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Personal Resilience Workbook

Self-care and Well-being

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1 Self-care and Wellbeing

Given the demanding nature of health and social care roles, prioritising self-care is essential to sustain resilience and wellbeing. Stress can adversely affect health and job performance, so it is vital to take proactive steps to mitigate the impact. The following characteristics are particularly important:

- Recognising the importance of self-care for wellbeing and performance.

- Seeking help and support during stressful times.

- Understanding your own personal vulnerability factors.

- Maintaining a healthy work-life balance and using effective recovery strategies.

- Optimism about the organisation's goals and a clear understanding of what good professional practice entails.

- Having a personalised self-care plan to repair, maintain and enhance your wellbeing.

Self-care and wellbeing questions
1. I am usually able to cope well during stressful times.
2. I have the knowledge and skills required to manage stress effectively and support my overall wellbeing.
3. I can empathise with the feelings and experiences of people who use services without becoming over-involved.
4. I am able to access appropriate support if I have a difficult experience at work.
5. I seek help if my stress levels are becoming unmanageable.

6. I generally feel able to prioritise my physical and psychological wellbeing.
7. On the whole, I have a healthy work-life balance.
8. If I am unwell, I can take time off to recover.
9. My job helps me flourish and grow.
10. Overall, I feel I make a difference to people who access care and support.
11. I recognise the physical, emotional, and behavioural signs that indicate I amexperiencing stress.
12. I engage in activities that promote relaxation and reduce stress.
13. I feel able to set boundaries and say no when necessary to protect my time and energy.
14. I take breaks through the day to rest and recharge.
15. I practice self-compassion and kindness towards myself when experiencing intense emotions.
16. I have hobbies and interests outside work that I find enjoyable and fulfilling.
17. I have a support network in place to provide help or emotional support during times of stress.

Building Personal Resilience Using 'Core Actions And Quick Wins'

This section provides a series of resources to help health and social care practitioners use the findings from the questionnaire to enhance their personal resilience. Included are:

- **Core Actions** – longer-term approaches focused on achieving significant and sustainable improvements in personal resilience. They aim to help embed resilience-building practices into your everyday behaviours and routines, fostering enduring resilience skills and habits.

- **Quick Wins** – short-term actions that can be implemented relatively quickly to address specific issues related to personal resilience. They are designed to deliver quick, tangible results and can serve as catalysts for boosting your morale, motivation, and confidence in handling stressors effectively.

Reflective pauses are also included to enable you to consider some issues in greater depth and explore options for change.

Self-Care and Well-being
- Core Actions

Core Action 1: Recognising And Avoiding Burnout

Reflective Pause

What strategies have you found effective in managing or preventing burnout?

Health and social care practitioners are at particular risk of burnout, which is a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout has three components:

- *Emotional exhaustion:* Feeling over-extended and drained of emotional and physical energy – 'I just can't do this job any longer'.

- *Depersonalisation/cynicism:* Active disengagement from one's job and negative attitudes towards colleagues or people accessing services – 'I feel that I treat some people I work with impersonally'.

- *Decreased sense of accomplishment:* Poor sense of achievement and loss of purpose – 'Maybe I am not cut out for this type of work. I'm just not good enough'.

Burnout can seriously impair practitioners' physical, mental and social wellbeing and compromise the quality of care or service provided. It is therefore crucial to identify the early warning signs of burnout and the likely causes to take remedial action. Some key symptoms of burnout are highlighted below:

How can you tell if you are burning out?

- *Cognitive changes:* Difficulty making decisions; lack of concentration; increased cynicism, criticism and suspicion of others; doubts about one's own competence.

- **Emotional changes:** Anger and frustration; anxiety and fear; feelings of meaningless and being under-valued; loss of enjoyment of work and sense of doing a good job.

- **Physical changes:** Insomnia and fatigue; unexplained symptoms such as headaches; increased vulnerability to illness.

- **Social changes:** feeling alienated from other people; feeling isolated.

- **Behavioural changes:** Lack of empathy; loss of sense of humour; depersonalising people; self-medication with food, alcohol or drugs.

Common causes of burnout

- Chronically high workload; fast pace of work; long working hours.

- Lack of resources and poor support from managers and colleagues.

- Unclear job expectations.

- Stretching yourself too thinly.

- Poor work-life balance; no opportunities to recover from work demands.

- Weak boundaries; over-involvement in work.

- Perfectionism; idealism; a rescuing tendency.

