health treatment during their professional careers but failed to seek it (Dattilio, 2015). Overwhelmingly the literature denotes a tendency on the part of the mental health professionals to neglect the importance of creating a balance between caring for themselves and others (Dattilio, 2015).

The research reveals a myriad of consequences when clinicians ignore stress and neglect self-care. Some of these include disrespecting work, mistakes, a lack of energy, use of work to block out feelings of distress or discontent, and loss of interest in the work (Wicks, 2008). Consistent in the literature is the fact that stress will negatively impact those working as clinicians; what varies is the extent to which professionals will take the necessary steps to appreciate, mitigate, and learn from the stress (Wicks, 2008). Many clinicians fail to recognize signs of burnout and do not take necessary precautions (Wicks, 2008). By the time that stress and lack of self-care is realized, it is often after harm is caused or mistakes are made (Wicks, 2008).

A study conducted by researchers at George Fox University analyzed responses of 260 APA members surveyed about their experiences with psychotherapy; the general finding was that those providing mental health more often than not fail to receive adequate mental health care themselves (Miller, 2013). The team found that psychologists do not appear to be as impacted by stigma, compared to the general population, when seeking mental health care (Miller, 2013). The study did find, however, that the barriers barring those providing mental health services from seeking help themselves were commensurate with the barriers faced by the general population: time, money, and difficulty admitting distress (Miller, 2013). The research also indicated that for therapists, the greatest barrier

was selecting a therapist who was not a colleague or mentor, and who lived up to the individual's own high expectations (Miller, 2013). Further concerns held by mental health professionals when seeking personal therapy include fear of emotions, anticipated risks, and difficulties with self-disclosure (Dattillio, 2015).

The underutilization of self-care among professionals highlights the importance of training graduate students in the use of appropriate self-care strategies prior to their engagement in the field. If taught within the context of the program and practiced within internship or practicum experiences, practicing health care professionals may be more likely to utilize self-care strategies and access mental health supports as needed during their careers.

Student Barriers to Self-care

Self-care is a vital part of attaining and maintaining the expectations of the individual graduate program, as well as those of the profession. Student trainees experience not only the myriad of stressors school psychologists experience in the field, but also a separate set of stressors tied directly to their role as a graduate student (Dearing, Maddux & Tangney, 2005). Many graduate students who are required to complete internship or clinical hours as part of their program experience trouble coping with the difficulty of academic and internship tasks, as well as having to acknowledge that they are not yet competent in all areas of the field (Stafford-Brown & Pakenham, 2012). Student trainees experience stress related to supervisor or professor evaluations, time limitations, professional self-doubt, and the pressure of frequently switching roles between student and aspiring professional (Stafford-Brown & Pakenham, 2012).

Though the vast majority of experienced therapists endorse the value of attending therapy to help alleviate personal stressors, barriers still prevent those in mental health professions from seeking personal help (Dearing et al., 2005). There is a plethora of research conducted on barriers the general population encounters when seeking therapy, and the literature on psychologists or therapists seeking their own therapy reveals that the barriers are the same for both populations. Further research indicates that graduate students in counseling or related programs also face these same barriers of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and affordability (Dearing et al., 2005). Another concern found in the research regarding psychology graduate students seeking their own therapy was a concern about confidentiality (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Many students are limited in where they can receive counseling services, and concerns about confidentiality barred students from taking advantage of free counseling offered on university campuses (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

Graduate students have reported difficulty engaging in self-care for a plethora of reasons: lack of time, exorbitant stressors, lack of motivation, lack of support, inability to find an effective form of self-care, and lack of knowledge concerning self-care (Shannon, Simmelink-McCleary, Becher, & Crook-Lyon, 2014). Lack of time was found to be the most influential barrier to graduate students using a coping strategy or engaging in self-care, and cost was the second greatest barrier that was reported (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Faculty attitudes regarding help-seeking have also been found to affect students' willingness or likelihood to seek help; if faculty models self-care, seeking help, and collaborating with colleagues, students may be more likely to seek help when under duress (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

In a 2014 study, participating graduate students reported recognizing the necessity of self-care, and expressed an intention to engage in self-care practices, but had difficulty scheduling time to do so (Shannon et al., 2014). In the same study, students acknowledged a decrease in the amount of time spent on self-care as well as the types of self-care practices used over time; it became more difficult to maintain self-care habits as the busyness and simultaneous stress of each semester increased (Shannon et al., 2014).

Psychologist trainees learn within a culture that emphasizes personal responsibility for assessment and maintenance of competence, as well as participation in self-care to ensure the preservation of competency (Johnson, Barnett, Elman, Forrest, Schwartz-Mette, & Kaslow, 2014). Yet, many graduate students report that their programs are wanting of formal training or policy regarding the use of self-care (Goncher, Sherman, Barnett & Haskins, 2012). An APA survey (APA of Graduate Students) conducted in 2006 found 82.8% of respondents claimed their training program did not offer written materials of self-care and stress.

EFFECTIVE SELF-CARE PRACTICES

In order for self-care to be practiced effectively, one must actively engage in a method, or methods, to promote a holistic sense of well-being (Colman et al., 2016). Stress directly impacts mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Seward, 1999). Similarly, NASP has indicated three main areas of self-care: physical self-care, which includes healthy diet, adequate sleep, breaks during workday, and exercise; emotional health including setting limitations, dedicating time to faith and/or spirituality, time management and priority setting, and engaging in hobbies; and social care and connection, which may include maintaining normal daily routines and staying connected with

friends/families, and debriefing with colleagues when needed (2017). Additionally, NASP has stated that stress is reduced when people engage in advocacy or activism (2017). Even within these three areas, the practice of self-care is extremely broad. The specific acts of self-care that will be effective will differ with each individual, but its importance is universal. This literature review will focus on the latter two areas indicated by NASP as a prominent area of self-care practice: emotional health and social care and connection.

Awareness

Awareness is a precursor to healthy functioning; in order to self-regulate and modify behaviors as needed, individuals must be cognizant of early signs of distress or dysfunction (Coster & Schwebel, 1997). The effectiveness of stress management and self-care techniques is dependent on one's accurate knowledge of their own body's reaction to perceived stress, as well as the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual factors they associate with stress (Seward, 1999). Students must be explicitly taught to identify sources of stress in order to effectively cope with it (Dyrbye, Thomas, & Shanafelt, 2005). White, Peters, and Myers developed the idea of self-care operations, or capabilities required for individuals to engage in effective self-care (2011). They describe a necessary investigation by the individual to determine their own personal conditions and factors necessary for self care (White et al., 2011). They ascertained that one must have a knowledge of self and personal environment, existing conditions, and what factors are personally necessary for life, health, and well-being (White et al., 2011). Wicks adds from his research that it is important for individuals to also be aware of what is realistic as a self-care practice given the current time, support systems, and finances one may have available to them (2008). The literature on self-care and resiliency suggests that different stages of life warrant

different types of self-care, and individuals must be able to recognize when a self-care strategy is no longer sufficient and needs to be adjusted or replaced by another technique (Wicks, 2008).

Cognitive and Emotional Health

Seward describes mental wellbeing as one's ability to intake, process, recall, and utilize information (1999). Stress has a tendency to decrease the speed and accuracy of both the processing and recall abilities required for thorough decision making (Seward, 1999). Psychologists are intellectually aware of irrational beliefs and the need to combat them, yet most fall prey to cognitive errors despite their awareness (Norcross & Guy, 2007). In order to effectively achieve cognitive restructuring, individuals must first have a sense of self-awareness and ability to self-monitor (Norcross & Guy, 2007). The research indicates that this awareness and monitoring does not need to be grossly extensive; even a few minutes of thoughtful reflection, testing assumptions, and sharing ideas of concern with trusted colleagues or peers can prevent destructive thought patterns (Norcross & Guy, 2007).

Cognitive self-care strategies can be found through various therapeutic techniques, many of which are utilized by school psychologists in their counseling work with students. Dattilio notes specifically the use of techniques from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Positive Psychology, Mindfulness Meditation, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (2015). Techniques from CBT may include monitoring the presence of negative reactions to students or colleagues, or raising awareness of changes in thoughts, emotions, and behavior throughout the day (Dattilio, 2015). Thought journals may be used as strong emotions or negative thoughts are experienced throughout the day to help the individual

actively reframe any negative cognitions they may have. Positive Psychology lends itself to building a general sense of well-being through engagement in positive thought statements, as well as life-affirming, happiness inducing practices (Dattilio, 2015). These practices vary between individuals, but the impact of engaging in such practices can augment an individual's sense of well-being (Dattilio, 2015). Norcross and Guy emphasize the importance of exercising empathy as a Positive Psychology self-care technique; they indicate empathy is necessary with oneself and with others to promote overall well-being (2007). Engagement in mindfulness meditation, further described below, is also noted by Dattilio as a positive self-care strategy (2015). He specifically outlines its usefulness when combined with progressive muscle relaxation and breathing exercises, both of which can be easily accessed throughout the work day (Dattilio, 2015). The final therapy that Dattilio notes as helpful to self-care is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, specifically the idea of general acceptance and self-compassionate mental observation of day to day activities (2015). Similar to mindfulness techniques, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy techniques offer strategies for an individual to let go of controlling situations and move into the position of observer. Techniques from this specific therapy also aim to increase an individual's psychological flexibility by facilitating what one finds meaningful in life; restructured priorities have been shown to have success in reducing work related stressors (Dattilio, 2015).

Other strategies endorsed in the literature focus on reminding practicing mental health professionals to maintain realistic expectations of themselves (Dattilio, 2015). Goal setting is encouraged, but such goals must remain realistic and achievable; Dattilio also emphasizes the importance of giving oneself credit for progress towards goals, even if the

progress is minimal (2015). Additionally, emphasis is placed on removing one's self-esteem from work performance (Dattilio, 2015). Avoiding that contingency allows an individual to maintain positive self-worth despite difficulties in the workplace and helps preserve overall well-being.

Emotional wellbeing is described as one's ability to feel and express emotions in a controlled manner; stress-induced emotions such as anger and fear can collectively overshadow the expression of other emotions (Seward, 1999). Research conducted by Norcross and Guy reveals the human tendency to escape when emotions are difficult for an individual to process or control (2007). They suggest that there are both negative and healthy means of emotional escape, and that when used healthfully, escape can be an important aspect of practitioner self-care (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Norcross and Guy listed vital breaks, relaxation throughout and after the work day, humor, group activities, leisure activities, restorative solitude, personal therapy, and a scheduled day of rest as positive means of emotional escape (2007). Other research describes emotional well-being as it relates to emotional regulation, or how an individual experiences and expresses various emotions (Myers, Sweeny, Popick, Wesley, Bordfeld, & Fingerhut, 2012). Emotional regulation can be understood as either antecedent or response focused (Myers et al., 2012). Antecedent focused regulation techniques, such as cognitive reappraisal, are employed early in the response process and change the effect of the stimuli causing the emotional response (Myers et al., 2012). Conversely, response focused techniques are implemented after the emotional response has already occurred internally to change the emotional output (Myers et al., 2012). Both antecedent and response focused regulation occur subconsciously, though new behaviors can be taught to conduct more healthful emotional

regulation. Research has shown that antecedent focused regulation is related to lower levels of stress related symptoms, whereas responsive strategies such as expressive suppression lend themselves to high levels of stress symptoms (Myers et al., 2012).

