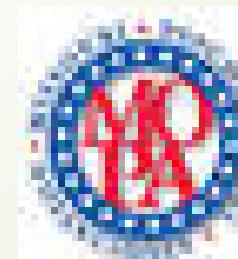


Self-Care as an Ethical Imperative: Maintaining Competence & Flourishing During Challenging Times

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PSYCHOLOGICAL
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Recent Headlines:

- ▶ How COVID-19 Is Setting Back Women's Careers & Losing Hard-Won Gains—Comprehensive Study of Working Women & Men
- ▶ Alcohol Consumption Rising Sharply During Pandemic & Women's Heavy Drinking Has Soared—an "Effective Pain Killer"
- ▶ Loneliness Doubled Among Older Adults in First Months of COVID-19
- ▶ A Dentist Sees More Cracked Teeth. What's Going On?
- ▶ Prevalence of Depression Symptoms in US Up from 8.5% pre-COVID-19 to 27.8% During COVID-19



Your special calm place?



Life for you during the pandemic?

Review of Key Concepts

Stress, Distress,
Burnout,
Vicarious
Traumatization,
Surviving, and
Thriving

Self-care and
the promotion
of wellness

Self-care and
competence

Self-care as an
ethical
imperative



Distress and Burnout

Distress: The subjective emotional response an individual experiences in response to any of a number of challenges, demands, and stresses in one's life (Barnett, Johnston, & Hillard, 2006). Burnout includes:

emotional exhaustion,

depersonalization, and

a decreased sense of accomplishment.



Burnout

Freudenberger (1984) described burnout as “a depletion or exhaustion of a person’s mental and physical resources attributed to his or her prolonged, yet unsuccessful striving toward unrealistic expectations, internally or externally derived (p. 223).

How might this be relevant to your current circumstances?



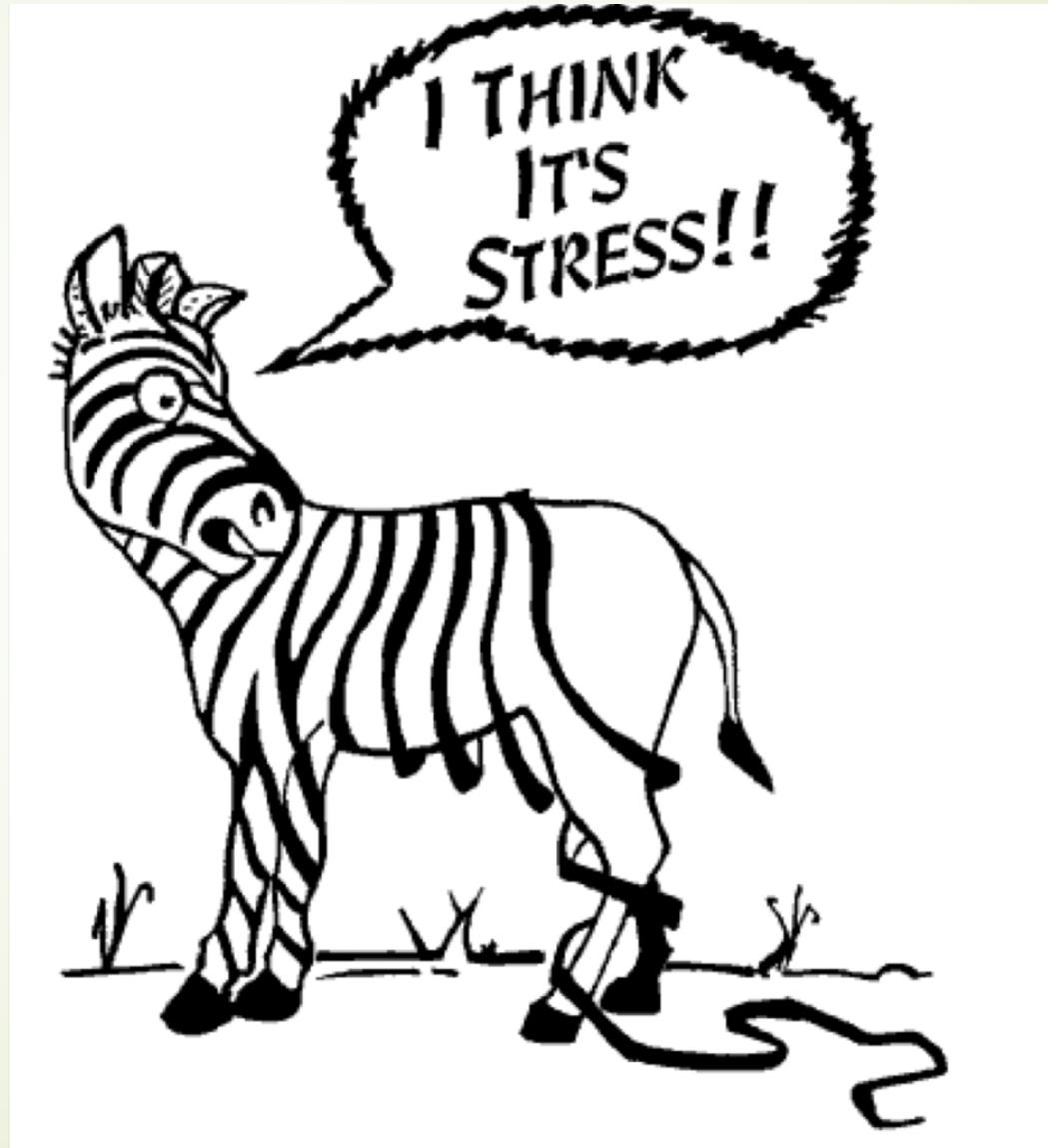
Vicarious Traumatization

- ▶ Vicarious traumatization (secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, co-victimization) described by Figley (1995) and others.
- ▶ Clinicians who work with victims of trauma are at increased risk of this developing.
- ▶ Symptoms include intrusive thoughts and images related to the client's disclosures, avoidant responses, physiologic arousal, somatic complaints, distressing emotions, and addictive or compulsive behaviors that may adversely impact one's competence.

Key Points to Remember

- ▶ Over time, distress left unchecked may result in problems with professional competence (as well as difficulties in your personal life).
- ▶ This may be a gradual process and difficult to accurately self-assess.
- ▶ We are all vulnerable to this at various points in time.
- ▶ Distress, burnout, vicarious traumatization, and impairment fall on a continuum and are not discrete entities.

Know How Stress Affects You



The role of
various stressors
in your personal
life

The role of
various stressors
in your
professional life

The Personal
Life/Professional
Life Split



"And that's how you make a peanut-butter sandwich."

Self-care and Resilience

- ▶ The person of the clinician as the instrument of change.
- ▶ Self-care as your regularly scheduled maintenance.
- ▶ Weeding your garden.
- ▶ Understanding resilience as a resource you can develop and enhance.

