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Even Superheroes Need a Break: A Simple Self-Care for Helping Professionals

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Self-care and well-being often goes unnoticed with the magnitude of demands put on helping professionals, whether it is high caseloads, meeting performance measures, or stretching ourselves thin in order to help as many clients as possible. The role of a helper is no easy task, whether a social worker, mental health counselor, case manager, victim advocate, or supervision officer. We hear horrible stories of the trauma that our clients endure. Daily we are privy to the unfortunate circumstances of the individuals we serve and we are inclined to want to swoop in with our capes on and save the day. We impact our client's lives in a major way. Often times, we are able to make life a little easier to manage for our clients. At the same time, we have to be cognizant of our well-being. How do we unwind from the intensity of our professional roles and client issues? I have outlined 5 key fundamental practices to help you be the best super helper possible.

1. **Leave it at the door.** When you walk through your work door, leave your home issues outside of the door. Your coworkers should not be subjected to the issues you experience at home. The same applies for when you leave work; leave it all at the door. Do not take the office baggage home. It is always a good idea to consult with your supervisor and/or colleagues on a difficult case to help you process your feelings and the manner in which you handled the case. (Sampson, 2011).
2. **Do something for YOU.** Find a hobby or treat yourself to a relaxing afternoon. Also, exercise is a major stress reliever (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Something as simple as moving away from your desk during your lunch break can make a big difference.
3. **Understand you cannot do everything for everyone.** Although you may feel like it on any given day, you are not a Superhero. It's ok to not be able to solve every single problem your clients face; practice these skills, delegate and empower. As helpers, we often want to go above and beyond the call of duty and desire to change the world. Remember, by helping one person, you have made difference in the world.
4. **Do not be afraid to say no.** If you simply cannot (or do not want to) squeeze something into your schedule, it's ok to tell that person no or "maybe at a later date when my schedule can accommodate your request."
5. **Self-Check-in.** Know when you are nearing the point that you need a break. As helping professionals, we listen to our client's stories that are filled with fear, pain, and trauma and may absorb what I refer to as, emotional residue. If we do not have effective avenues to process the information we take in, providers may develop secondary trauma, also known as compassion fatigue. It is important to be knowledgeable about and recognize the symptoms of compassion fatigue. Symptoms include: nightmares (about something a

client has shared), zoning out, feelings of guilt or shame, and becoming unsuccessful at separating professional work from personal life (Simpson & Starkey, 2006).

We are so busy saving the day in our capes that we forget it's the simple things that we can do for ourselves that enable us to continue our work. Do not diminish your effectiveness by not recognizing the importance of self-care. In order to provide our clients with the best possible service, we must be at our best, and in order to be at our best, we all need to take care of ourselves.

References

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