Tied to emotional well-being is receiving professional support. Especially given the confidential nature of the school psychologist's job, it is important for individuals within the profession to have a safe space in order to process work related stress and difficulties. Research indicates that undergoing personal therapy improves the emotional and mental functioning of a mental health professional in addition to alleviating the emotional stress inherent in the counseling aspects of the job (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Psychologists who participate in counseling themselves as part of self-care have reported improvements in self-esteem, work functioning, social life, emotional expression, and symptom severity (Norcross & Guy, 2007).

Social Care and Connection

General guidelines for graduate student self-care, particularly for those students within psychological, educational or other service-based programs, includes the use of supervision and peer support within practicum experiences (Shannon, Simmelink-McCleary, Becher, & Crook-Lyon, 2014). Ensuring students have adequate social support as they go through the program and begin work in their fields has also been found to reduce the potential of mental health problems and positively influence well-being (Shannon et al., 2014). El-Ghoroury et al. found the top three reported coping strategies for psychology graduate students to be support from friends, family and classmates (2012).

Social support can be found and encouraged for school psychology fieldworkers and interns both with colleagues at their school sites as well as within their graduate

programs. Relationships at school sites with other school psychologists, administrators, Special Education staff, or other service providers are helpful supports because they understand the world in which school psychologists operate (Norcross & Guy, 2007). In the context of a graduate program, peer and staff support have been shown to be important aspects of social support (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Peer support is particularly helpful due to naturally occurring mutuality and lack of hierarchy among students (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Peer groups provide a sense of community as well as a safe space to discuss difficulties and stressors, learn from others' experiences, and find support (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Dyrbye et al. maintain that peer discussion groups allow students to process conflict, nurture self-awareness, and promote empathy (2005). Such discussion also allows students to understand that their experienced difficulties are not entirely unique, as well as to provide them with meaningful insight about how to approach different problems (Dyrbye et al., 2005).

It is also imperative for graduate students to maintain social support outside of the school settings; strong connections within one's personal life help encourage a healthier work-life balance. Partner and/or family connections have been found to have a strong correlation with the longevity of careers in the psychology field (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Among psychology interns, significant others and family are noted as sources of support in regard to success within the graduate program (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Norcross and Guy describe familial connections as necessary because partners and family relate in a way that allows psychologists to drop the role of helper and accept genuine support (2007). Friendships work similarly as a means of self-care in that they are absolutely necessary to separate work and personal life. Maintaining friendships that are distanced from one's work

offer an individual a wider and healthier perspective on life (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Especially when considering the emotional, stressful, and crisis-based nature of school psychologists' work, surrounding oneself with individuals that are not related to the field helps bring variety to one's view (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Consistently engaging in relationships with personal friendships also allows space for honesty; friends can note changes in one's life and demeanor in a way that colleagues cannot comment on (Norcross & Guy, 2007).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has enjoyed increased attention from the psychological and research community within the recent years. Numerous studies have been conducted on mindfulness as a therapeutic technique or protective factor, and many of the studies have yielded positive results; there is a considerable body of research that has found an inverse relationship of mindfulness to stress (Nezlek, Holas, Rusanowska, & Krejtz, 2016). It has been found to increase overall reports of well-being, reduced psychopathology and negative emotionality, and has been attributed to improved behavioral regulation (Nezlek et al., 2016). When studied specifically in relation to the educational setting, research has documented its benefits in terms of mindfulness' ability to improve attention, overall health, and emotional regulation in addition to relieving distress encouraging well-being (Singh, Schonert-Reichl & Roesner, 2016). Mindfulness is described as an attentional style originating in the contemplative traditions such as Buddhism (Nezlek et al., 2016). There are a myriad of definitions for mindfulness, but the most commonly cited is Kabat Zinn's, who defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (as cited in Nezlek et al., 2016, p.1). Nezlek and colleagues

describe mindfulness as a state of being, indicating that it is an individual's intent attendance to what he or she is experiencing at the time (2016). The commonality between all of the definitions found in the literature is that mindfulness involves sustained consciousness and awareness of external events and internal experiences in present time (Nezlek et al., 2016). Mindfulness does not restrict attention to a single object or event, but rather follows thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise within the individual (Tarrasch, 2015).

This state of nonjudgmental attendance has been suggested to lower stress and increase one's ability to cope (Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). When faced with stress, individuals often go through an often unconscious appraisal of the situation to determine if it is good, bad, or neutral (Weinstein et al., 2009). The interpretation of the event directly influences the way an individual views the situation, has an emotional understanding of it, or perceives his or her capacity to meet the demands of the situation (Weinstein et al., 2009). Mindfulness has been found to promote a less defensive approach to challenging experiences due to its open-minded nature; situations may be viewed in more neutral terms because they have not been filtered through conditioned evaluations, beliefs, or memories that often inform the determined "level" of stress (Weinstein et al., 2009). In decreasing one's natural defenses that would otherwise be raised in the face of stress, one's overall levels of perceived stress are decreased thereby mitigating the physical and cognitive responses to stress (Weinstein et al., 2009). Mindfulness also encourages engagement in approach coping, which is a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral means of acknowledging and reinterpreting stressful situations (Weinstein et al., 2009). An approach coping response requires one to actively face the stressor and reframe the situation, as opposed to

avoiding the source of stress and its effects (Weinstein et al., 2009). Approach coping responses are threefold, containing active coping, acceptance, and cognitive reinterpretation (Weinstein et al., 2009). Active coping describes a direct action an individual may take to deal with stress (Weinstein et al., 2009). Acceptance describes the cognitive and emotional acknowledgement of the stressful situation (Weinstein et al., 2009). The final component, cognitive reinterpretation, is a process by which an individual learns from the situation, finds good in the situation, or makes the conscious decision to use the situation to develop oneself in a positive way (Weinstein et al., 2009). These collective components of an approach coping response allow a fuller level of awareness of the situation as well as one's own responses to the situation, and reduce thought distortion and suppression (Weinstein et al., 2009).

Research conducted by Tarrasch followed graduate students' experience with mindfulness via journal summaries (2015). Students initially reported difficulty and feelings of discomfort, but clinically significant changes were reported as the year progressed (Tarrasch, 2015). Students reported changes in their relationship with their thoughts; mindfulness allowed attendance to and regulation of thoughts, and students reported being better able to recognize the positive or negative nature of their thoughts (Tarrasch, 2015). Data analysis conducted regarding the students' reports determined six areas of benefits: increased awareness of actions, increased awareness of thoughts and feelings, ability to accept oneself, feelings of calmness and more successful coping with stress, learning to use meditation as a coping skill, improvement in sleep quality, and improvement in relationships with others (Tarrasch, 2015). McCollum and Gehart (2010) led a similar study where mindfulness teaching was integrated with academic curriculum

in a graduate program; they specifically taught focused breathing, use of a mantra, walking meditation, mindful eating, and compassion therapy techniques (Tarrasch, 2015). In this study, the techniques were taught in school and practiced outside of the program, supported by class discussions and assigned readings on the mindfulness techniques that were taught (Tarrasch, 2015). Data analysis of McCollu and Gehart's study found an increase in presence, positive effects of meditation, and increases in self-compassion and acceptance (Tarrasch, 2015).

Mindfulness is a practice that can be learned and adjusted to individual needs and time frames. Wicks suggests that beginning with a few minutes of silence or mindful breathing in the morning and ending with a similar practice before sleeping at night can help reset the mind and free individuals from suppressing or analyzing thoughts and emotions that may be overwhelming (2008). In learning to practice mindfulness, he also suggests setting a self-care protocol for the day, that is, scheduling in a few minutes of a break to practice breathing, listen to music, or going on a brief walk (Wicks, 2008). Wicks also emphasizes the difference between formal and informal practices of mindfulness. Formal practices such as meditation require a specific time to be set aside where an individual can be actively aware of breathing or walking, whereas informal practice may be acknowledging emotions tied to daily life activities as they occur (Wicks, 2008). Both have their value and place, and can be used to augment an individual's overall self-care practice.

Spirituality and Religion

Also encompassed in the broad area of emotional health is spiritual or religious wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is understood as a higher consciousness grown through

nurturing relationships with oneself and others, the development of a personal value system, and finding a sense of meaning in one's life (Seward, 1999). Religious experiences are often described as denominational, external, cognitive, behavioral, ritualistic, and public; they often refer to experiences and activities occurring as part of an organized religion (Colman et al., 2016). White, Peters and Schim describe religion as a set of beliefs and values that make up an identity and way of life (2011). Conversely, spiritual experiences are described as universal, ecumenical, internal, affective, spontaneous, and private (Colman et al., 2016). Spirituality can be understood as a search for meaning, harmony, peace, transcendence, and purpose in life (White et al., 2011). White and colleagues go on to describe three themes that arise as a core of spiritual practices: relationship with others, awareness of a higher being, and recognition of the broader world (2011). Research has determined both religious and spiritual experiences have positive impacts when employed as part of one's self-care practices (Colman et al., 2016).

Both spiritual and religious practices can be performed as an individual or within a group and offer different practices that lend themselves to personal growth as well as feelings of peace and understanding. Group or public participation in spiritual or religious practice may include theological studies, group worship, volunteer or service opportunities, group exercise, and self-improvement classes (White et al., 2011). This may also include participation in activist groups or social justice movements (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Group participation also enhances the importance of communal support and connection, both of which are central characteristics of self-care (White, 2008). More personal pursuits include prayer, meditation, relaxation techniques, and being in nature (White et al., 2011).

In their research, White and colleagues, describe spiritual self-care as a “set of spiritually based activities that one engages in to promote personal development and well-being” (White et al., 2011, p.48). They emphasize that there is no specific way to engage in religious or spiritual self-care, but that each individual will have a different practice based on personal mind/spirit/body connection, moral and religious background, and life experiences originating from faith and emotions (White et al., 2011). Spiritual self-care may be done to feel connection; either to a higher power or to connect the individual to those around them (White et al., 2011). Other spiritual self-care practices may include listening to music, meditating, exercising, and appreciating the beauty of nature (White et al., 2011). Though the range of practices involved in spiritual self-care is broad, the goal is the enhancement of overall health and well-being (White et al., 2011).