Developing and Strengthening Resilience

- ▶ Pushing yourself outside your comfort zone.
- ▶ Removing the success/failure model.
- ▶ Focusing on learning and continuous growth and progress.
- ▶ Realistic goal setting.
- ▶ Accept that very little goes according to plan. Plan for this.
- ▶ A focus on, understanding of, and dedication to one's overarching mission.
- ▶ Cognitive flexibility; a lack of cognitive rigidity.
- ▶ A focus on what we can influence and impact, not on what is out of our control. An active, problem-solving approach is helpful; passivity and avoidance are not.
- ▶ A strong social support network enhances resilience; don't try to go it alone. Rely on each other and work to establish networks of mutual support.

Starting to Create Your Self-Care Plan

- ▶ Consider your list of stressors in your life (professional and personal). Update as needed.
- ▶ Know your vulnerabilities, risks, and blind spots.
- ▶ In addition to all the typical challenges and stressors in your work and life, how has the pandemic added to them?
- ▶ We each need to address the impact of the pandemic on us. Deal with your frustrations, loss, grieving, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, etc.
- ▶ Have reasonable and realistic expectations and set realistic goals for yourself.

Working Within the Constraints of Reality

- ▶ Time management, limit setting, and the time budget.
- ▶ Understanding balance as an aspirational goal.
- ▶ Balance within your professional life, within your personal life, and between the two.
- ▶ Goal Setting

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**"Before we begin our Time Management Seminar,
did everyone get one of these 36-hour wrist watches?"**

Not Business as Usual

Strive for balance in your life but be flexible and have realistic goals for yourself. As one parent recently wrote in the New York Times:

“Balancing is not a thing when you are parenting, teaching and working simultaneously. It’s simply not possible to do it all or do any of it well”

(Learning, October 18, 2020, p. 7).

- ▶ How do we need to modify our expectations of ourselves and of others?



Self-Care as an Ethical Imperative

- Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence: "Psychologists strive to be aware of the possible effect of their own physical and mental health on their ability to help those with whom they work".
- Other principles and virtues: Fidelity, Justice, Autonomy.



Ethical Standard 2: Competence

➤ 2.03 Maintaining Competence

Psychologists undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence.

➤ 2.06 Personal Problems and Conflicts

(a) Psychologists refrain from initiating an activity when they know or should know that there is a substantial likelihood that their personal problems will prevent them from performing their work-related activities in a competent manner.

(b) When psychologists become aware of personal problems that may interfere with their performing work-related duties adequately, they take appropriate measures, such as obtaining professional consultation or assistance, and determine whether they should limit, suspend, or terminate their work-related activities.



Additional Ethics Standards

- Standard 3.04, Avoiding Harm, states:
- “Psychologists take reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/patients, students, supervisees, research participants, organizational clients, and others with whom they work, and to minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable.”
- Standard 2.03, Maintaining Competence, states that “Psychologists undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence.”

The Self-Care Imperative

- ▶ Self-care as an ethical imperative.
- ▶ Self-care and wellness: psychological/emotional, physical, relationship, spiritual.
- ▶ The roles of self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-assessment.
- ▶ Positive career-sustaining behaviors.
- ▶ Maladaptive coping strategies.

Maladaptive Coping Strategies: How much of a good thing is too much?

- Working longer hours to compensate for lost wages due to managed care, cutting the therapy hour to less than 50 minutes, seeing multiple clients back-to-back with no breaks in between, and taking fewer vacations.
- Attending less to your own personal health needs by getting less sleep, getting less exercise, not maintaining a healthy dietary regimen, and spending less time engaging in pleasurable activities.
- Self-medication: alcohol, drugs, food, caffeine, nicotine, other substances.

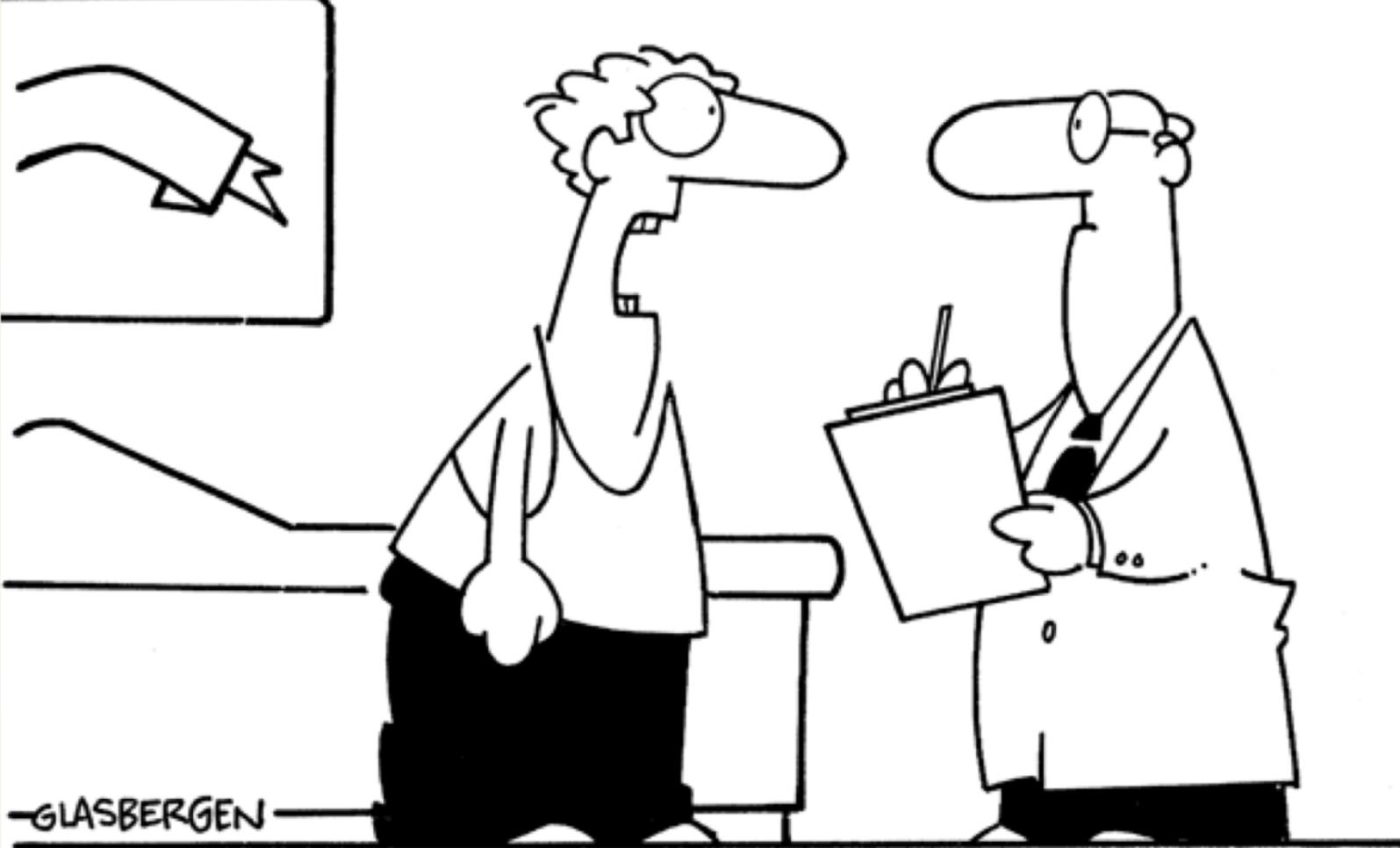
The Role of Awareness

- Self-reflection on an ongoing basis.
- Honesty about the impact of stressors on our functioning and wellness.
- Know your personal warning signs – boredom, anger, daydreaming, wishing you were somewhere else, ending sessions early, arriving late, missing or canceling appointments, feeling fatigued, loss of enjoyment, low motivation, impaired sleep, self-medication.