[See here](#) for more information on burnout in health and social care and how it can be managed effectively.

The strategies included in this section are designed not only to help you avoid burnout, but to enhance your wellbeing, and help you thrive personally and professionally. Many strategies included in the sections to support other FWBs will also be helpful.

Core Action 2: Cognitive Behavioural Techniques For Stress Management And Resilience

Reflective Pause:

How do I actively work to overcome cognitive biases or thinking errors in my decision-making? What strategies do I find effective in promoting more accurate and objective judgements?

2

Thinking errors are cognitive distortions rooted in inaccurate beliefs about ourselves or the world. While everyone experiences them to some extent, severe thinking errors can impair personal functioning, relationships and overall wellbeing. Recognising thinking errors related to self-criticism, neglecting self-care, inflexibility and feelings of isolation can significantly bolster personal resilience. Cognitive behavioural techniques are effective tools for managing stress and improving wellbeing (Bhui et al., 2012). They offer fresh perspectives on challenging situations and help people regain a sense of control.

Understanding the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) helps us replace cognitive distortions with more constructive thoughts, feelings and actions. Various types of thinking errors are shown below, alongside strategies for coping with stress and supporting emotional resilience.

Some common types of thinking errors include:

- ***'All or nothing' thinking:*** Seeing situations in absolute terms, with no middle ground. For example, if you are not perfect then you are a failure.

- ***Over-generalising:*** Drawing broad conclusions from limited evidence or single incidents. For example, after receiving critical feedback for one case, you consider yourself incapable of doing the job well.

- ***Discounting the positive:*** Ignoring or minimising positive experiences, accomplishments or personal qualities. For example, dismissing positive feedback and dwelling only on criticism.

- ***Mind reading:*** Assuming you know what others are thinking or feeling without any evidence. For example, believing that someone does not like you without any direct evidence.

- ***Catastrophising:*** Ruminating about worst-case scenarios and impending disasters. For example, feeling that you have overlooked a patient's symptom in your assessment and their condition might worsen rapidly.

- ***Personalisation:*** Taking responsibility for events beyond your control. For example, if a patient is upset, believing you should have helped them more.

- ***Labelling:*** Attaching negative labels or identities to yourself or others. For example, calling yourself a 'loser' for making a mistake.

- **Should statements:** Using '*should*', '*must*', or '*ought to*' to impose unrealistic expectations on yourself or others. For example, thinking that others should always agree with you otherwise you are at fault in some way.

- **Emotional reasoning:** If because you feel a certain way, it must be true. For example, if you feel guilty, then you must have done something bad.

- **Control fallacy:** Beliefs about being in control of every situation in your life. If we feel externally controlled, we are helpless and a victim of fate or chance (for example, believing you did a bad job as you were given the wrong advice). if we feel internally controlled, we assume responsibility for the wellbeing and distress of everybody (for example, if somebody is angry, you must have upset them).

- **Global labelling:** generalising one or two personal characteristics into a negative judgement about oneself or others. For example, feeling that making a complaint will make colleagues think you are 'difficult'.

- **'Just world' fallacy:** the belief that the world is a fair place where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. For example, believing that a coworker who has experienced harassment must have provoked it in some way.

Thinking errors have serious implications for people's wellbeing and professional functioning. '*Personalisation*' can lead to over-commitment to the job, poor boundary setting and neglect of self-care. '*Global labelling*' may dehumanise people who access services and make us disregard information that contradicts our preconceived beliefs. The '*just world fallacy*' might result in victim-blaming, attributing challenging circumstances to the individual's actions. '*All or nothing thinking*', often observed in people who are anxious or perfectionist, can be harmful for people accessing services as it may lead to overgeneralisation from perceived failures and overlooking progress in other areas.

More information on developing personal resilience using CBT strategies for social care workers can be found in Alexander and Henley (2020). This guide will also be relevant for healthcare professionals.

Core Action 3: Building A Culture Of Self-Compassion

Reflective Pause

How do you typically respond to yourself during challenging times or when you make mistakes? How might practicing self-compassion improve your response?

2

For people in emotionally demanding professions, such as health and social care, prioritising self-compassion and self-care is crucial. While these professionals derive considerable satisfaction from helping others, the emotional toll of their work can lead to burnout. Research by Kinman and Grant (2020) indicates that cultivating self-compassion can protect practitioners from these negative effects.