Norcross & Guy take a different approach to describing spirituality as a form of self-care, but ultimately arrive at the same conclusion regarding positive overall impact; they describe spirituality as “an indispensable source of strength and meaning for the therapist.” (Norcross & Guy, 2007, p. 183). In their writings, spirituality is understood as a mission or calling to the helping profession (Norcross & Guy, 2007). They determine that all individuals are devoted to some task, call, vocation, or beloved work outside of themselves, likening such work to Maslow’s self-actualization (Norcross & Guy, 2007). As a form of self-care, this understanding of spirituality still retains many of the ideas expressed above. The authors emphasize a recognition of forces beyond one’s own ability that can be called upon for assistance and encouragement, a trust that the universe or higher power will care for students or clients beyond one’s personal efforts, and laud spirituality as a way of providing meaning in life beyond one’s job (Norcross & Guy, 2007).

Longitudinal studies have found that the influence of religion practiced in childhood may synthesize neural pathways related to faith and wellness in adulthood (Colman et al., 2016). The long-term effects of religion or spirituality have been termed “remembered wellness” (Colman et al., 2016). This term describes the healing effects of one’s personal religious, spiritual, and/or personal values even if they are not actively practiced (Colman et al., 2016). Even if the spiritual or religious practice of an individual changes over time, the literature suggests that such practices and values can positively contribute to an individual’s overall health and well-being when used as self-care (Richards et al., 2010).

Habitualization of Self-care

Self-care is not something that can be implemented into one’s lifestyle spontaneously. To be truly effective, self-care must be planned; intentionality and structure are required. Students can be taught to set goals for themselves as well as to hold members of their cohort accountable for the goals they set (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). When taught within the context of a graduate program, self-care can be practiced and reinforced prior to students’ entrance into the field. Universities should aim to engage students preparing for a career in school psychology by creating a climate of self-care within the program (Zahniser, Rupert, & Dorociak, 2017). Research has determined that the perceptions graduate students have of their programs’ self-care emphasis directly affects their overall quality of life as well as their propensity to engage in self-care (Zahniser et al., 2017). In creating a culture of self-care, graduate programs should ensure the effective modeling of self-care by program faculty, provide students with opportunities to actually learn about

self-care, and create a sense of accountability for students to practice self-care throughout the program (Zahniser et al., 2017).

Research conducted by El-Ghoroury and colleagues found that graduate students should be instructed in self-care strategies and exploration beginning in their first year in the program (2012). The researchers suggested that first year students be encouraged to explore self-care strategies, educated to accurately self-monitor stress levels, and be supported in developing self-care plans (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Another key aspect of the habitualization of self-care is the periodic evaluation of effectiveness; students must understand that self-care techniques may vary in effectiveness depending on the levels and types of stressors experienced at the moment, and that techniques may need to be altered or substituted for others (Seward, 1999).

Creating a Culture Within the Program

Graduate trainees in psychology have been shown to suffer from distress and consequent interference in professional functioning, which then negatively influences trainee's provision of professional services (Goncher et al., 2013). Psychologists, as well as graduate trainees, must actively participate in managing overall stress management via self-care to ensure a balance between personal and professional lives while promoting mental, physical, and spiritual well-being (Goncher et al., 2013). Practicing school psychologists are ethically required to maintain competence in practice, and the culture of the field encourages a personal responsibility for maintaining best practice and competency, as well as engagement in self-care to ensure the longevity of competence (Johnson, Barnett, Elman, Forrest, Schwartzz-Mette, & Kaslow, 2014). Part of this culture is supported by the wealth of research emphasizing the importance and necessity of self-care. It is also being

driven by NASP Standard II, which outlines the expectations for professional competence and responsibility (NASP, p. 6). There is an increasing significance placed on self-care within the field of school psychology that graduate students are aware of, but the acquisition of such skills is something that must be taught and practiced under the guidance of professionals (Johnson et al., 2014). Education alone cannot ensure competence; clinical supervision, professional mentorship, and consultation with peers and professors within the graduate program play a vital role in supporting an individual's success as a school psychologist (Johnson et al., 2014).

Without direct support and instruction regarding self-care, students are left to self-assess their well-being. The literature denotes that when an individual attempts to self-identify their current level of functioning, they are often inaccurate (Johnson et al., 2014). Self-knowledge refers to an awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and behavioral tendencies, as well as an accurate understanding of how others perceive those tendencies (Johnson et al., 2014). Barriers to accurate self-knowledge can be both informational and motivational (Johnson et al., 2014).

In a study conducted by Goncher et al., the researchers found that graduate trainee's perceived self-care emphasis within their graduate programs was both directly and indirectly related to graduate training quality of life (2013). Graduate programs should create a culture of self-care by promoting the effective management of distress and consequent interference in professional functioning (Goncher et al., 2013). The promotion of self-care techniques to mitigate stress from program demands will assist in fostering resiliency among students; graduate students who perceive training demands to be manageable, or are given tools to help them manage the demands are more likely to display

resiliency in learning and working environments (Myers et al., 2012). While in a graduate program, particularly those aligned with careers in mental health, a student's intellectual disposition, ethical views and character are shaped in ways that remain for years to come (Singh et al., 2016). It is imperative, therefore, for the program to offer training for the whole professional that makes use of the academic, the reflective, and contemplative (Singh et al., 2016).

The influence of faculty on graduate trainee's socialization is greater than most administration realizes (Goncher et al., 2013). Research has shown that mentored students demonstrate greater confidence in their abilities and professional identities, and the counsel of a faculty mentor assists the student in developing a sense of competence (Goncher et al., 2013). Student-lead support programs and mentorship programs have also been shown to be effective in reducing student distress (Dyrbye, Thomas, & Shanafelt, 2005). It is also essential for staff to help students promote personal physical health, in part by modeling techniques and practices themselves (Dyrbye et al., 2005). Considering many of the professors employed in school psychology graduate programs have been practicing school psychologists, or are currently practicing, it is necessary for staff to be open about work-life balance and personal self-care practices. Especially for students who are beginning fieldwork and internship experiences, hearing first-hand from faculty regarding challenges in work-life balance and how to address such challenges is helpful (Dyrbye et al., 2005).

Beyond simply making students aware of their mental health, it is important to offer individualized support opportunities (Dyrbye et al., 2005). Many college campuses offer free or reduced counseling for students, and/or ombudsman programs, or have off-campus confidential resources about which they can provide information on. Encouraging school

psychology students to utilize these resources, particularly in the latter years of their program, is a good way to offer individualized support.

CONCLUSION

Other graduate programs build self-care into the curriculum, but programs specific to school psychology appear to be falling behind. While it is not yet specifically addressed in the NASP ethical standards for the field of school psychology, it is addressed for other helping professions. The ability to engage in self-care is accepted as a core competency of clinical training (Myers et al., 2012). Despite the limited research available on self-care and psychology graduate students, the literature on self-care, clinician burnout, and postgraduate student stress and self-care indicate the importance of self-care as a training competency for students in order to decrease the negative impacts of stress on academic and clinical training, as well as later career performance (Myers et al., 2012). It is imperative that the importance and praxis of self-care are taught during graduate training for those entering the field of school psychology. By building in these skills as they learn the profession, students can begin to implement and experiment with self-care practices as they undergo fieldwork and internship experiences; as professionals, these skills will enable them to better serve their students and their schools.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This graduate project, completed in fulfillment of the requirements for the School Psychology graduate program at California State University, Northridge, presents a concise handbook on self-care for students within school psychology graduate programs. The limited research conducted on self-care and graduate students suggests there is need for materials and instruction related to self-care to be provided as part of the graduate program curriculum or resources (Tarrasach, 2015; Zahniser, Rupert & Dorociak, 2017). The research indicates high levels of stress experienced by students in graduate school which directly impacts students' functioning while in their programs (Colman et al., 2016). The research also has indicated that the work of clinical psychologists and other mental health specialists places them in vulnerable positions for stress, psychological distress, and burnout, and that beginning professionals are among the most vulnerable from this population (Colman et al., 2016). Given the expectation established in the research, as well as personal experience of stressors within a School Psychology graduate program, this candidate made the decision to research the existing body of literature on self-care and create a product for future student use. This chapter will discuss the Development of the Project, the Intended Audience, Personal Qualifications of those providing the handbook to students, and a Project Outline.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT

This project was initially conceptualized during the second year of enrollment in the School Psychology Master's program at CSUN. This candidate hoped to create a

meaningful project, something that could be useful for School Psychology graduate students during their time in the program, or in their beginning few years in the field. In speaking with other students participating in the School Psychology program at CSUN, it quickly became clear that one of the consistent areas students struggled with concerned engagement in self-care practices. This candidate, along with other students in the program had been encouraged by professors to schedule personal time to relax, to reach out to others for support when needed, and to practice self-care. Students were reminded of the importance of prioritizing work, using checklists, and including time spent both with others and alone in our busy schedules. These reminders were given during the “check-ins” many professors conducted at the start of lecture, or as students packed up their bags to leave for the next class. Few suggestions were provided, which revealed a need for students to have more specific information in order to engage in self-care activities. Consistent with the research, the cohort experienced significant stressors and discovered vulnerabilities which many students had not previously been aware of (Colman et al., 2016; El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

The meta-analysis conducted by Colman et al. (2016) determined there should be a more intentional effort of graduate programs to “increase their efforts to help all of their students develop a culture of self-care” (p. 196). The researchers suggested including self-care information in program handbooks, discussing the value of self-care early in the program, advisors or professors working with students to create and monitor self-care plans, and promoting the of participation in nourishing activities promoting holistic wellness (Colman et al., 2016). Given these suggestions and taking into consideration the more informal, discussion based approach to self-care practiced in the CSUN program, as

opposed to a strategically implemented program, this candidate hoped to create a handbook outlining the basics of self-care and providing examples of various self-care practices that students could familiarize themselves with. The intention was for this handbook to be provided to graduate students as they entered the program to assist them in building an impactful self-care system. After beginning to read some of the literature on the topic, it became clear that self-care practices were often discussed in one of two categories: physical or social-emotional. For the purposes of this specific project, this candidate elected to focus on the social-emotional and cognitive aspects of self-care. Another student, Burlinda Seals, and this candidate were granted permission to utilize information provided from the other person to create a cohesive self-care handbook covering all of the major areas mentioned by NASP (Physical, Emotional, Social Care & Connection) to require self-care (NASP, 2010). This candidate and Ms. Seals combined respective information gained from the literature on the foundations of self-care, burnout, and awareness to form the beginning pages of the handbook.

Following meetings with Dr. Wilda Laija-Rodriguez, project advisor, the literature reviews were completed based on the topics Ms. Seals and this candidate had decided on. The OneSearch tool on the Oviatt Library website was almost exclusively utilized to find related books and peer-reviewed journal articles used in completing the literature review. Other websites, such as the NASP website, was accessed through the Google search engine. The literature reviews were written concurrently with a literature review completed for a paper presentation at the November CASP Conference; both this paper and the consequent materials (PowerPoint and handouts) were utilized in addition to the information found through the literature reviews to create this handbook.