Your Self-Care Plan: First Steps

- ▶ You should already have a list of your current stressors in your professional and personal lives.
- ▶ Add a list of the range of self-care activities relevant and accessible to you. Remember they need to be enjoyable, relaxing, or rejuvenating.
- ▶ Write out the maladaptive coping strategies you are at risk of using.
- ▶ List your personal warning signs of the need for increased self-care or changes in your life.

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**"I'm learning how to relax, doctor —
but I want to relax better and faster!
I want to be on the cutting edge of relaxation!"**



Self-Assessment

- ▶ There are many self-assessment tools easily accessible on the Internet. Once easy to use tool to assess for symptoms of burnout can be found at:
 - ▶ https://www.onelegacy.org/docs/BurnoutQuestionnaire_PublicWelfare1981_Modified2013.pdf
- Additionally, Kramen-Kahn (2002) suggests the following 15 questions to determine your current level of personal self-care. Do you:
 - 1) appear competent and professional?
 - 2) appear warm, caring, and accepting?
 - 3) regularly seek case consultation with another professional while protecting confidentiality.
 - 4) at the end of a stressful day, frequently utilize self-talk to put aside thoughts of clients?
 - 5) maintain a balance between work, family and play?



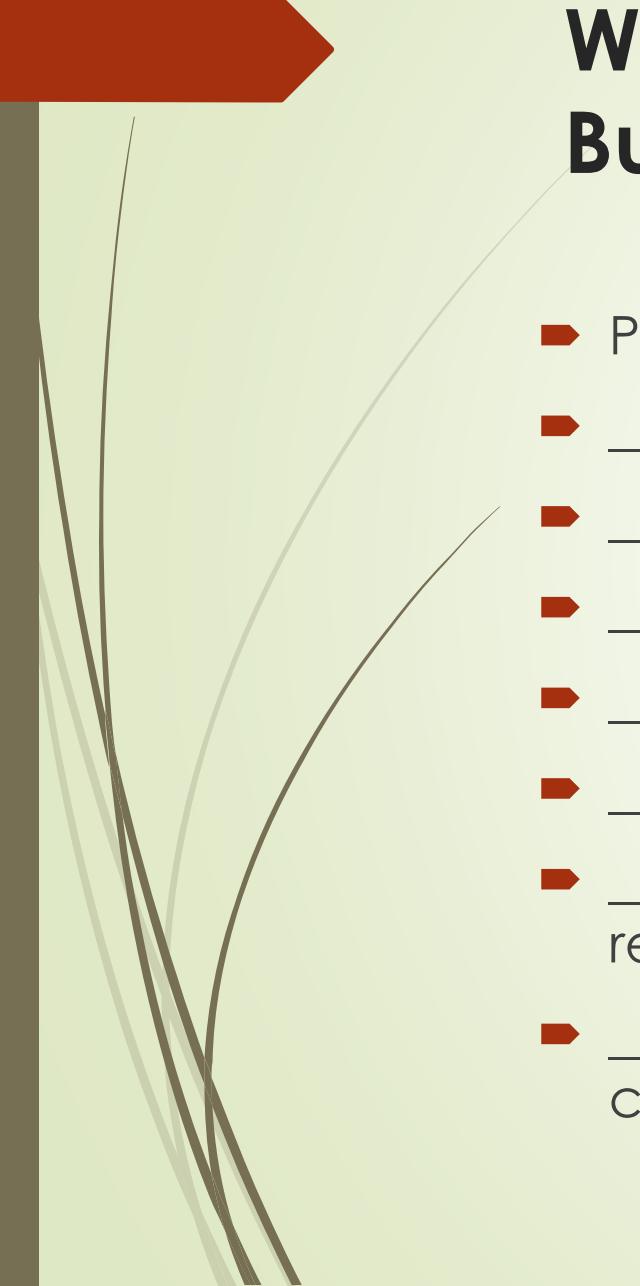
Self-Assessment (cont.)

- 6) nurture a strong support network of family and friends?
- 7) use healthy leisure activities as a way of helping yourself relax from work? If work is your whole world, watch out! You do not have a balanced life.
- 8) often feel renewed and energized by working with clients?
- 9) develop new interests in your professional work?
- 10) perceive clients' problems as interesting and look forward to working with clients?
- 11) maintain objectivity regarding clients' problems?
- 12) maintain good boundaries with clients, allowing them to take full responsibility for their actions while providing support for change?



Self-Assessment (cont.)

- 13) use personal psychotherapy as a means of maintaining and/or improving your functioning as a psychotherapist?
 - 14) maintain a sense of humor? You can laugh with your clients.
 - 15) act in accordance with legal and ethical standards? (p. 12)
-
- What are some of the challenges associated with accurately responding to these questions to yield an accurate and objective assessment of your self-care needs? What can be done about this?



