

Cyberwork

Self-care working online

Sarah Worley-James

worley-james@cardiff.ac.uk



I've been pausing to consider how well I take care of myself. I pride myself on ensuring that a key aspect of my client work and support for supervisees and colleagues, is self-care.

Yet, I still struggle at times to apply the same level of care and support to myself, as I juggle a range of professional and personal roles.

Digital technology, smart phones and improving wi-fi signals across the world, mean that it's increasingly possible to work almost anywhere, and across time zones. Workplace counsellors are often self-employed, with a portfolio of work typically including: employee assistance programme (EAP) clients; supervision and training; working part time or per session for public, private and voluntary sector organisations; and running a website and social media content.

Technology offers us the potential and flexibility to embrace a broad approach to our work, which can be exciting and stimulating. But we are working in an age of evolving innovation and rapid change. Only now are children being taught the importance of boundaries, what's known as 'netiquette' and to consider how much screen time is healthy; and when, and how, to switch off.

Too often it is only once we become stressed and overloaded that we stop to consider how to achieve a balance and how to, literally, switch off our devices or put them to one side.

When our smart phone has become our watch, alarm, calendar and our

access to email, it can feel impossible to turn it off or set it down. How many of us cringe inwardly as we discuss self-care with our clients, knowing how we can struggle to follow our own advice ourselves?

If you've found yourself exploring ways for a client to reduce dependency on their phone or device, while you go to bed checking emails, catching up on news or checking your social media, you're probably not alone. Of course, there are apps and websites devoted to helping us relax, to be more mindful, and limit our time on social media; yet when did you last pause to reflect on how well you are taking care of yourself?

'Context' is a word I use a lot with clients and supervisees, and context matters when looking at the theme of self-care. How much time do I realistically have to focus on self-care in relation to my other work and life demands? What types of self-care fit me at this point in my life? What variety of self-care do I have access to?

I encourage you to take a few moments to think about your self-

care; and to write a list of the different ways that you relax. Having options gives us flexibility and reduces pressure to maintain something that may not actually fit our lives right now.

As a mother of a young child, I have come to realise how the time available for self-care is often severely limited. Hence my great belief in the quality of self-care (what it means to me) over and above the quantity of time spent. I am an avid reader, and in my pre-motherhood days, I would happily spend an hour or more reading. Now, I give myself 10 or 15 minutes as my little one falls asleep. These few short minutes are a part of my evening that I relish. I've learnt, through becoming stressed, to take a full lunch break and to go outside for a walk, whatever the weather. I have found that this leads to a more productive afternoon; and now, after years of rarely taking a lunch break, I fiercely protect it.

What did you do in the past to relax? Would you like to reconnect with these ways of relaxing? Perhaps there are things you'd like to try? I've never quite got into colouring books,

but a year ago, I took up knitting (having learnt as a young child) and I enjoy the sense of achievement of creating something tangible.

I may go several days without knitting if I feel too tired, but enjoy it all the more when I choose to pick up my needles again. My daughter is the happy recipient of my efforts – as long as I use purple wool!

Experiment and find a range of self-care activities; things to do alone, with others, at

home, outside, quiet, active, free, for different seasons, for different energy levels, things that make you feel virtuous and things that are guilty pleasures.

Most of all, remember quality over quantity – a few minutes is all it takes to give yourself the message, 'I am worth taking care of'. ●

Sarah Worley-James is Chair of the Association for Counselling and Therapy Online (ACTO) and a Senior Counsellor and Co-ordinator of the Online Service at Cardiff University.

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