HANDBOOK DESIGN

In terms of content, the handbook is divided into thirds, with each section providing separate information but building off of the previous section. The respective pages Ms. Seals contributed to are noted at the beginning of the handbook. Beyond the table of contents and acknowledgements, the first section provides the need for self-care, particularly for graduate students, as well as an overview of stressors and burnout pertinent to school psychologist practitioners and trainees. This section also includes worksheets for the students to build awareness of current stressors and self-care usage. The second section of the book focuses on specific self-care techniques that the students could potentially utilize. This section is broken down into information on Physical Health, Dietary Health, Emotional Well-Being, and Social care & Connection. The last section describes how to create a plan for self-care, and includes worksheets to support student planning as well as a list of resources beyond the handbook to support building self-care practices. The last few pages are reserved for references.

INTENDED AUDIENCE & INSTRUCTIONS

This handbook is intended for use by graduate students enrolled in School Psychology programs. Self-care is a skill that can be utilized throughout the entirety of the program to help students have success in managing both program and personal demands. Current literature on self-care suggests that students entering psychology graduate programs lack consistent self-care practices and are highly susceptible to symptoms of burnout even while in the program. The handbook is intended to be provided to students as they begin their coursework in the graduate program. Ideally, this handbook could be provided during the incoming cohort's orientation to the program in order to provide

information about self-care, both of its importance as well as practical applications, as soon as possible.

The handbook attempts to address covers a very broad scope of ideas, organized primarily in accordance with the National Association of School Psychologist's suggested self-care domains: Physical Health, Emotional Health and Social Care and Connection. All three areas are appropriate for a graduate student in any year to address at any time; there is no expectation this section of the handbook be followed in a linear fashion, nor is there a specific way that students should address self-care. Rather, the handbook attempts to provide an overview of various aspects of self-care in order to reach a wide variety of people who could be eventually enrolled in a School Psychology graduate program.

PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

This handbook is designed to be accessible to graduate students within a School Psychology program and is written in such a way that assumes the audience understands principles that are taught in the prerequisite classes for the program and has a basic understanding of the program and job demands. Therefore, the only formal qualification that an individual intending to utilize this handbook should have is admittance into a Masters or Doctoral level School Psychology program.

PROJECT OUTLINE

Chapters One and Two

The contents of Chapters One and Two offer an overview of current professional literature and other informational resources addressing the topics included in the handbook.

Chapter Three

The contents included in Chapter Three include a discussion of the project development, including a description of how the research articles were obtained for the literature review. This chapter also includes an overview of the topics and content for the handbook, a description of the intended audience and suggested instructions for using the handbook.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four provides a brief reference to the physical project, which can be found in Appendix A.

Chapter Five

The contents of Chapter Five include a summary of the preceding chapters as well as a discussion of the project. Future work regarding the use and revision of the handbook is also discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT

The product created as part of this culminating project is a handbook entitled *Self-Care for School Psychology Graduate Students*. The completed handbook can be found in Appendix A of this written paper. This handbook was authored by myself and Burlinda Seals; she provided information to the pages noted on the Acknowledgements and Contributions page in the handbook.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

This handbook was created with the intention of providing school psychology graduate students with a synopsis of information related to self-care and its importance, various self-care techniques, as well as guidance in creating a personal self-care plan. Researchers have asserted that programs educating and training future professional psychologists and other mental health professionals should provide a strong foundation of self-care education and training (Goncher et al., 2012; Zahniser et al., 2017; Shannon et al., 2014, Johnson et al., 2014). Dyrbye et al. (2005) detail in their research the importance of explicitly teaching graduate students skills for self-management and promoting self-awareness to reduce tension and anxiety while increasing the students' ability to cope with the stressors of the program as well as of the job. El-Ghoroury et al. (2012) commented that the high frequency of psychology graduate students reporting high levels of stress should necessitate programs including self-care instruction, yet the research indicates the limited access current graduate students have to such instruction (Tarrasach, 2015; Zahniser et al., 2017, Carter & Barnett, 2014). Given the existing research and the call for greater instruction, this handbook seemed to be an appropriate and necessary first step in providing students enrolled in school psychology graduate programs with self-care information and support.

The research consistently indicated that a large part of successful self-care was rooted in one's self-awareness, particularly an understanding of one's responses to stress and types of self-care that genuinely bring nourishment (Coster & Schwebel, 1997; Seward,

1999; Dyrbye et al., 2005). Due to these findings, the first section of the handbook focuses on supplying the graduate student with basic information about stressors specific to graduate students as well as warnings about the characteristics of burnout. Worksheets in this first section aid the student in determining personal stressors, workplace stressors, and a self-care assessment for students to determine which practices they already engage in, as well as to identify areas lacking self-care practices.

The second section of the handbook focuses on listing examples of self-care techniques based on the NASP identified categories of self-care: physical health, including general physical and dietary health, emotional health, and social care and connection (NASP, 2017). Each sub-section provides both a general description of the category as well as specific self-care practices included in each category. Within Physical Health, exercise, sleep habits, and diet are addressed. The exercise section provides a resource website as well as general findings from the research concerning the amount and types of exercise adults should engage in per week. In the sleep section, details are given about the amount of sleep is considered “enough,” the dangers of inadequate sleep, and tips to maximize one’s sleep benefits. The page in the handbook dedicated to diet begins with an overview of why individuals crave certain types of foods in times of stress, as well as a list of foods deemed by health.gov as nutritious and notes on the types of ingredients one should limit. The Emotional Health section covers several areas, including “Healthy Emotional Escape,” mindfulness, counseling techniques, personal counseling, breathing exercises, and spirituality and religion. The page entitled “Healthy Emotional Escape” delineates a series of coping strategies that enable one to escape a stressful situation, but in a way that is healthy and replenishing for the individual. A brief overview of taking breaks, relaxation,

humor, group and leisure activities as well as time and solitude are discussed. The page on mindfulness provides a brief overview of the practice as well as directions for success with basic mindfulness exercises. This page is followed with two examples of mindfulness exercises: a Body Scan Meditation and an Awareness of Breath exercise. The page on counseling techniques offers a summary of techniques found in the literature as helpful when employed as self-care. These techniques include practices from Positive Psychology as well as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; an additional summary of journaling benefits is also included on this page. The following page includes a discussion on the benefits of personal counseling found in the literature, as well as the use of spiritual and/or religious practices as self-care techniques. Definitions of spirituality and religion are provided in addition to group and individual practices one might choose to engage in. The social care and connection section is divided into two pages, one discussing supervision and peer support, and the other discussing supports outside of school and work. The first page describes research findings on the benefits of site supervisor and colleague support as well as the support offered by peers within the graduate program. The second page is dedicated to research on the positive supports offered by family, friends, and significant others to graduate students.

The final section of the handbook provides tips for creating an effective self-care plan, including a brief synopsis of the possible demands one may experience in the school psychology graduate program at CSUN. This is followed by pages to aid the user in recognizing skills (Personal Management, Relationship, Outlook, and Stamina skills) they may already have. The next section prompts students to use identified skills to address various situation demands, or to determine self-care techniques aligned with their strengths.

Worksheets in this final section assist the student in developing a Self-Care Maintenance Plan, determining personal barriers to self-care, and creating an emergency self-care plan. There are additional worksheets to assist the user in choosing and scheduling self-care activities for him or herself. An example of a habit tracker and weekly planner are also provided immediately following the other planning worksheets. The handbook closes with a list of resources, including websites, apps and books concerning self-care that students can explore, in addition to the exhaustive list of references utilized by the authors to create this handbook.

DISCUSSION

This project was intended to provide a means by which graduate students enrolled in school psychology programs could be introduced to building a self-care system via a handbook including relevant research validated practices. Research indicates those working in the helping professions are extremely susceptible to symptoms and experiences of burnout, partially due to the astounding lack of self-care practiced by mental health professionals (Dattilio, 2015; Wicks, 2008). In reviewing the literature addressing self-care practices of graduate students, primarily those within the medical or psychological fields, many researchers called for the direct instruction of self-care practices as well as the implementation of a culture of self-care within such graduate programs in order to lessen the long-term impacts of stress and burnout these students would experience as they went through the program and began working in the field (Goncher et al., 2012; Zahniser et al., 2017; Shannon et al., 2014, Johnson et al., 2014). For many graduate programs, the certification and degree demands fill up all hours of direct instruction, making it difficult to add in instruction on self-care (Tarrasch, 2015). For programs facing this dilemma, the

recommendation would be for them to at the very least provide their students with written materials regarding self-care, hence the creation of this handbook. Though the research indicates the clear need for greater instruction and effort devoted to instructing graduate students within the helping and mental health fields in effective self-care practices, the provision of written material on the subject to begin guiding students in that process seemed like a feasible first step.

This handbook, though a detailed introduction to self-care for school psychology graduate students, is still a work in progress. Future edits made to this handbook could include making aspects of the planning portion specific to the graduate program. That is, pages could be included detailing the specific demands of the graduate program (e.g. Fall Semester of the second year) as well as self-care suggestions to meet the limitations of that particular time in the program. The current handbook includes limited notes on the page entitled *Creating a Plan* based on the CSUN school psychology program demands. If this handbook were to be utilized by different universities, it would be in the program's best interest to include program-specific planning pages to guide the students' planning of self-care strategies. Another way in which the handbook could be improved is with the creation and addition of worksheets guiding physical health planning, perhaps addressing meal planning, common nutritional goals, exercise regimens or sleep schedules. In regard to the cognitive and mental health aspects addressed in the handbook, it may be helpful if a list of local counseling agencies, including any offered on the university campus, were produced according to the for each respective university program. Finally, due to time constraints, this project is limited in that formative and summative evaluations were not completed. In the future, it would be useful for this handbook to be distributed to students

enrolled in school psychology graduate programs along with a survey in order to collect feedback on the usefulness of the handbook. Such a survey could address areas such as ease of use, worksheet usefulness, and/or degree of detail and research included. Results from this survey could then be used to edit the handbook as appropriate to fit the needs of students at their specific university.

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California State University, Northridge

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Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

School Psychology Program

Culminating Project

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Self-Care

For

School Psychology Graduate Students

Written by

Kristen L'Heureux

In collaboration with

Burlinda Seals

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Professional contributions were made by Burlinda Seals in the following sections of this handbook:

Stressors and Burnout
Burnout: It is a big problem
Building Awareness
Physical Health: Exercise & Sleep
Creating a Plan
Dietary Health
Habit Tracker
Resources
References

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Purpose

Self-Care

Graduate students are told to “take care” of themselves by professors, family, and friends. They are warned of the imminent stressors that come from enrolling in a graduate program, and soon discover the toll of the academic and program demands. Especially for students enrolled in psychology programs, and for our purposes, those enrolled in School Psychology programs, it is often assumed that cohort members intimately understand the importance of and how to practice self-care.