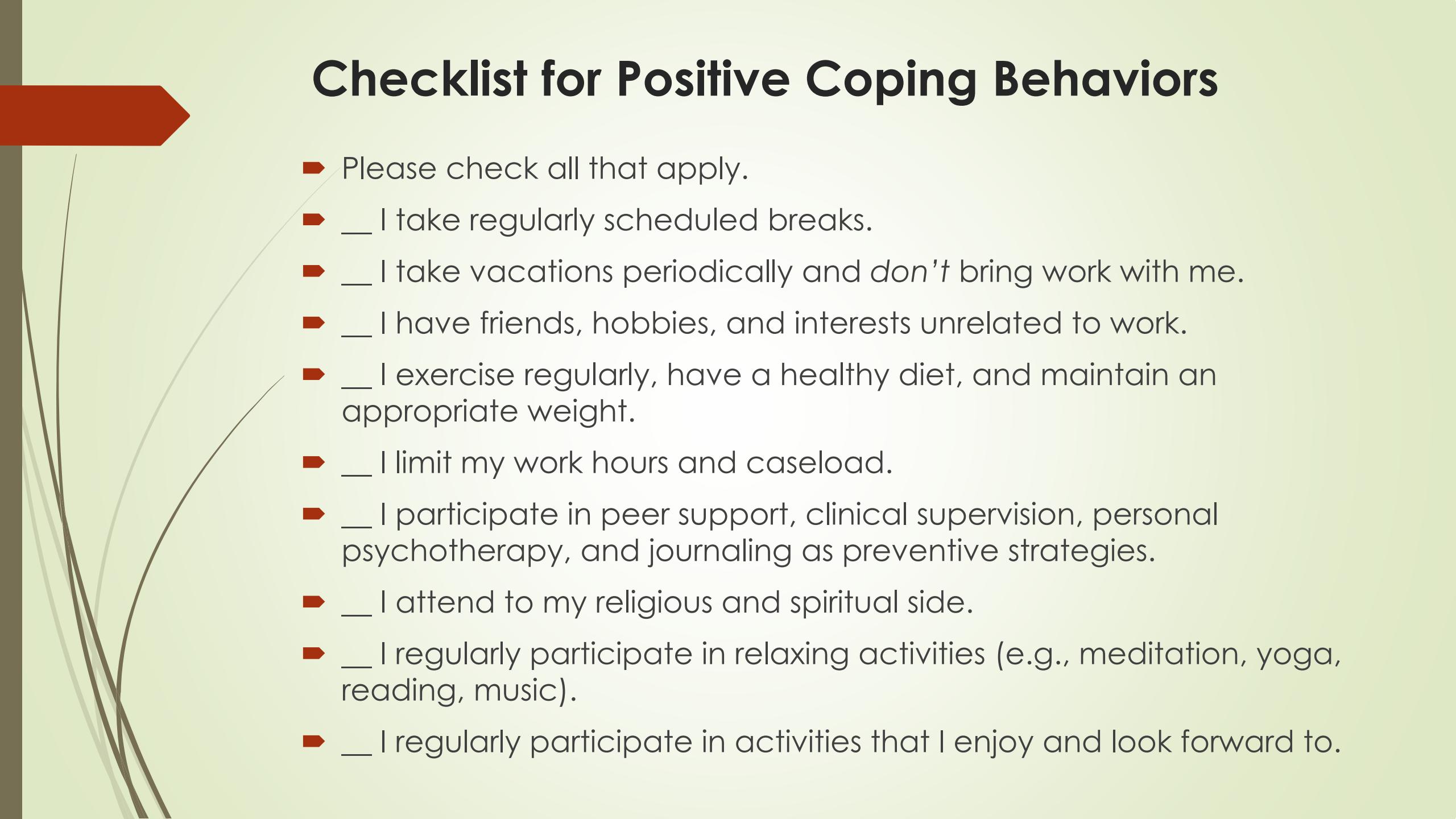
Warning Signs Questionnaire for Distress, Burnout, and Impairment (Barnett, 2008)

- ▶ Please check all that apply.
- ▶ I have disturbed sleep, eating, or concentration.
- ▶ I isolate myself from family, friends, and colleagues.
- ▶ I fail to take regularly scheduled breaks.
- ▶ I enjoy my work less than in the past.
- ▶ I find myself bored, disinterested, or easily irritated by clients.
- ▶ I have experienced recent life stresses such as illness, personal loss, relationship difficulties, financial problems, or legal trouble.
- ▶ I feel emotionally exhausted or drained after meeting with certain clients.



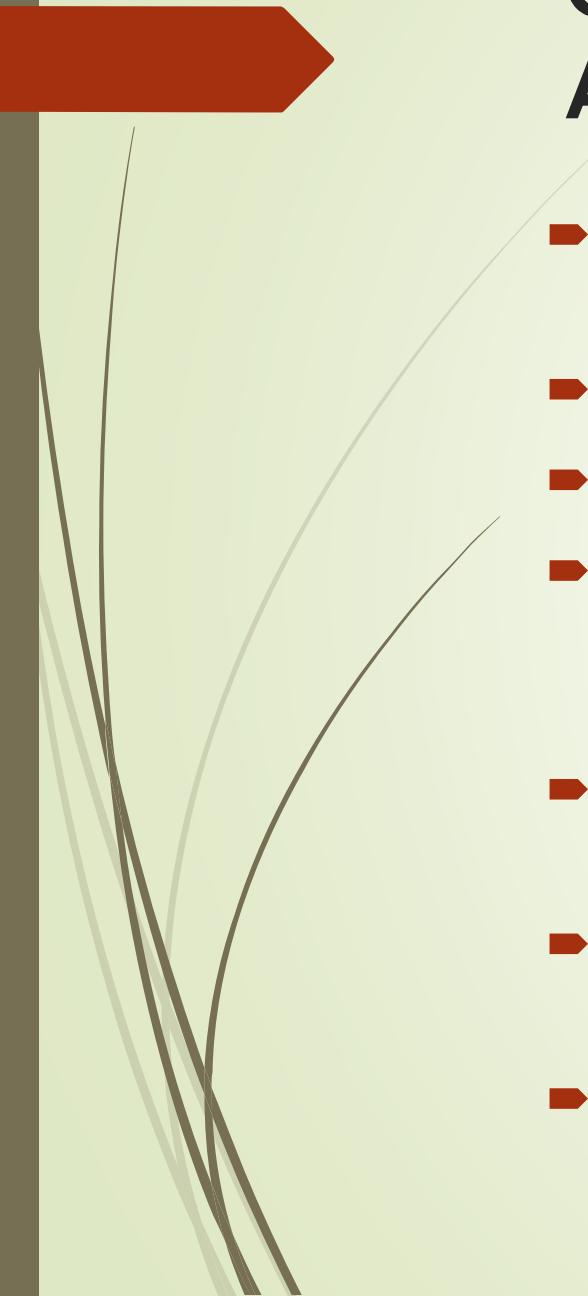
Warning Signs Questionnaire (cont.)

- ▶ I've become less empathic and caring toward my clients.
- ▶ I find myself thinking of being elsewhere when working with clients.
- ▶ I am self-medicating, overlooking personal needs, and overlooking my health.
- ▶ I find my work less rewarding and gratifying than in the past.
- ▶ I am feeling depressed, anxious, or agitated frequently.
- ▶ I am enjoying life less than in the past.
- ▶ I find myself experiencing repeated headaches and other physical complaints.



Checklist for Positive Coping Behaviors

- ▶ Please check all that apply.
- ▶ I take regularly scheduled breaks.
- ▶ I take vacations periodically and don't bring work with me.
- ▶ I have friends, hobbies, and interests unrelated to work.
- ▶ I exercise regularly, have a healthy diet, and maintain an appropriate weight.
- ▶ I limit my work hours and caseload.
- ▶ I participate in peer support, clinical supervision, personal psychotherapy, and journaling as preventive strategies.
- ▶ I attend to my religious and spiritual side.
- ▶ I regularly participate in relaxing activities (e.g., meditation, yoga, reading, music).
- ▶ I regularly participate in activities that I enjoy and look forward to.



Checklist for Negative Coping Behaviors to Avoid

- ▶ I self-medicate with alcohol, drugs (including over-the-counter and prescription), and food.
- ▶ I seek emotional support and nurturance from clients.
- ▶ I keep taking on more and try to just work my way through things.
- ▶ I try to squeeze more into the day, get more done, and measure success by how many tasks I complete and by how much I can accomplish in a day.
- ▶ I isolate, avoid colleagues, and minimize the significance of stresses in my life.
- ▶ I know that distress and impairment are for others and don't take seriously the warning signs I experience.
- ▶ I believe that everything will turn out fine just because I say so.

