

## Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society

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Cowichan  
**Family  
Caregivers  
Support  
Society**

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# Self-Care for Caregivers

When you're a caregiver, stress is inevitable. Being out of balance can affect our ability to provide the level of care our family member needs. When we experience the effects of stress through secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout, our lives can be impacted on many levels – emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially, and spiritually.

- Self-care is any activity that creates a sense of comfort and well-being, both in the short and long terms, and can occur in various dimensions of health, such as emotional, social, or spiritual health.
- To truly care for yourself, it's important to acknowledge how you feel, to see and hear yourself in the situation, and to offer yourself comfort that will meet your need.
- Sometimes your need will be met by a long walk, and sometimes it's simply a rest. Self-care can be calling a friend or saying no to a loud and busy social event. Only you know what activity will truly feel comforting for you.
- It's important to note that self-care is not necessarily self-improvement. Although the activities of self-care can be beneficial and have positive effects on your health or fitness, the goal of self-care is to meet your own needs and to feel better, cared for, and more grounded.

Learn from yesterday

Live for today

Look to tomorrow

Rest this afternoon.

## Self-Care Assessment

How well are you taking care of yourself in your life right now? Do you prioritize some dimensions of health over others? Rate the following self-care activities according to how well you think you are doing:

3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)

2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)

1 = I barely or rarely do this

0 = 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

Allow myself to rest or have times when I am not "productive"

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: \_\_\_\_\_

### 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

See a counsellor or therapist

Write in a journal

Read things that are unrelated to work

Do something at which I am not expert or in charge

Try to minimize the stress in my life

Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre

Be curious

Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 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
  - Love 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: \_\_\_\_\_
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## Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
  - Spend time in nature
  - Find a spiritual connection or community
  - Be open to inspiration
  - Cherish my optimism and hope
  - Be aware of non-material aspects of life
  - Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
  - Be open to not knowing
  - Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
  - Meditate, Pray
  - Sing
  - Have experiences of awe
  - Contribute to causes in which I believe
  - Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
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## 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
  - Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
  - 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: \_\_\_\_\_
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## Workplace or Professional Self-Care (for employed caregivers)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 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 workload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Get regular supervision or consultation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have a peer support group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Develop an area of professional interest focused on wellness, not illness

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). *Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization*. Norton.

(Retrieved 8/6/2010 from [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self\\_care\\_assess.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self_care_assess.shtml) and adapted by Lisa D. Butler, Ph.D.)

## Ok, Now What?

Reflect on your results.

- Are there dimensions of your health that you value and prioritize?
- Are there dimensions of your health that you ignore?
- What self-care activities do you currently engage in regularly (those with a score of 2 or 3)? Note what dimension of health they're in.
- What self-care activities scored a 1, a 0, or a '?' on the assessment? What dimensions of health are they in?

Why are some dimensions of health more important to you than others? How did you learn these priorities? From your family, from your friends, from our culture?

- What values or beliefs are your current self-care practices based in?
- What barriers do you have to seeing and hearing yourself and acting on your own behalf?
- Consider the impact your prioritization of certain dimensions of health above others is having on your current health and wellbeing.
- Consider how your approach to your own health and well-being might influence your role as a caregiver. What effect could it have on your ability to support those you love?
- Are you willing to undertake new activities in the dimensions that are currently neglected? If so, which ones? If not, why not?
- Do you feel resistance to undertaking any activities? Are you willing to let go of any negative self-care practices? Reflect and try to gain some insight about this.

## Personal Self-Care Plan

Now that you've gained more insight into how you currently take care of yourself, you can work on a self-care plan to support yourself in your caregiving role and your life. This plan will look different for each person so there is no one right way to create it.

- Include activities in each dimension of health, including the activities you're already practicing and the adoption of new activities. But not too many! Remember that self-care is not necessarily self-improvement, and shouldn't look like a list of New Year's Resolutions. The best and most sustainable self-care is simple.
- An understanding of your personal traits and beliefs that might make self-care a challenge for you, and a plan to meet yourself in this place of resistance. What will you do if you find yourself resisting your own self-care? Often the biggest barrier to practicing self-care is being unable to say, "I matter and how I feel matters."
- Creativity and inspiration. Your self-care plan can be light-hearted, self-compassionate and full of goodwill for yourself.