However, we need explicit instruction. We need accountability and modeling; someone to teach us how to take care of ourselves as we go through this program.

In discussing self-care in the context of our graduate program, we drew a comparison with the idea of “preferential seating” - a catch-all accommodation found on many IEPs. The term “self-care” seemed to be used as liberally as reminder to practice “self-care,” without much meaning or discussion as to what such practices could or should look like.

Some students enter this program with excellent self-care strategies, others find out quickly that the strategies employed in undergrad or in past careers are not as effective in this stage of life. Still other students enter with no real strategies in place at all, and soon find themselves overwhelmed by the demands of the program. The literature indicates that self-care strategies, as well as long term flexibility with self-care practices, can be intentionally taught alongside other professional skills traditionally taught in graduate programs. When presented, discussed, and practiced within the context of a program, students have demonstrated long-term success.

This handbook is the first step in what we hope will become a movement toward explicit self-care instruction for students enrolled in School Psychology graduate programs. We hope that you find it helpful, and wish you all the best in your academic journey.

Introduction to Self-Care

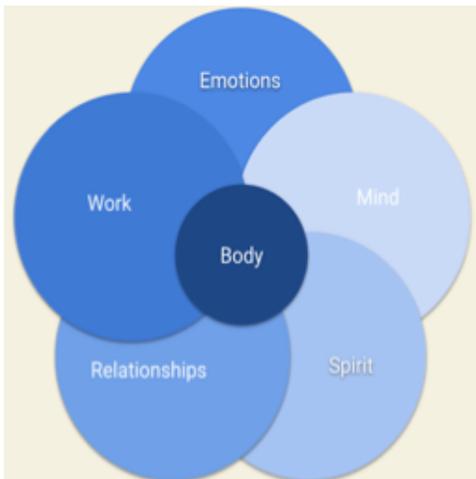
What is Self-Care?

Self-Care has been described as “the process of actively initiating a method to promote holistic well-being.”¹

- *Intentionality*: a planned routine
- *Holistic*: a whole-person view of wellness
- Avenue toward balance, personally and professionally²

Self-Care can include exercise, healthy eating, mindfulness, religious and/or spiritual practices, and social connections.

*Self-care should not be merely a practice to promote resiliency in the face of stressors but should be an encouragement to flourish in one’s personal and professional life.*³



Stress directly impacts mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual components of well-being. Self-care, then, needs to address these same components.

Many self-care practices can impact multiple areas at once. For example, meditation may be considered a “spiritual practice,” but it often lends itself to releasing tension in the body and calming one’s mind.

The goal of self-care is to find what works for you to address as many parts of yourself as possible.

Stressors & Burnout

*Stress is
normal, right?*

*Graduate
School
Demands*

Graduate school is supposed to be hard, and it is going to be stressful.

That is just the reality of graduate school. We all knew that getting a graduate degree was going to be inherently stressful, and after graduating, our jobs are also likely to be stressful.

We cannot make stress go away,
***but we can build a defense system for ourselves
against the effects of stress.***

And that defense system? Self-care.

Grad school comes with its own set of stressors.⁴

70% of graduate students report experiencing some stressor that interferes with their functioning.⁵

- Academic Responsibilities/ Pressures
- Finances/ Debt/ Student Loans
- Anxiety and/or Depression
- Poor School-Life Balance
- Family Issues
- Lack of Social Support
- Physical Health Issues

Balancing schoolwork, finances, program expectations such as fieldwork or internship is extremely difficult. All of these require time and attention, and all are expected to be completed well. *Time* becomes a valuable commodity, and *motivation* to take care of yourself may become more lacking.

Burnout: It is a big problem

Even after you survive graduate school, have your degree and credentials, and land a job, **you will still experience high levels of stress.**

Continuous elevated degrees of stress within a job can lead to absolute exhaustion of an individual. Among helping professions, this is referred to as **burnout**.

Burnout is a *serious* problem in our profession. **Up to 1/3 of practicing psychologists** may demonstrate burnout symptoms at any given time, and the literature indicates **as many as 50% of psychologists** reporting clinically significant levels of depressive symptoms directly tied to their work.⁶ It's a problem for any of the helping professions, putting us in company with doctors, nurses, social workers, and teachers.

There are three main areas that define burnout: *emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.*⁷

Emotional exhaustion: feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. This often includes interpersonal conflicts and feeling overworked.

Depersonalization: a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes a loss of idealism and often begins as a defense mechanism against emotional exhaustion

Reduced personal accomplishment: a decline in feelings of competence and productivity at work and can result in difficulty coping with the job demands and depression

So how do we avoid burnout?

You guessed it: **self-care**

The Nature of Stress⁸

The purpose of this self-assessment is to begin to have you look at your problems, issues, and concerns contributing to stress in a holistic way.

1. Make a list of your current stressors, briefly explaining each one.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

2. From the list you just made, reorganize it into acute (short-term) stressors and chronic (prolonged) stressors.

Acute (lasting hours to a few days)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Chronic (lasting weeks to months)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

3. Now, from the list you made, determine whether each stressor is mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual.

Mental

*Overwhelmed/
Bored*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Physical

Injuries/Sickness

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Emotional

Anger or Fear Based

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Spiritual

*Relationships/
Values/Purpose
in Life*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Building Awareness

Let's think about self-care and stress like we're looking at the ABCs of behaviors.

Poor Coping	Self-Care
<p style="text-align: center;"> A = Stress B = Poor Coping C = Short-Term Stress Relief </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> A = Stress B = Self-Care C = Long-Term Stress Management </p>
Scenario	
<p>If I experience a great deal of stress at work or in school, and I do not have a self-care practice, I may shut down, try to ignore it, or engage in behavior that may give me temporary relief, but is not healthy for me in the long run. I will be emotionally exhausted, not have the energy to care for my students or other staff, and I will feel incompetent and overwhelmed</p>	<p>If I experience a great deal of stress at work or in school, and I have different self-care practices I can do [e.g. deep breathing, making a coffee run during the day, taking a walk when I get home, etc.] I can better process and manage stress. I will have given myself a mental break, engaged in something to give myself more energy, and will be more prepared to care for students and do my job well.</p>

Notice that the antecedent, stress, does not change. Nor does the behavior completely rid the scenario of stress. However, the behavior *does* impact the degree of experienced stress. Despite what popular media depicts, self-care behaviors are not ordering a pizza and binge-watching reality television for 6 hours. Those types of behaviors are not going to help you be better prepared to face your job again the next day.

If we begin to think of self-care as our replacement behavior for poor coping skills, we can become aware of what “stress” feels and looks like for us, what helps us cope with stress, and when our old routines need to be changed⁹.

Maybe you notice that when you go for a run after work, your mood improves. Or if you attend church on Sunday, you feel recharged and ready for Monday. Or if you eat a salad instead of that pizza, you can concentrate a little better.

Self-care.

Workplace Stress Survey¹⁰

Enter a number from the sliding scale below, which best describes you.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY DISAGREE AGREE SOMEWHAT STRONGLY AGREE

I can't honestly say what I really think or get things off my chest at work. _____

My job has a lot of responsibility, but I don't have very much authority. _____

I could usually do a much better job if I were given more time. _____

I seldom receive adequate acknowledgement or appreciation when my work is really good. _____

In general, I am not particularly proud or satisfied with my job. _____

I have the impression that I am repeatedly picked on or discriminated against at work. _____

My workplace environment is not very pleasant or safe. _____

My job often interferes with my family and social obligations, or personal needs. _____

I tend to have frequent arguments with superiors, coworkers or customers. _____

Most of the time I feel I have very little control over my life at work. _____

Add up the replies to each question for your **TOTAL JOB STRESS SCORE** _____

If you score between...

10-30, you handle stress on your job well;

40-60, moderately well;

70-100 you are encountering problems that need to be resolved.

Self-Care Assessment¹¹

Rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself based on your self-care practices in the last month. If there are other areas of self-care that are relevant to you, please feel free to add them.

When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list you wish you tried, but haven't? Listen to your inner responses, and notice any frustrations or hesitations you experience while rating the items. Take note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

Use the following scale to rate the items below:

Rating:	3	2	1	0	?
Description:	I do this well (frequently).	I do this fine (occasionally).	I rarely do this.	I never do this.	This never occurred to me.

Physical Self-Care

- Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- Eat healthily
- Exercise
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when sick
- Get massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
- Take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes I like
- Take vacations
- Other:
- Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
- Other:

Psychological Self-Care

- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet
- Make time for self-reflection
- Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
- Have my own personal psychotherapy
- Write in a journal
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
- Attend to minimizing stress in my life
- Engage my intelligence in a new area, (e.g. go to an art show, theatre, etc.)

Emotional Self-Care

- Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in my life
- Give myself affirmations, praise myself
- Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- Allow myself to cry
- Find things that make me laugh
- Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- Other:

Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- Meditate/Pray
- Sing
- Contribute to causes in which I believe
- Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music

Relationship Self-Care

- Schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- Schedule regular activities with my children
- Make time to see friends
- Call, check on, or see my relatives
- Spend time with my companion animals
- Stay in contact with faraway friends
- Allow others to do things for me
- Enlarge my social circle
- Ask for help when I need it
- Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
- Other:
- Get regular supervision or consultation
- Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise, time off)
- Have a peer support group

Overall Balance

- Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
- Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

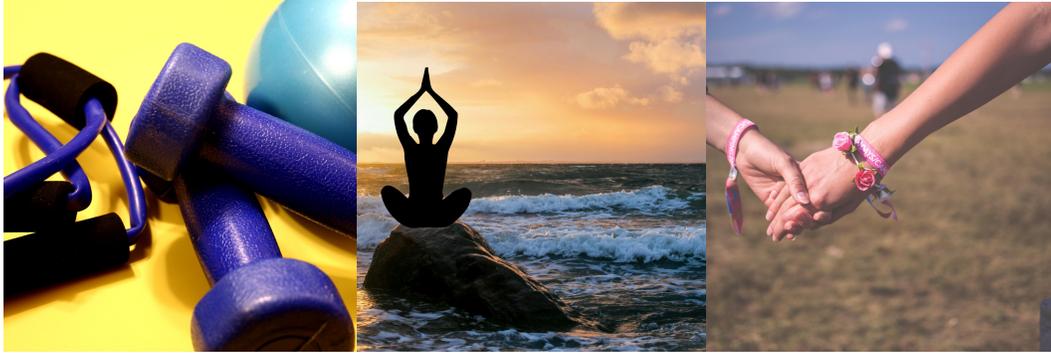
Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

-
-
-

Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
- Take time to chat with co-workers
- Make quiet time to complete tasks
- Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
- Set limits with clients and colleagues
- Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”
- Arrange workspace so it is comfortable and comforting

Self-Care Techniques



What has been shown to be effective?