Self-compassion is the practice of extending kindness, understanding, and acceptance towards oneself, especially during times of suffering, failure or distress. It enhances our coping abilities and protect us from stress and burnout. Self-compassion is also a potent source of resilience, enabling us not only to endure adversity, but to thrive. Additionally, as self-compassion can enhance empathy and improve interpersonal relationships, there are likely to be benefits for people who access services.

Neff (2016) identifies three elements of self-compassion:

- **Self-kindness:** Being warm, patient and understanding towards ourselves when we suffer, fail or feel inadequate, rather than being self-critical and hostile.

- **Common humanity:** Recognising that personal suffering and feelings of inadequacy are part of the human condition, and not something that makes us different from others.

- **Mindfulness:** Taking a balanced and accepting approach to our negative emotions, so feelings are neither avoided nor exaggerated.

Developing interventions to foster self-compassion and healthy self-care strategies early is crucial. Kinman and Grant's (2020) research found that social care practitioners often view themselves as self-compassionate but are reluctant to prioritise their own wellbeing over the needs of others, seeing it as self-indulgent or irresponsible. Similar findings with healthcare professionals show that prioritising self-care in both working and personal lives can be challenging, with practitioners often feeling they need 'permission' to do so (e.g. Andrews et al., 2019; Egan et al., 2019).

Several strategies can improve self-compassion. For example, compassion-focused expressive writing can help us overcome self-criticism and develop the self-reflection required for self-compassion (see Quick Win 5.1). Other strategies, some of which are included in this workbook, will also be helpful:

- Reflective supervision and reflective conversations (see FWB 3) can foster self-compassion and encourage practitioners to prioritise self-care.

- Peer coaching (see Core Action 2.3) can help identify and share best practice among co-workers to improve self-care.

- Mindfulness techniques (see Quick Win 5.5) can help us maintain personal boundaries and enhance awareness of the self and the need to care for it.

- Using strategies to challenge unproductive thinking (see above) can also help us relate to ourselves in a more compassionate, friendly and forgiving way

More information about self-compassion and some useful resources can be found [here](#).

Core Action 4: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the basic ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us. [(Mindful.org, 2014)](#)

Many studies have shown the positive effects of mindfulness, especially in health and social care settings (NICE, 2020). For example, van der Riet et al. (2018) demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness in improving the wellbeing of healthcare practitioners, while Kinman et al. (2019) found it offers extensive benefits for social workers, including enhanced emotional literacy, mental health and resilience, and reduced compassion fatigue and distress. Interviews with participants also revealed that mindfulness helps individuals achieve better work-life balance by enabling them to disconnect from work-related concerns and recharge their energy and motivation.

Kinman et al.'s study also found mindfulness can help improve job performance in the following ways:

- When experiencing pressure, we are more aware of the options we have available to manage it.

- We are able to sharpen our focus and prioritising skills.

- We become more adept at identifying what we can and cannot control in high-stakes situations.

- We carry more energy by reducing wasted effort and enhancing recovery processes.

- We are less judgmental towards others and ourselves, more patient and trust in our intuition and authority.

Some guidance on learning to be mindful is provided in the Quick Win below. More information on mindfulness can be found [here](#).

Core Action 5: Managing Online Meetings

Reflective Pause

What strategies have you found effective in fostering collaboration, maintaining focus and maximising productivity during online meetings?

Many health and social care practitioners increasingly work online, a trend expected to grow as organisations adopt hybrid working models and engage with people who access services through online platforms. Digital working offers greater accessibility, flexibility and access to resources, information and support, but it also technological barriers, limits personal interactions, and raises privacy and security concerns. Practitioners might feel isolated from support networks and struggle with work-life balance, especially given the emotional demands of their roles. Regular support from line managers and colleagues is crucial for sustaining their wellbeing.

Regular 'check ins' with colleagues are vital for maintaining connections, offering routine, structure and support. Informal opportunities to connect are also beneficial. However, a day filled with remote meetings, emails and video calls can leave us feeling drained and fatigued, often more so than face-to-face interactions.

Managing Online Meetings

'Zoom fatigue' stems from the additional demands we experience during online meetings. Firstly, we must concentrate more intensely during online conversations to absorb the same amount of information as in face-to-face interactions. Secondly, the temptation to multitask during virtual meetings can hinder focus. Thirdly, technological difficulties and distractions from family or pets can add stress to online meetings. Finally, online conversations pose challenges as we may struggle to interpret non-verbal cues and follow discussion points, leading to prone to misunderstandings. Research showing how Zoom fatigue can harm people's psychological and social wellbeing and jeopardise their work performance, highlights the need for interventions (Li & Yee, 2022).