Integrate Self-Care into your Daily Life

- Barnett and Sarnel (2003) recommend:
- Make adequate time for yourself. Schedule breaks throughout the day.
- Do things you enjoy. Engage in hobbies.
- Take care of yourself physically and spiritually.
- Take care of the relationships in your life.
- Say NO!
- Don't isolate yourself.
- Keep in mind that self-care is a good thing.
- The "Lunch Hour" Myth

Self-Care Strategies

**Write down
applicable
ones in your
self-care plan**

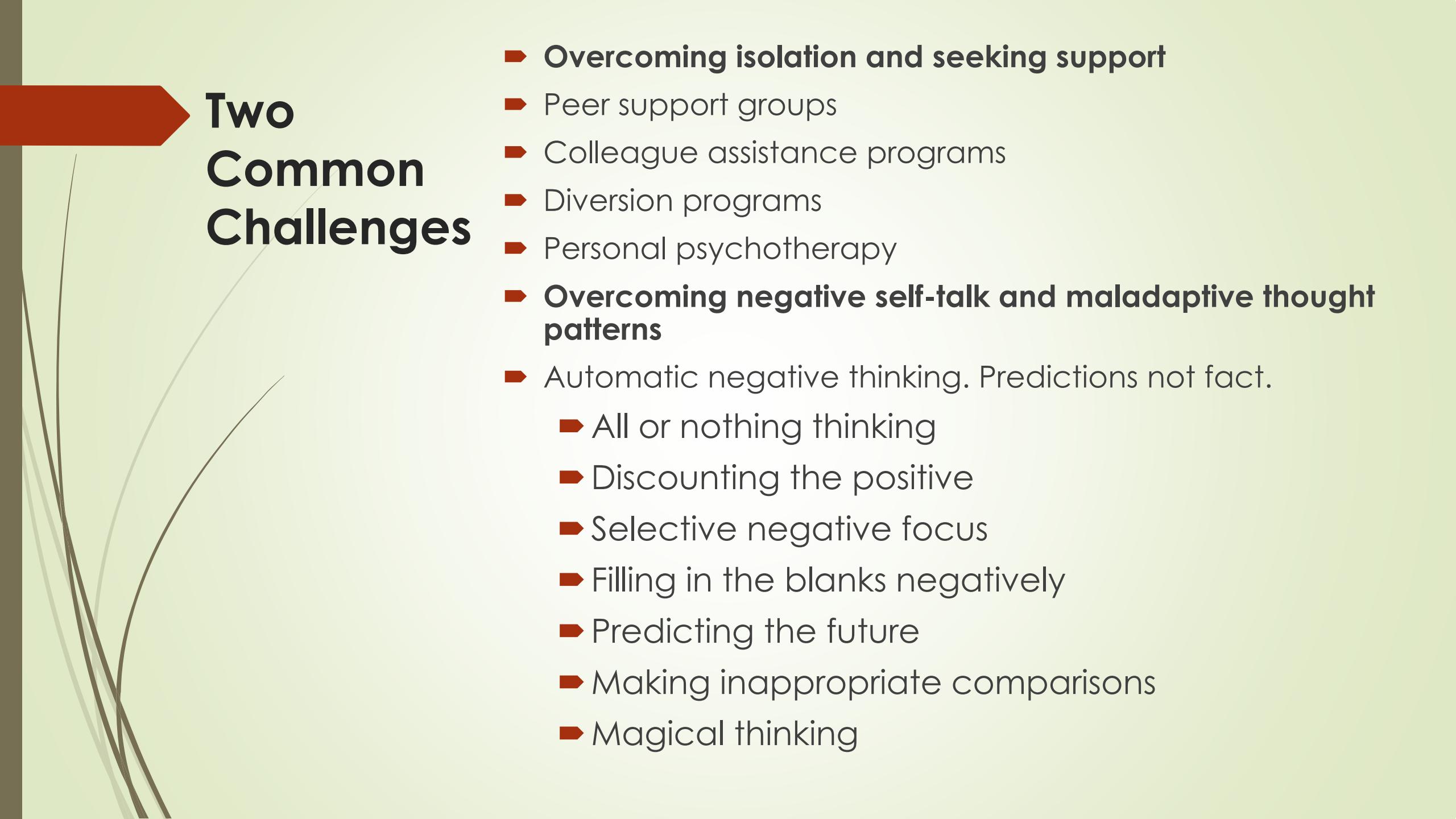
- Watch out for warning signs, such as violating boundaries, self-medication, wishing patients would not show up, finding it difficult to focus on the task at hand, boredom, fatigue, missing appointments.
- Watch out for distress, burnout, and impairment in your colleagues.
- Conduct periodic distress and impairment self-assessments and seek help when it is needed.
- Focus on prevention. Prospective Retrospective Planning
- Make time for self-care!

Self-Care Strategies (cont.)

- Seek out personal psychotherapy.
- Use colleague assistance programs.
- Participate in peer support groups.
- Accept that you're human, in need of assistance, and a work in progress.
- Don't try to be perfect, to have it all, or to do it all. Know your limits and be realistic.
- Strive for balance (a moving target and aspirational goal at best)

Self-Care Strategies (cont.)

- ▶ Changing your client mix.
- ▶ Changing the range of professional activities in which you engage.
- ▶ Changing the number of hours and days you work.
- ▶ Scheduling breaks during the workday.
- ▶ Changing how you schedule clients' start and end times.
- ▶ Taking vacations, even mini-vacations or mental health days.
- ▶ Not trying to do it all yourself. Getting administrative support.



Two Common Challenges

- ▶ Overcoming isolation and seeking support
 - ▶ Peer support groups
 - ▶ Colleague assistance programs
 - ▶ Diversion programs
 - ▶ Personal psychotherapy
- ▶ Overcoming negative self-talk and maladaptive thought patterns
 - ▶ Automatic negative thinking. Predictions not fact.
 - ▶ All or nothing thinking
 - ▶ Discounting the positive
 - ▶ Selective negative focus
 - ▶ Filling in the blanks negatively
 - ▶ Predicting the future
 - ▶ Making inappropriate comparisons
 - ▶ Magical thinking



Catch, Challenge, and Replace Automatic Negative Thoughts

- ▶ “I’m such a loser.”
- ▶ “I’m the only one who can’t do this.”
- ▶ “I’ll never be able to do this.”
- ▶ “I should be better at this by now.”
- ▶ “This will never get better.”
- ▶ ...

Try to Stay Focused in the Present

- ▶ The past is to learn from. (not ruminate over)
- ▶ The future is to plan for. (not worry about)
- ▶ The present is to live in. (set goals, figure out the positive actions to achieve them, focus your energies on doing them)

Avoid comparisons to others. These are typically quite harmful and demoralizing. They do not promote resilience!

You are comparing your insides to others' outsides.

