Introduction

The following lecture was written by Jamie Beachy, who is an Adjunct Professor at Iliff. She has spent many years as a chaplain and self-care is of personal interest to her. This lecture was written during the first iteration of this course almost 4 years ago, I still find the information she presents to be helpful and meaningful for students. With her permission I continue to use this lecture in its entirety. You will find a link above to the self-care inventory she mentions.

Self-Care in Care-giving

Self care is a central consideration to the practice of spiritual care for at least three reasons:

* In order to embody spiritual care rather than merely approaching the practice of care as a set of skills, we must necessarily include ourselves as a primary focus.
* Self care lays a foundation for healthy relationships and protects care seekers from breeches of power and trust that can happen when we look to care seekers to meet our needs rather than attending to needs for intimacy, friendship and support outside of the pastoral relationship and ministry context.
* Through attention to self care, spiritual caregivers cultivate presence, emotional availability, reliability, and the capacity to model self care for others.

Responsibility vs. Blame

Before continuing with this lecture be sure to complete the self care inventory included in this week’s assignments. The inventory is to be used as a tool for assessing areas of strength and also areas of your own self care that may need further attention.

In reflecting on the inventory, attend to any feelings of self blame that may arise. Acknowledge that no one is perfect and that each day is an opportunity to begin anew. Note that taking responsibility involves continuing to seek ways to address your need for self care, while self blame only takes energy away from this effort and focuses valuable energy away from taking action to address obstacles to change.

Self blame only reinforces the avoidance of responsibility and puts the pastor/chaplain and those who are in her care at risk of being harmed.

Theological and Religious Messages about Self-Care

Watch this video expressing one pastor’s views on self care in the parish setting...

In my own childhood in the Mennonite church, work was emphasized as a high moral and theological value. The following verse from John 9:4 is hand written on the front page of a family Bible passed down to me from my father: “We must work the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (NRSV). My family culture highly valued work as a sign of faithfulness while paying less attention to healthy eating, exercise, spiritual practice and play as resources for the religious life. Take a moment to note any theological and religious messages (both positive and negative) you received from your own family and culture of origin about self care.

As you reflect on early childhood messages, note the difference between self care (responsibility for self and others, living joyfully and with integrity) and selfishness (being overly concerned with one’s own self satisfaction at the expense of others, lacking in integrity).

Asking for Help: Exploring Motivations and Resources for Change

Sometimes self care becomes possible when we remind ourselves of our core values and seek to live them out with intention. When I find myself overworking, I affirm my gratitude for the work ethic I learned from my family and remind myself that I now hold a different set of values that support a balance of work, family, play and time alone. This differentiation from my family of origin has taken time to cultivate through support from mentors, colleagues and religious teachers.

If you find yourself struggling to address self care needs, consider seeking support to explore motivations, family messages and other obstacles that you may not be able to access on your own in order to move away from self blame and toward self care and joyful, responsible living. Resources such as recovery groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Al Anon, etc.), therapists and peer support groups can provide guidance and help with addressing obstacles and reinforcing motivations for change.