2 Guidance is available for social care practitioners to build rapport and meaningful relationships during on-line meetings, informed with service user input. The first thing to consider is whether a meeting is really necessary or if the objectives could be met through alternatives such as a one-to-one call or using email to review and feedback on a document. A decision tree can be a useful tool for this assessment (see here.)

Some tips for reducing Zoom fatigue are:

- **Limit screen time:** Schedule breaks between meetings to rest from screen exposure and process what has been discussed before transitioning to the next. Avoid scheduling meetings during lunchtimes to ensure adequate time for relaxation and rejuvenation.

- **Use audio only:** When possible, opt for phone calls instead of video meetings to reduce visual stimulation.

- **Enable break-out rooms:** Break up larger meetings into small groups to encourage more focused discussions.

- **Encourage movement:** Take a micro break and engage in activities such as stretching, deep breathing, or taking a brief walk. This can help prevent physical discomfort, alleviate mental fatigue and improve overall productivity and wellbeing.

- **Practice the 20-20-20 rule:** Every 20 minutes, look away from your screen at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds to reduce eye strain.

- **Adjust camera settings:** position your camera at eye level and adjust lighting to minimise glare and ensure optimal visibility.

- **Use speaker view:** Switch to speaker view instead of gallery view to focus on the active speaker and reduce visual distractions.

- **Set boundaries:** Communicate your availability and establish boundaries around meeting times to prevent over-scheduling and burnout.

- **Avoid multitasking:** While it is tempting to use the opportunity to do more in less time, switching between tasks actually consumes more time and effort and increases the likelihood of errors. Close any programmes or tabs that may distract you (e.g. your email inbox) to stay focused and present during meetings.

- **Agree an end time for the meeting and stick to it:** Ensure that meetings do not over-run. Sharing an agenda in advance of the meeting can be helpful.

- **Practice mindfulness:** Take a moment before and after meetings to practice deep breathing or mindfulness exercises to centre yourself and reduce stress.

For more information, see here.

Engaging With Email

Professionals typically spend one to three hours per day managing work-related emails (Hearn, 2019), although this varies by role, type of work and personal habits. Remote workers may spend even more time reading, responding to, and organising emails. Unfortunately, email has become a major workplace stressor, contributing to reduced productivity, increased burnout and disengagement. Failing to disconnect from email during evenings, weekends and holidays can also threaten work-life balance and wellbeing. Many organisations now offer guidelines to promote healthy email management and enhance 'e-resilience' among employees.

Russell et al. (2023) provide some useful strategies for optimising email management to safeguard both wellbeing and job performance. These involve:

- **Respecting and enforcing work-email boundaries:** e.g. using automatic replies,scheduling emails to be sent during work hours and removing pressure to respond outside these hours.

- **Regularly triaging emails:** e.g. frequently reviewing and dealing with emails promptly and allocating sufficient time for this task.

- **Observing email etiquette:** e.g. being polite and considerate in email exchanges, providing clearly actionable points and intentions.

Quick Win 5.3 provides some other strategies to help you manage your email traffic more effectively.

Core Action 6: Ensuring A Healthy Work-Life Balance

Reflective Pause

How do you maintain boundaries between work and personal life to ensure a healthy work-life balance?

Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium an individual strives to achieve between their professional responsibilities (work) and their personal life (including family, leisure activities and personal wellbeing).

It involves effectively managing time and energy to fulfil both work-related obligations and personal commitments, without allowing one to overshadow the other. Achieving work-life balance typically involves setting boundaries, prioritising tasks and making choices to allocate time and attention to various aspects of life. Striking a healthy balance is essential for well-being, productivity and satisfaction in both professional and personal domains.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for health and professional effectiveness. Long working hours can damage health and family relationships, leading to reduced satisfaction with both work and life in general. Additionally, an excessive preoccupation with work makes it harder for us to switch off from work and recharge our mental and physical energy after the working day.

Health and social care professionals can find it challenging to achieve a healthy work-life balance, frequently experiencing difficulty in mentally disconnecting from work (Chan et al., 2022). This struggle can lead to stress, mental health issues and relationship difficulties (Kalliath et al., 2012; Kinman & Teoh, 2018; Kinman et al., 2020). Research has highlighted the significant consequences of not achieving a healthy work-life balance. For example, the number of NHS professionals citing poor work-life balance as the main reason for leaving the 90 service tripled between 2010 and 2018 (Buchan et al., 2019). Similarly, a survey of nearly 1,200 social workers found that poor work-life balance was a significant factor influencing intentions to leave the profession (Cooper, 2019).