Compare you to yourself over time. Focus on actions and efforts, not just results. Focus on what you can control (or influence).

Common Self-Care Strategies Used

- ▶ In a study of 400 psychologists Case (2001) found psychologists benefited from the use of meditation and prayer, socializing with friends, maintaining a diversity of professional roles, maintaining relationships with one's family of origin as well as with friends, and engaging in relaxation activities promoted psychologists' well-functioning.
- ▶ Would increased attention to any of these be helpful to you?

Chocolate and Self- Care?

A Special Self-Care Strategy

- Numerous chemicals in chocolate impact the brain and emotional functioning.
- The American Heart Association reports that consuming flavanol-rich cocoa enhances brain function.
- The journal Neurology reports that moderate chocolate consumption is associated with a lower risk of stroke.

Reported Stressors Then and Now

- Three main studies from the 1980s (Guy, Poelstra, & Stark, 1989; Shinn, Rosario, Morsch, & Chestnut, 1984; Thoreson, Miller, & Krauskopf, 1989) found:
- Most Common Stressors and Frequent Sources of Distress: Excessive workload, lack of support from one's agency, illness in the family, challenging clients, personal psychological issues, and marital dissatisfaction.
- Most Common Stressors and Frequent Sources of Distress at Present (Cooper, 2010): Challenging clients (91%), documentation and record keeping (91%), managed care (59%), risk of client suicide (53.6%), financial pressures (50.5%), and risk of ethics/licensure board complaints (46.6%).
- Write down yours.

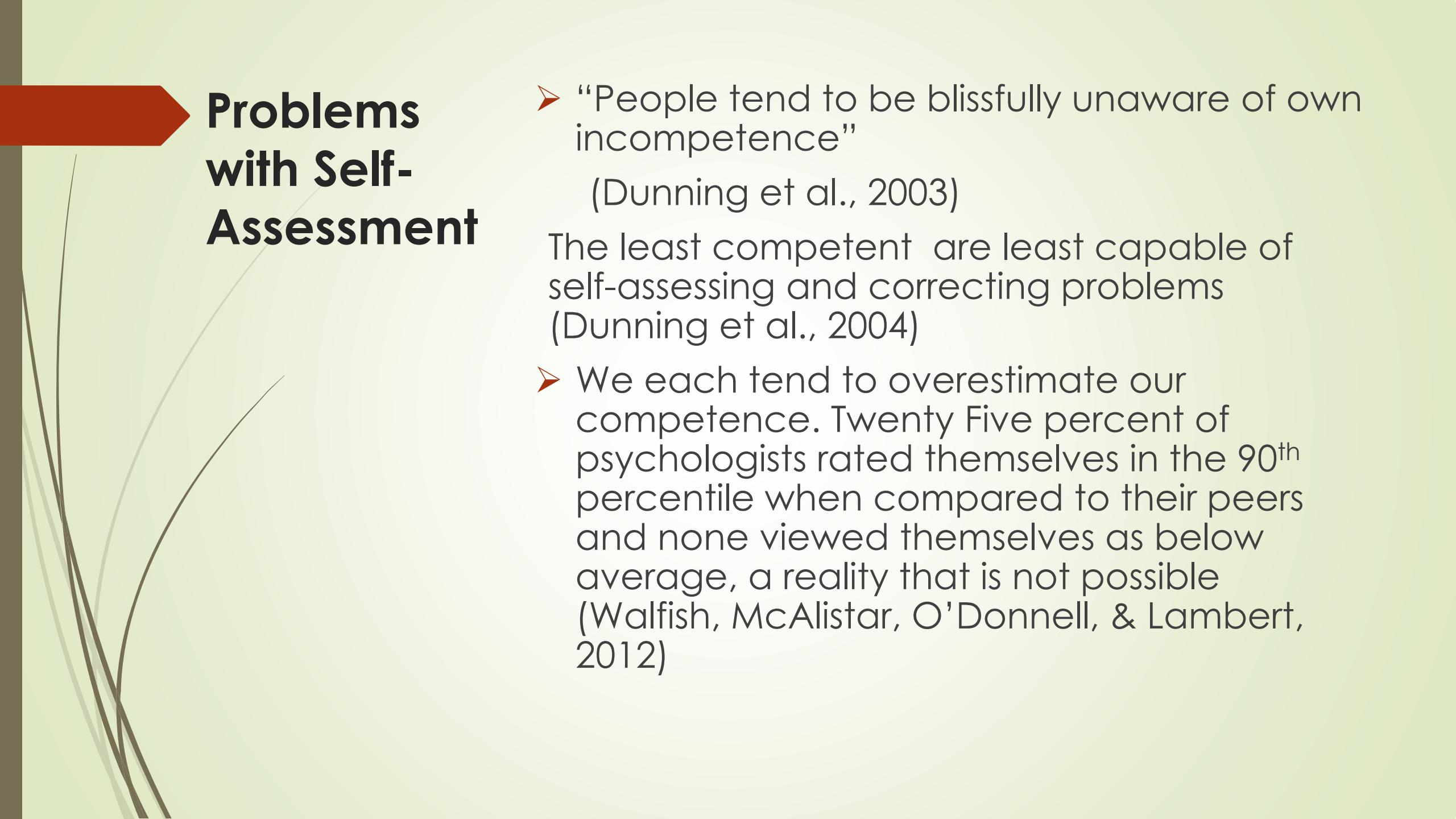
Reported Coping Strategies Then and Now

- 1980s: Personal psychotherapy, reducing workload, regular exercise, spending time with family, temporarily quitting, wishful thinking, and seeking social support.
- At Present: Humor (91.4%), relaxing activities (meditation, yoga, reading; 85.6%), vacations (82.9%), exercise (75.2%), scheduled breaks throughout the day (67.6%); positive self-talk (66.7%), and listservs/professional affiliations (61.3%).
- Write down yours.