The National Association for School Psychologists (NASP) has identified three main categories of self-care that, when addressed, help improve the overall health of the individual¹²:

Physical Health

Includes Physical & Dietary Health

Emotional Health

Social Care & Connection

Physical Health

Being physically healthy often falls in the category of things that we know we *should* do, but we're not always so great at actually doing. The biggest takeaways of physical health are as follows: **exercise some, eat healthy foods, and sleep enough**. Exercise decreases the body's physiological response to stress, lowers our perception of how stressed we are, and increases our feelings of self-efficacy¹³. Sleep helps our brains cleanse themselves of neurochemical byproducts, repair muscles and other tissues, and produce proteins that fight off infection and inflammation¹⁴. Research shows both exercise and sleep are effective in fighting the symptoms of anxiety and depression *even in clinical populations!*¹⁵ Stress affects what we eat, and what we eat affects how stressed and unhealthy we are¹⁶.

Exercise

There are a plethora of resources that discuss how much exercise is “enough,” and there is probably evidence for and against all of them. The important thing is that you find an exercise routine or practice that you find engaging and can commit to. As you try out different things, be mindful of the newest guidelines from the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP). More information and resources are available to you at [health.gov](https://www.health.gov).

Things to keep in mind as you develop a personal exercise routine¹⁷:

- Adults should **move more and sit less throughout the day**. Some physical activity is better than none. Adults who sit less and do any amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity gain some health benefits.
- For substantial health benefits, adults should do **at least 150 minutes** (2 hours and 30 minutes) to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of **moderate-intensity**, or **75 minutes** (1 hour and 15 minutes) to 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of **vigorous-intensity aerobic** physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Preferably, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week.
- Adults should also do **muscle-strengthening** activities of moderate or greater intensity and that involve **all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week**, as these activities provide additional health benefits.

Sleep

How much sleep is enough?

What constitutes enough sleep differs from person to person. On average, adults report needing about 7 ½ hours of sleep a night, but report that they average about 6 ½. Over a course of a week, this adds up to an entire night of missed sleep¹⁸.

It's worth it to make sure you get enough sleep.

Insomnia and a lack of sleep are tied to greater absenteeism at work, more frequent injuries, and even more car accidents. Sleeplessness is also tied to depression, anxiety, and suicide¹⁹. As much as we need to get our work done, sleep is necessary for us to function fully. At some point, it just isn't worth it to stay up to try to finish that one last report. After a good night of sleep, you'll be more productive and able to think more clearly.

What does a good night of sleep actually look like?

The National Sleep Foundation (NSF)²⁰ measures a good quality night of sleep as:

- Falling asleep within 30 minutes
- Waking up no more than once per night
- Falling back asleep within 20 minutes if you do wake up
- Staying asleep until within 20 minutes of your preferred time (or, when the alarm goes off).

To maximize health benefits, aim for being asleep 85% of the time you spend in bed²¹.

If these aren't happening consistently for you, the NSF has some suggestions on how to help yourself along²²:

- Turn off/ put away electronics (TV, computer, phone, etc.) an hour before bed.
 - *We know this one is tough, but research shows that you will sleep more soundly throughout the night if you avoid screens prior to going to sleep.*
- Lower the temperature in your bedroom a couple of degrees.
- Make sure the room is as dark as possible.

Dietary Health

A Healthy Diet

When people are stressed, they tend to eat more saturated fats, sugars, and carbs²³ - think pepperoni pizza, chips and cookies. We turn to comfort food to feel better, which actually has a biological basis. When we're stressed, our bodies are in fight-or-flight mode, AKA "Do I fight this lion or run away from it?" So our bodies want fuel. Quick fuel. Because we've got to run from the lion!

But we don't (hopefully) run from lions much these days. Instead, we tend to be psychologically stressed from jobs, family problems, financial stress, etc., but our bodies still want those fast fuels. The problem is, these foods actually **increase** our stress response²⁴. Take sugars and carbs for example; have you ever indulged in a pint of ice cream when you got home? You feel great for about half an hour, and then crash when the sugar high wears off, which is not ideal. In fact, that crash can actually lead to more severe symptoms of anxiety and depression. Sugar highs occur as your body goes into a serotonin overdrive, but they are never sustainable. Your body is craving fuel, but you need to make sure that what you consume will actually help you in the long run.

So what should we be eating? Again, there's a plethora of opinions, but *health.gov* gives easy guidelines²⁵.

Try to eat:

- A variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups—dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy, and others
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), and nuts, seeds, and soy products
- Healthy oils

Try to Limit:

Saturated fats and trans fats, added sugars, and sodium

Emotional Health

When we experience “big” emotions, such as stress, frustration, or anger, our natural inclination is to do something to escape or combat that behavior. Like emotionally running from lions. Each person will have different ways of coping, though natural trends will emerge over time as to if those coping strategies are healthy or not. The ideal is to develop and practice healthy means of coping, so that over time your learned strategies remain helpful and don’t end up harming you.

Healthy Emotional Escape

Vital Breaks²⁶: *This could be 10 minutes in the morning and afternoon where you sit and play music you enjoy, or take a quick walk around the campus. Even setting aside time to actually eat lunch counts. Give yourself permission to take these breaks - they are necessary for your sanity.*

Relaxation²⁷: *This should happen during the school day as well as after*

- Brief meditation, muscle relaxation, deep breathing, listening to music, looking at pictures, a few minutes of enjoyable reading
- Any activity that reduces bodily and mental activity will invoke a relaxation response

Humor²⁸: *Find something in your day that makes you laugh.*

Group Activities²⁹: *Avoid isolating yourself. A simple conversation or activity with a colleague will go a long way during a stressful day.*

Leisure Activities³⁰: *This can include reading, creative outlets such as music, art or dance, hobbies, travel etc. Make sure that you take time to engage in these activities when you get home. These are vital to re-charge and be ready for the next day.*

Restorative Solitude³¹: *Spend a few minutes by yourself at the end of each day to mentally process the day’s events and allow yourself to “shut the door” on as much as you can. This allows you to be present before engaging with others outside of work, and allows you to better shift mentally from work to personal events.*

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be understood as a state of being that requires you to simply pay attention to what you may be experiencing at the moment³². Many of us are cognizant of situations as they occur, but recognition is often paired with judgement or emotional attachment³³.

The point of mindfulness is to become more aware of your surroundings and actions in order to give ourselves space to think and breathe before reacting.

The Basics³⁴:

1. **Take a seat** (or stand if that is easier in the space you have). Make sure that you are comfortable in whatever position you're in.
2. **Set a time limit**. A few minutes (5-10) is perfect.
3. **Notice your body**. Take time to scan your body and notice feelings of tension, try to relax.
4. **Focus on your breath**. Follow your breath as you inhale and exhale.
5. **Notice when your mind has wandered**. This will happen, and it is okay. Simply notice it, and return your focus to your breathing.
6. **Be kind to yourself**. Don't worry about how often your mind may wander, or the emotions you cannot let go of. Just try to return to your breathing.

Mindfulness may include breathing and meditation, but the point of it is to calm yourself. If you find it helpful to listen to non-lyrical music, do it. If you find it helpful to focus on a mantra or saying to calm yourself, do it. Other times it may be helpful to set aside a time to simply observe your thoughts as they come up; writing them down can provide a guide as to what you may be worried about that day.

Mindfulness Exercises³⁵

When engaging in these mindfulness meditations, remember that there is no right or wrong way to do it. Simply observe what you find and practice letting things be for a while. If something grabs your attention - a passing thought, a pain, an itch - acknowledge it, then return your attention to your breathing.

You may begin seated comfortably in a chair, with your gaze softened or eyes closed, whichever feels better for you.

Body Scan Meditation	Awareness of Breath
<p>Take a few moments to notice sensations of breathing. Take deep breaths in, and let it out.</p> <p>Draw your attention to your feet. Notice the pressure of your feet against the floor, and any aches and pains you may feel from the day. Let your attention rest with your feet in this way for a few minutes.</p> <p>Move your attention to your legs. You may notice the feeling of fabric, or you may notice tension in your calves, thighs, or hips. Let your attention rest with your legs for a few minutes.</p> <p>When you are ready, bring your attention to your stomach and chest. Notice physical sensations - breathing, hunger or fullness - and pay particular attention to any discomfort. Notice if there is any tightness in your chest, or pain in your stomach. Acknowledge any discomfort, and breathe slowly in and out.</p> <p>Bring your attention to your arms and shoulders. Note any tension in these areas, you may want to slowly tilt your head from side to side or alternatively make fists and release your hands to address the tension.</p> <p>Finally bring attention to your head. Acknowledge thoughts passing by, but spend a few minutes breathing in, and out, noticing the stillness before opening your eyes.</p>	<p>Draw your attention to the physical sensation of you breathing, possibly noticing the rising and falling of your chest, or focusing on the air moving in and out through your nose and mouth. Which each breath bring attention to these sensations. It may be helpful to mentally note "Breathing in...breathing out..." as you breathe.</p> <p>You will likely be distracted by thoughts or feelings - that is okay, and normal. There's no need to block all thinking, but rather, acknowledge the thoughts and feelings as they come up, and return your thoughts to your breathing.</p> <p>Let go of any desire to try to make something happen. For these few minutes, allow the opportunity not to plan or fix anything.</p> <p>Breathe in...and out...returning your attention to the breath each time it wanders elsewhere.</p> <p>After a few minutes of sitting and paying attention to your breath, open your eyes as you feel ready. Make a conscious decision about one task that you are to do, and move forward with intention.</p>

Counseling Techniques

Positive Psychology Techniques³⁶

- **Gratitude Journal:** At the end of each day, reflect on the positive things that happened and record 3-5 things that occurred that you are thankful for, big or small.
- **Gratitude Note:** Take time to write a letter (or send a text) to someone who has had a positive impact on your life, or helped you in some way.
- **Pick a Mantra:** Find a quote, saying, or song lyric that is positive and meaningful to you. Write it on a post-it and stick it on your mirror, laptop, car dashboard - really anywhere that you will see it. When you see it, recite it to yourself and think about how your mantra can impact you today. Ours is currently “I can do this until graduation... I can do this until graduation....”

Positive Self-Talk is a Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) technique that research has linked to an increase in well-being and self-esteem³⁷. Essentially, the goal is to catch yourself when you are thinking negatively, and replace it with a positive thought. You may want to employ mindfulness and try to pay attention to these thoughts as they come up, or you may want to physically complete a Thought Record.