It is crucial, therefore, to make a clear commitment to nurturing your work-life balance. Quick Win 5.4 provides some tips to help you achieve this.

Core Action 7: Prioritising Self-Care

Self-care is the cornerstone of resilience and wellbeing. It contributes to practitioners' wellbeing in two ways: directly, by protecting their health, and indirectly, by helping them manage the emotional demands of the job and avoid burnout. Health and social care practitioners often struggle to prioritise their own wellbeing over meeting the needs of others, typically focusing on the wellbeing of their professional self (i.e. that enables them to support others) rather than their own self-care (Miller et al., 2019). Maintaining good health by using appropriate personal self-care strategies is an essential survival skill, not only to sustain oneself but also to provide the best possible support to people who access services.

Reflecting the three pillars of health, we need strategies to protect our physical, mental and social health.
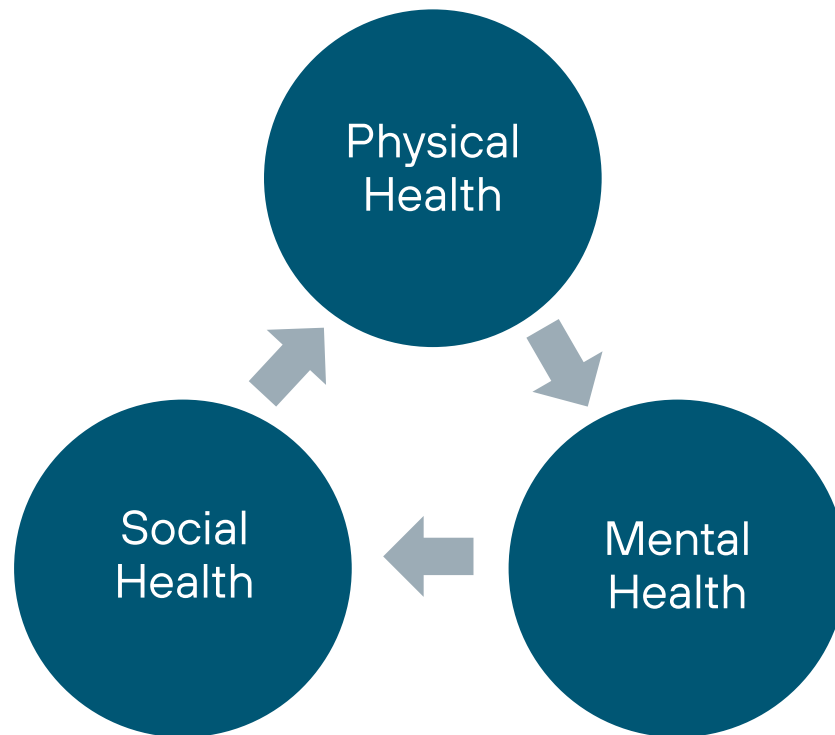
A self-care plan should also recognise the need to repair, maintain and grow our wellbeing. The following exercise will help you do this (see Kinman, 2022).

Repair: The remedial actions we take when we notice signs of stress. Although there are some common symptoms of stress, people can react differently – they may respond emotionally (*e.g. become irritable, feel overwhelmed or lose confidence*), behaviourally (e.g. become indecisive, isolate themselves from others or turn to alcohol or other substances), or physically (*e.g. experience headaches, insomnia or food cravings*). Key questions to help you develop repair strategies are:

- Think about a time when you took some action because you noticed symptoms of stress or signs of burnout.

- What signs did you notice and what did you do?

- How effective were your actions?

- What could you do to spot these signs sooner and take pre-emptive action?

Maintenance: Keeping ourselves '*ticking over*' and operating at full capacity. Key questions to develop your maintenance strategies are:

- What do you do to maintain your wellbeing?

- How successful are these strategies?

- Do you pay enough attention to your physical, mental and social wellbeing?

- What else could you do to maintain your wellbeing across these three areas?

Growth: building the capacity for resilience, to feel and perform at our best. Key questions to develop your growth strategies are:

- What do you do to build your mental and physical resources and invest in your future wellbeing?

- What type of things might destabilise your actions and what could you do to overcome them?