TOP 10 STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

1. EAT
2. SLEEP
3. EAT
4. SLEEP
5. EAT
6. SLEEP
7. EAT
8. SLEEP
9. EAT
10. SLEEP



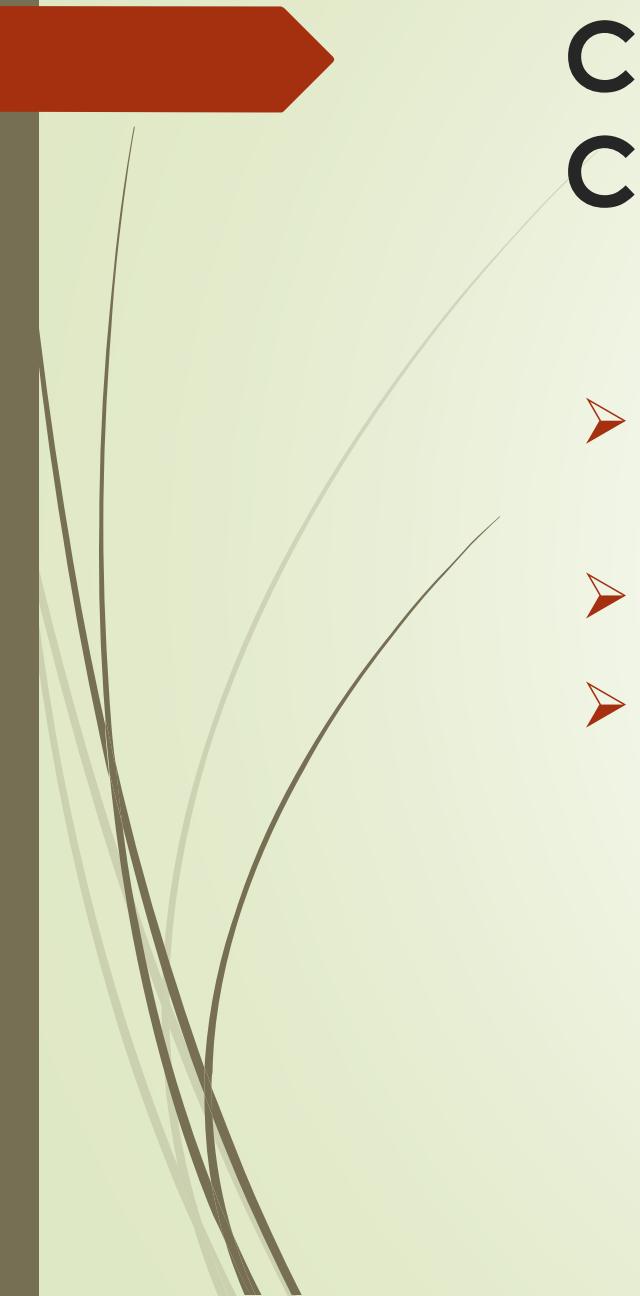


Problems with Self- Assessment

- “People tend to be blissfully unaware of own incompetence”
(Dunning et al., 2003)
The least competent are least capable of self-assessing and correcting problems
(Dunning et al., 2004)
- We each tend to overestimate our competence. Twenty Five percent of psychologists rated themselves in the 90th percentile when compared to their peers and none viewed themselves as below average, a reality that is not possible
(Walfish, McAlistar, O'Donnell, & Lambert, 2012)

Career Satisfaction

- ▶ High involvement with managed care is associated with lower job satisfaction (Rupert & Baird, 2004).
- ▶ Positive career sustaining behaviors endorsed by mental health professionals to help function effectively include:
- ▶ Approaches to manage work life (e.g., maintain a sense of control over work responsibilities, vary responsibilities at work, maintain a professional identity, read the literature to keep up to date, attend continuing education programs).



Communitarianism and the Ethics of Care

- Emphasizes interdependence and communal relationships with emotional engagement
- Requires responsiveness to 'neighbors in need'
- Assumes that individual ethical reasoning is insufficient and that relational virtues must be incorporated as well



Communitarianism and the Competent Community

- A person is a person through other persons
 - Zulu Idiom
- We are bound up in a delicate network of Interdependence
 - Desmond Tutu

The Competence Constellation (Johnson et al., 2013)



Competence Constellations

- ▶ Provide support; prevents/reduces stress:
 - ▶ Emotional support (e.g., reassurance)
 - ▶ Appraisal support (e.g., competence feedback)
 - ▶ Informational support (e.g., advice)
 - ▶ Instrumental support (e.g., time & resources)
- ▶ Offer better judgment on functioning because
 - others generally better assessors



Questions to Consider and Steps to Take

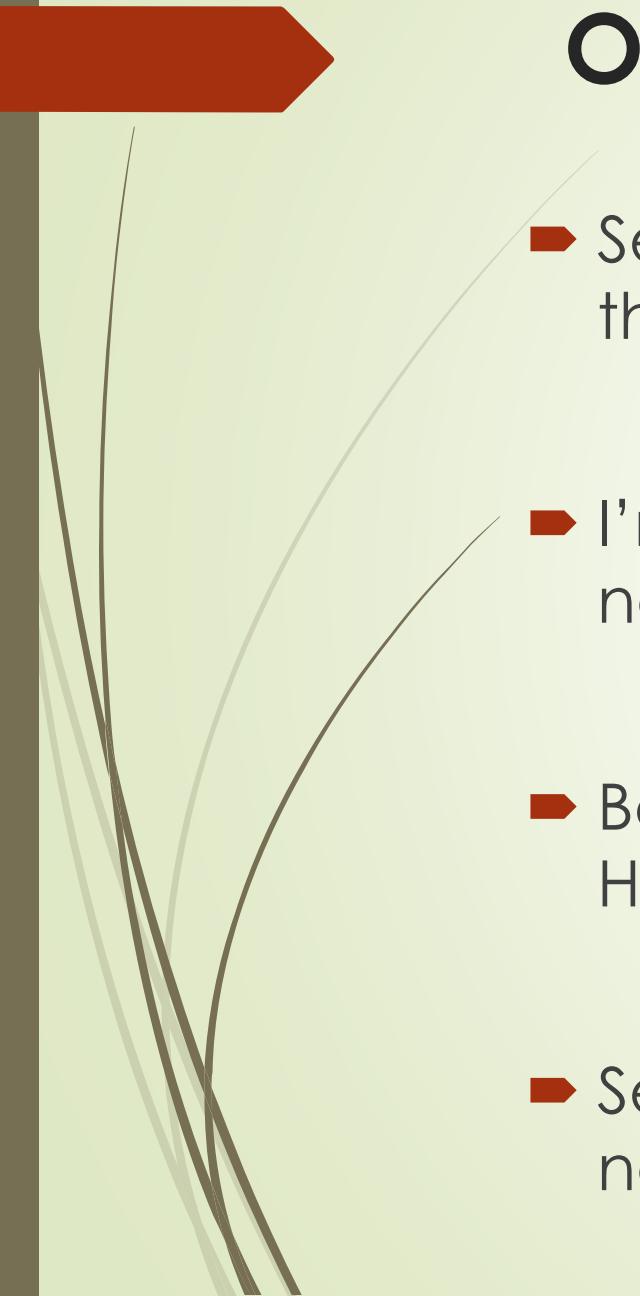
- ▶ Consider your competence constellation.
- ▶ Do you have one? How actively do you use it?
- ▶ Who are the individuals and groups in each ring?
- ▶ How can you utilize them more actively?
How might this benefit you?
- ▶ What tangible steps can you take now?
- ▶ How can you integrate this into your ongoing self-care plan?

Pulling it all Together

- ▶ Is your self-care plan taking shape?
 - ▶ What are its components?
 - ▶ What is your role and what role do others play?
 - ▶ Where do you begin?
-
- ▶ Remember to avoid thinking in terms of success vs. failure.
 - ▶ Take an incremental and sustainable approach.
 - ▶ Be kind to yourself.
 - ▶ Be vulnerable and open with colleagues; be caring and supportive of them.