Thought Record				
Negative Thought	Emotion Attached to Thought	Evidence Disproving Negative Thought	Positive Replacement	Emotion Attached to Replacement Thought
I'll never complete this report in time.	Hopeless- Ness Inadequacy	I can re-adjust my schedule to make time. My supervisor said I have plenty of time to finish.	It might take me a while to complete it, but I will be able to finish this report before the meeting date.	Belief in self Hope

Journaling³⁸

If keeping a thought record is too much for you, try to at least journal when you are feeling stressed. Putting it down on paper allows you to get it out of your head, so you don't need to dwell on it. It also gives you the chance to reflect on it later and notice patterns in your stress responses. Is it generalized? Happening before or after IEP meetings? If you can identify when it happens, you can be more mindful of engaging in a breathing exercise, journaling, or finding something else that works to calm you during those times.

Personal Counseling

Given the confidential nature of our job, it is especially important to have a safe space to process particularly work related stress and problems. Research indicates that undergoing occasional personal therapy improves the emotional and mental functioning of mental health professionals³⁹.

During your time as a student, take advantage of the counseling services offered on your school's campus. Many universities offer free counseling to students, or are able to refer you to local agencies that can offer affordable counseling.

Spirituality & Religion

Both Spirituality and Religion have been linked to well-being in individuals, and such practices have been determined to be effective forms of self-care. Though spirituality and religion are often thought to be the same, they do have distinct differences, allowing for a wider range of people to access different spiritual or religious practices⁴⁰.

Spirituality	Religion
Definition	
<p>A higher consciousness grown through nurturing relationships with oneself and others</p> <p>Development of a personal value system</p> <p>Finding a sense of meaning in life</p>	<p>A set of beliefs and values that make up an identity and a way of life</p> <p>Experiences and activities occurring as part of an organized religion</p>
Practices (Group & Individual)	
<p>Prayer</p> <p>Journaling</p> <p>Meditation</p> <p>Relaxation Techniques</p> <p>related text</p> <p>Self-Improvement Classes</p>	<p>Playing instruments/singing</p> <p>Listening to music</p> <p>Volunteering/Serving</p> <p>Exercise</p> <p>Studying</p> <p>Being in Nature</p> <p>Reading Poetry or Books</p>

Social Care & Connection

In School: Supervision & Peer Support

Supervisors	<p><i>This includes: Professors & Site Supervisors⁴¹</i></p> <p>Research shows that positive relationships with professors and other supervisors is a helpful avenue for students to access support. This also allows students to observe and ask about practicing psych’s self-care practices; seeing such practices modeled can help inform a student’s own self-care routine.</p>
Colleagues	<p><i>This includes: Other SP’s, Site Administrators, SPED Staff, Service Providers (SLP, OT etc.)⁴²</i></p> <p>These relationships are particularly helpful because they understand the world in which SPs operate. They may provide particular insight about how to work with certain students, teachers, or parents based on their own work and experience.</p>

<p><i>This includes: Cohort members, mentors, other students in your program or in SP programs at other schools⁴³.</i></p> <p>Peer support has been shown to be immensely helpful as a protective factor against stress and burnout. Cohorts provide a naturally occurring mutuality and lack of hierarchy in which support can be found. They provide a sense of community as well as a safe place to discuss, learn, and find support.</p> <p>Oftentimes, your classmates and mentors may be the only people who have a full understanding of what you are experiencing. They understand the difficulty of balancing “real life” with school and fieldwork or internship, and also understand the draining nuances of the job that others cannot comprehend.</p> <p>While you don’t need to befriend every single person in your cohort, find a few people that you connect with in the program who you can turn to when things are stressful and difficult. The relationships you make in your first year may change as your progress through the program, but you will need to turn to others in your cohort for support and help especially as you go through your second and third years.</p>	Peer Support
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Social Care & Connection

Outside of School: Family & Friends

Maintaining relationships with family, significant others, and friends outside of school are **absolutely necessary to separate work and personal life**. Oftentimes these are the relationships that are impacted first; as your schedule fills up, you may choose to skip out on dinner with friends, or pass on Sunday dinner at your parent’s house. As tempting as it is, you need to spend that time with others - homework and report writing can wait, we promise. **Schedule time with friends, family and loved ones!**⁴⁴

<p>Family & Significant Others</p>	<p>Spending time with one’s partner and/or family is highly correlated with longevity of careers for psychologists.</p> <p>Surveys of psychology interns indicate significant others and family are among the highest ranked supports. These are the people that tend to accept us unconditionally, and know our strengths and weaknesses. They knew us before we entered the program, so there is no need to perform the role of “psychologist” when we are with them. This is a necessary, and welcome, break given the innate stress of our jobs.</p> <p><i>“Family members relate in such a way that allow us to drop the role and accept the support of family as genuine, without ulterior motives.”</i> (Norcross & Guy, 2007)⁴⁵</p>
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<p>Maintaining friendships that are distanced from your work or program offers a wider and healthier perspective on life⁴⁶.</p> <p>Yes, there is absolutely value in befriending people that understand your world. BUT, given the emotional, stressful, and crisis-driven nature of our jobs, it is helpful for our emotional well-being to surround ourselves with individuals not related to the field.</p> <p>Having friends that operate in different worlds helps remind us that life is not always this crazy - everything is not always an emergency, most students operate successfully and can navigate life without your help, and not every parent wants to sue you.</p> <p>Friendships also serve as a gauge of how you are doing. Friends that are familiar with you outside of the program or job can note changes in your life, attitude, or demeanor in a way that colleagues cannot comment on.</p> <p>Find friends that you can be honest around and have fun with. Your life is not your job, and they can help remind you of that.</p>	<p>Friends</p>
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Creating a Plan

Let's be realistic: If you don't make a plan or a list of what you need to accomplish, you are going to forget something. Oftentimes, that "something" is self-care. It tends to be the first thing to be forgotten when we get busy, yet ironically, when we are busy is when we need self-care the *most*.⁴⁷

So, let's make a plan. Think of it as your behavior plan. We're here to help with your plan. You'll find a few worksheets to guide you.

Where do you start?

Start by asking yourself these questions:

- *What are you doing now? What would you like to do more of?* (See: Self-Care Maintenance Plan)
- *What are your barriers to self-care?* (See: Barriers to Self-Care)
- *Who can you turn to when you're feeling stressed?* (See: Emergency Self-Care Worksheet)
- *Who should you NOT talk to about it?* (See: Emergency Self-Care Worksheet)

What can you do?

- **Schedule self-care**⁴⁸: Write it into your planner, journal about it, set reminders in your phone, whatever you have to do. We have included a habit tracker in the handbook that you can utilize to record different self-care practices. (We suggest **color coding** each habit.)

Be honest with yourself about what you need to do to make your self-care an important part of your schedule.

- **Try different things:** Self-care does not mean you need to make drastic changes to every part of your life. Engaging in self-care is successful when you find things that you enjoy and can realistically do on a frequent basis.
 - Maybe you find a friend that will hold you accountable to workouts by going with you.
 - Maybe you will schedule a mindfulness movement every Tuesday right after lunch.
 - Maybe you need to have your best friend text you and remind you to take a break.
- **BE FLEXIBLE:** This may be the most important thing to keep in mind. What may work for you one year, may not work for you in another year, or even after a few months. As your demands change and you learn to navigate the ever-changing work/school/life balance, **your self-care will need to change too**, and that's okay.

First Year	In your 1st Year of the program, you are learning to be a graduate student. Maybe you can keep up with the demands of the program fairly easily. Maybe you're finding that working is difficult to balance with school. During this year, you will likely have the most free time - this is a good time to try out different self-care practices to find what works and what doesn't.
Second Year	In your 2nd Year of the program, your demands increase dramatically. Not only are you expected to keep up with the workload of 5 classes, but you are beginning to complete your fieldwork hours. Especially if you are working outside of the program, you need to make sure to schedule in self-care. Self-care in this year will look different due to time constraints, and that's okay. Be kind to yourself as you figure out what works.
Third Year	In your 3rd Year you are primarily in internship, and your day to day work mimics that of the actual job. You are still balancing internship and coursework demands, and maybe some of the self-care you used last year will work this year. Be prepared to make adjustments as needed.

Personal Stress Skills⁴⁹.

In choosing self-care techniques to practice, it is first important to recognize what skills you already may have. Once you have done this, take some time to look through the other skills you may not have fully developed yet, and consider which ones you may want to start practicing.

Nancy Loving Tubesing and Donald A. Tubesing compiled a list of coping techniques, or stress skills, into four different categories. They indicated that “skills from any or all of these groups may be potential components of an individualized plan for preventing burnout and promoting vitality.” (p. 162)⁵⁰.

Strategy: Personal Management Self-regulation skills for organizing how you spend time and energy
<p>Valuing: Choosing between alternatives. Identify things/people/activities that align with your core values. Take time to track what you spend time doing; if you spend excessive amounts of time participating in things that do not align with your values and beliefs, you will experience greater degrees of burnout.</p> <p>Personal Planning: Set clear, achievable goals and track your progress towards your accomplishment.</p> <p>Commitment: Saying yes and investing yourself in things that you truly care about, and discerning when you need to say “no” to other things.</p> <p>Time Management: Spending time effectively. Try to identify and rid yourself of time wasters, whether they be specific activities or people. Set priorities to ensure you are using your time well.</p> <p>Pacing: Controlling the tempo of your life. Pacing requires predicting accurately what can be handled, taking on only that predicted amount, and then working toward that accomplishment. This prevents a “crisis mentality” or the feeling of being under constant pressure.</p>
Strategy: Relationship Skills Relationship skills allow you to control the environment by changing how you interact with people and the spaces that surround them.
<p>Contact: Forming friendships. People need positive contact with each other in order to feel energized and supported.</p> <p>Listening: Practicing empathy. Listening to others’ needs and concerns is key in developing and maintaining meaningful relationship.</p> <p>Assertiveness: Saying no and controlling what you are involved in. Assertiveness begins with recognizing your personal needs and abilities, and is carried out by expressing your preferences, needs, and feelings respectfully to others.</p> <p>Fight: This refers to standing firm in your beliefs. It is important to determine which issues are worth fighting for, and which ones can be left alone.</p> <p>Flight: Retreat. Taking a break does wonders to alleviate stress. When used appropriately, breaks can offer breathing space in the midst of chaos. However, you need to be careful that this does not turn into running away and avoiding responsibility.</p>

Nest-Building: Making your environment comfortable and pleasing to you. If your workspace is somewhere you enjoy being in, the work is less tedious.

Strategy: Outlook Skills

Skills to help you take control of your attitudes and perceptions.

Re-labeling: Seeing the bright side. When no other method relieves a particular stress, calling the problem something other than a problem may help to alleviate some of the stress.

Surrender: Learning to let things go. This means accepting the present, living with restrictions and acknowledging there are things in your life you cannot control.

Faith: Accepting the mysterious and unknowable. Faith skills are necessary to deal with life's mysteries (e.g. Why do bad things happen?), and can be practiced through either spiritual, religious, or simply introspective practices.