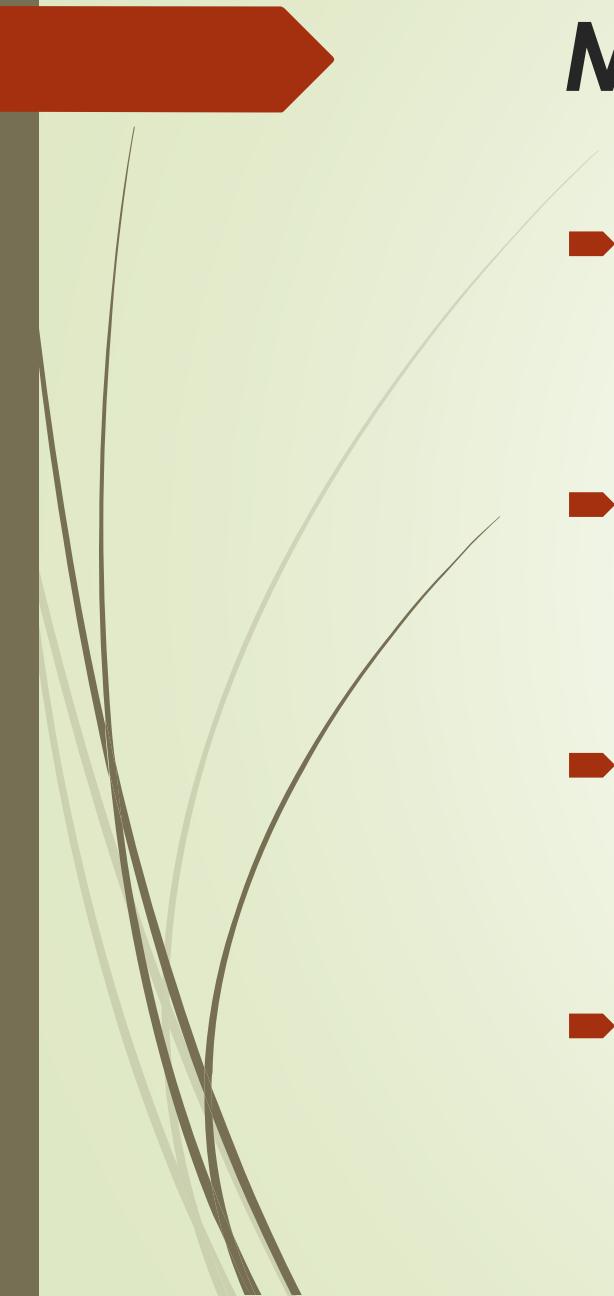
Thoughts to Keep in Mind

- ▶ While there are guidelines, there are no absolute rules. Take an individualized approach that best meets your needs at the present time. What works for you?
- ▶ But, be prepared to make changes as circumstances and needs change.
- ▶ Take a flexible and creative approach to self-care, the promotion of wellness, balance, and resilience.
- ▶ Focus on learning, conduct behavioral experiments, and keep moving forward.
- ▶ Don't try to do it alone.
- ▶ Focus on gratitude.
- ▶ Pursue happiness.



Overcoming Common Self-Care Myths

- ▶ Self-care is great for everyone else, but it's not something that applies to me. I'm doing fine.
- ▶ I'm just starting out in my career. I don't need self-care now. That is something I'll get to later.
- ▶ Being Perfect at Self-Care is Expected of Each Mental Health Professional. To do Less is Unethical.
- ▶ Self-care is a wacky new-age concept. In real life, there is no evidence of its value or success.



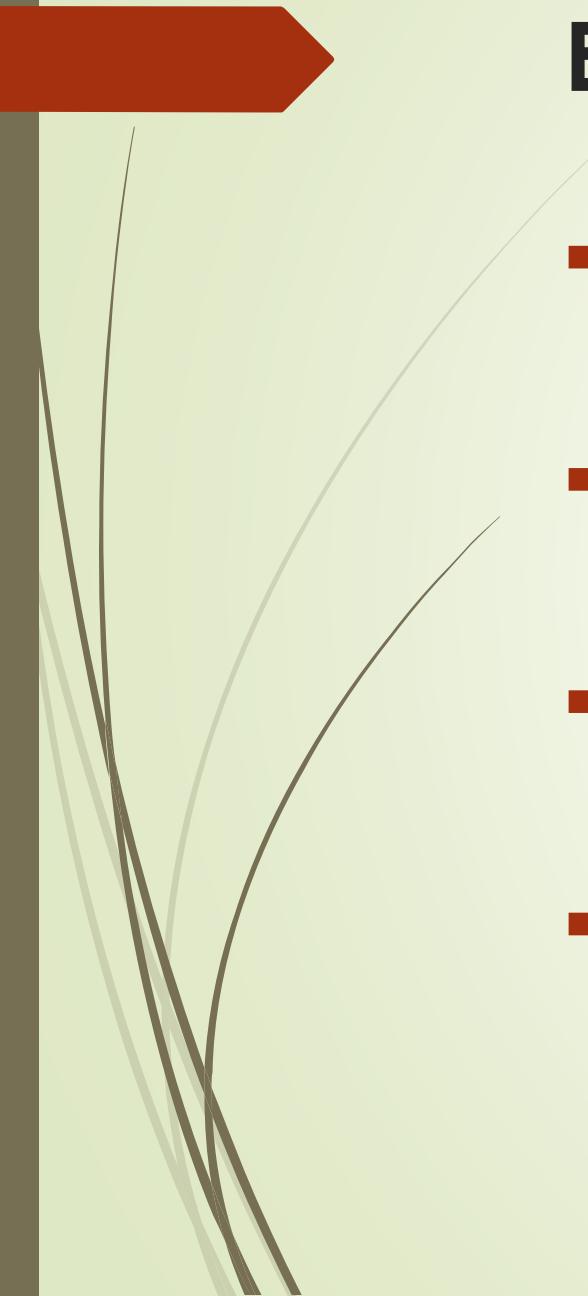
More Self-Care Myths

- ▶ It is best if I work as many hours and make as much money as possible now. I can always slow down later.
- ▶ I exercise regularly. That should be all the self-care I need.
- ▶ I enjoy a glass or two of wine each evening. By relaxing in this way, I am practicing great self-care.
- ▶ Only those who participate in managed care have work stress. Having a fee for service private practice is stress-free



Still More Myths

- ▶ Working for someone else is stressful but owning your own practice and being your own boss is stress-free.
- ▶ While private practice is stressful, being a salaried employee at a hospital, clinic, university, etc. is stress-free.
- ▶ All my colleagues seem to be doing fine without practicing self-care, why should I bother?
- ▶ All my colleagues seem to be doing fine; what's wrong with me that I am having difficulties?



Even More Myths

- ▶ I know self-care is important, but I don't have time for it now. I'll get to it later.
- ▶ Self-care is for those who are weak and vulnerable. I'm strong and healthy. That's not for me.
- ▶ I can see as many clients as I want or need to and not have it impact my competence or emotional functioning.
- ▶ Self-care is a solitary activity; I don't need to share anything about my 'personal' issues with anyone else.



Questions? Discussion



► Thank you!

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