Whisper: Positive self-talk. Oftentimes our self-talk is negative, we must be active in telling ourselves positive things in order to confirm our self-belief.

Strategy: Stamina Skills

Skills to help strengthen you physically; to help you stand up to stress and strain.

Exercise: Exercise can provide a healthy "high" and reduce muscle tension while strengthening the body for upcoming stressful situations.

Nourishment: What you eat affects all of you. Developing proper nourishment skills means designing an eating style to support your life demands. If you are eating healthfully, your body will hold up better in times of stress.

Gentleness: Treat yourself with kindness. Allow yourself to take breaks, to laugh at mistakes, and to acknowledge when you need help.

Relaxation: Yoga, breathing, music, stretching, progressive muscle tension and relaxation, meditation, massage, visualization etc. The list is endless; try to find ways of relaxing that are easily accessible and work well for you.

Choosing the Appropriate Skill

Matching Skill & Situation⁵¹

Personal Management or Organizing Skills

- When life seems out of control
- When you don't have enough hours in the day
- When goals are unclear

Relationship Skills

- When you feel alone or unsupported
- When you feel depleted or in need of care
- When your work or home environment is a source of tension

Personal Management & Relationship Skills

When demands of your physical/social environment are causing stress and need to be altered

- *Assertiveness* can help you cope with frustrating administrators, parents, or advocates
- *Personal planning & time management* will help you make sure you keep a social life and still get your job done
- *Contact & listening skills* are helpful when you are beginning a new job, or are working with new team members
- *Outlook & attitude change skills* are helpful when you feel depressed or cynical about your job or when you are feeling stressed due to self-imposed stressors
- *Stamina Skills* work well when stress is primarily due to circumstances beyond personal control, when you push yourselves too hard, or when other self-care techniques are being explored and practiced, but are not yet part of daily life

Choosing the Appropriate Skill

Matching Skill & Personality⁵²

It is important for you to recognize your personal strengths and preferences when choosing what skills to practice.

If your strength is in Relationship Skills...

it might be helpful to spend time with co-workers and personal friends or family

If your strength is in Relaxation Skills...

you may prefer to learn new breathing techniques, or practice brief tension-reduction exercises before particularly stressful IEP meetings

If your strength is in Faith...

practice ritual or meditation during times of crisis

At the same time, it is important to occasionally take a self-assessment of which skills you use frequently, which ones are underdeveloped, or which skills may have a positive payoff but have not been touched?

Your stress will change over time depending on differences in demands at work and in your personal life. Your self-care practices and skills should change to as well in order to effectively manage your stress.

Self-Care Maintenance Plan⁵³

Review the Self-Care Assessment that you completed earlier in the handbook, which includes what you are doing now for self-care. On this maintenance self-care worksheet, list those activities that you engage in regularly (3's and 2's) under "current practice" within each section. Identify new strategies that you would like to begin to incorporate as part of your ongoing maintenance self-care, and pay attention to domains that you have not actively addressed in the past.

Mind

Current Practice:

New Practice:

Body

Current Practice:

New Practice:

Emotions

Current Practice:

New Practice:

Spirit

Current Practice:

New Practice:

Work

Current Practice:

New Practice:

Relationships

Current Practice:

New Practice:

Barriers to Self-Care⁵⁴

On this page, identify barriers that might interfere with ongoing self-care as well as how you will address them. Add any negative coping strategies that you would like to target for change, and what positive coping strategy you will replace it with.

<p>Barriers to maintaining my self-care strategies: What is stopping me from practicing self-care? <i>(E.g. Lack of time, financial strain, lack of energy or motivation)</i></p>	<p>How I will address these barriers and remind myself to practice self-care:</p>
<p>Negative coping strategies I would like to use less, or not at all:</p>	<p>Positive coping strategies that I will use instead:</p>

Emergency Self-Care Worksheet⁵⁵

When you are in a state of stress or crisis, it is very difficult to think of what self-care strategies you should employ. Creating an “emergency self-care plan” can help you react more positively in times of stress.

You need to consider 3 general areas: what to do, what to think, and what to avoid.

1. Make a list of what you can do when you are upset that will be good for you.

a. *What will help me relax? (e.g. breathing, music, reading, exercising, watching a movie)*

b. *What do I like to do when I'm in a good mood?*

c. *What can I do that will help me throughout the day? (e.g. avoid caffeine when feeling anxious, remember to breathe, attend to thoughts, stay present)*

d. *Other: What else do YOU need to do that is specific to YOU?*

2. Make a list of people you can contact if you need support or distraction.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

a. *Divide the list of people into categories by asking yourself the following questions:*

Who can I call if I am feeling depressed or anxious?

Who can I call if I am lonely?

Who will come over to be with me if I need company?

Who will listen?

Who will encourage me to get out of the house and do something fun?

Who will remind me to follow my self-care plan?

Other:

3. Identify negative self-talk, and come up with statements that you can use to combat any negative statements you may tell yourself.

Try to think about what you would say to a student with the same struggles and apply it to yourself.

Negative: _____

Positive: _____

Negative: _____

Positive: _____

Negative: _____

Positive: _____

4. Next, make a list of who and what to avoid when you are having a hard time.

Not everyone can be supportive or helpful in every situation. Go to the ones who can be supportive about the specific issue you are dealing with.

Who

What



5. Write this plan on a 3x5" card. Keep it in your purse/wallet (and on your phone if you can). Look at it often. Add any good ideas to it whenever you can. USE IT!

Weekly Planners:

We're sure you already have a planner (or two) that you're using, but in your planner be sure to **schedule in self-care**. Make it a specific color (pink in the example), or put a sticker by the activity to make sure it stands out. If you schedule it into your day or week, you'll be more likely to commit to it.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE PLANNER		
<p>MONTH January</p> <p>WEEK NO. 3</p>	<p>MONDAY</p> <p>Internship: Site A</p> <p>IEP @ 7:20 Consult w/ SAI Teacher @ 10:30 Para meeting @ 1</p> <p><i>gym @ 6:30</i></p>	<p>TUESDAY</p> <p>Internship: Site B</p> <p>Alt-K Class 9 -11 Preschool 11-12:30 Psych Meeting @ 1</p> <p>*Finish A.A. Report</p>
<p>WEDNESDAY</p> <p>Internship: Site A</p> <p>IEP @ 7:20 Assess Y.Y. Counseling: Group 1 Group 2 Individual Group 3</p> <p><i>gym @ 6:30</i></p>	<p>THURSDAY</p> <p>Internship: Site B</p> <p>Test X.X. @ 8-10 @ 1:30 - 3</p> <p>CLASS 7PM</p>	<p>FRIDAY</p> <p>Internship: Site C</p> <p>Test Z.Z. Counseling: Group 1 Individual Individual Group 2</p> <p>*Finish X.X Report <i>Dinner @ 7</i></p>
<p>SATURDAY</p> <p><i>gym @ 9</i></p> <p>Finish Z.Z. Report Work on Thesis</p> <p><i>gina's house @ 7</i></p>	<p>SUNDAY</p> <p>Volunteer @ 11 Work on Thesis</p> <p><i>Meditate before bed</i></p>	<p>NOTES</p>

If you don't already have a planner, get one! You can pick up these up at Target, Amazon, the campus bookstore, etc. If physical planners don't work for you, use a calendar app on your phone and schedule it in. Set reminders for yourself at specific times to ensure you don't forget to practice a little self-care during your day.

Choosing Self-Care Activities⁵⁶

What You Should Know

In the midst of personal and professional stressors, individuals will face barriers to self-care, or things that prevent them from engaging in self-care activities. These barriers often include concerns with time (e.g. not enough time to work and engage in self-care), money and motivation. However, trying to continue on in personal and professional endeavors without addressing symptoms and impacts of stress only add to the problem. Engaging in self-care will help you feel better and contribute to your ability to take care of all of the things you need to get done. It may take some time for it to become habitual, or for you to feel comfortable taking time for yourself, but it is worth it.

Activities to Consider

Emotional & Cognitive Activities	Physical Activities	Social Activities
Reading	Going for a walk	Calling a friend
Journaling	Running	Hanging out with friends
Drawing, painting	Visiting a park	Reaching out to a family member
Watching a movie	Walking a dog	Meeting new people
Playing games on the computer, phone, tablet	Gardening	Learning a new hobby
Knitting, crocheting	Swimming	Texting or emailing friends or family
Listening to music	Hiking	Playing a team sport in a local league or with friends
Playing an instrument, singing	Biking	Playing a board or card game
Meditating/Mindfulness	Yoga	Joining a book club
<i>What other activities can you think of that you might like to try?</i>		

Choose any of the activities on this list that appeal to you or use the list to help you brainstorm other activities. Pick at least one activity that you can do by yourself, and one social activity that you can do with someone else.

Identifying & Planning Self-Care Activities⁵⁷

1. Identify & Plan One or More Activities

Either look over the previous worksheet (*Choosing Self-Care Activities*) or create your own list of two to three activities you can try. Include some activities that have worked in the past to reduce stress. Pick at least one activity you can do by yourself and one social activity that involves someone else.

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Schedule Activities in a Calendar

Choose a day and time when you can do one or more of these activities (even for a 5-10 minutes) in the next week. Write them on the calendar below.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

List anything else you need to make sure you can do the activity (bring art supplies, make sure your friend is free that afternoon, check to see if trails are open).

Resources

Websites:

NASP: Self-Care for School Psychologists (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/self-care-for-school-psychologists>)

Youtube.com has a wealth of guided meditations, breathing exercises, yoga practices, home workouts etc. that you can easily access.

Pinterest.com has wonderful, creative habit trackers. There are also meal plans, fitness plans, and even ready-to-go self-care plans and goals. Plus, you can plan your wedding and decorate your dream house all in the same place.

Mindful.org provides free tips and resources to beginning a mindfulness practice. They offer guided meditations, podcasts, and post research findings regarding mindfulness.

Apps:

Mindfulness & Breathing

- **Aura** (3 min meditations & gratitude journal)
- **Brethe** (5 min meditations, tips throughout the day)
- **Stop, Breathe & Think** (guided meditations according to topics)

Exercise

- **Strava** (great for tracking your exercise. Running, bike riding, swimming, it's all in there).
- **Daily Burn** (quick (30 min) daily workouts of varying intensity)

Sleep

- **SleepScore** (Tracks your sleep cycle using your phone)

And don't forget your Fitbit, Apple Watch, or whatever other technology you're already using probably has some of the features already. The Health app on iPhones links to a *ton* of apps in each of these categories.

Books:

365 Days of Self-Care: A Journal by Jayne Hardy

Self-Care for the Real World by Nadia Narain & Katia Narain Phillips

The A-to-Z Self-Care Handbook for Social Workers and Other Helping Professionals by Erlene Grise-Owens

Footnotes

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