



Presbyterian Mission
**Presbyterian
Disaster Assistance**

**PCCCA Conference
“Shaping Our Story”**

**Building Resilience For Stressful Times
When Times Are Stressful**

 **PRESBYTERIAN
DISASTER ASSISTANCE**
OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE



Faith Leader Resilience



So Let Us Not Grow Weary in
Doing What is Right
(Galatians 6:9)



Do You Want To Be
Made Well?
(John 5:6b)



Faith Leader Resilience

Ministry is a demanding experience and the **stress** experienced can be **overwhelming**. For those in a stressful environment **compassion fatigue** is a very present reality. This workshop will present an introduction to the causes of compassion fatigue and, more importantly, the **tools** that build and **strengthen resilience**. Participants will be introduced to the following topics: Why self care is not enough. How to **transform** one's life from the stress of reactivity to the **calm effectiveness** of intentionality. Skills to sustain longevity as a professional. Integration of **resilience practices**. How to **burn brightly** and never burn out.



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STRESS !!!

Is your work stressful?
If so, what are some of the
causes?
What are some of the
effects?

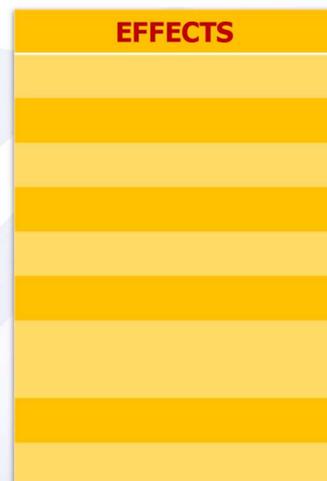
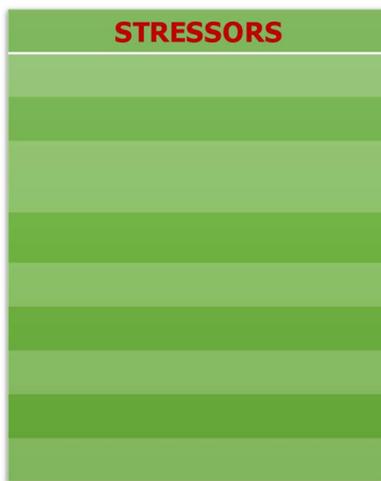


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Stressors and Effect



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Stressor

Physiological	Brain	Other Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Heart Rate ▲ Breathing Rate ▼ Breathing Volume ▲ Muscle Tension ▲ Energy ▲ DIS-EASE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Brain Stem ▼ Higher functioning parts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Function Fine motor control Emotional regulation Language Speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Obsession & Compulsion ▼ Speed, Agility & Strength ▲ Constricted thoughts & behaviors ▲ Fatigue


Fight OR Flight

Compassion Fatigue



Compassion Fatigue =
 Secondary Traumatization + Burnout

(Figley, 1995)

Secondary Traumatic Stress

The negative effects
of interacting with
people who have
experienced a
traumatic event

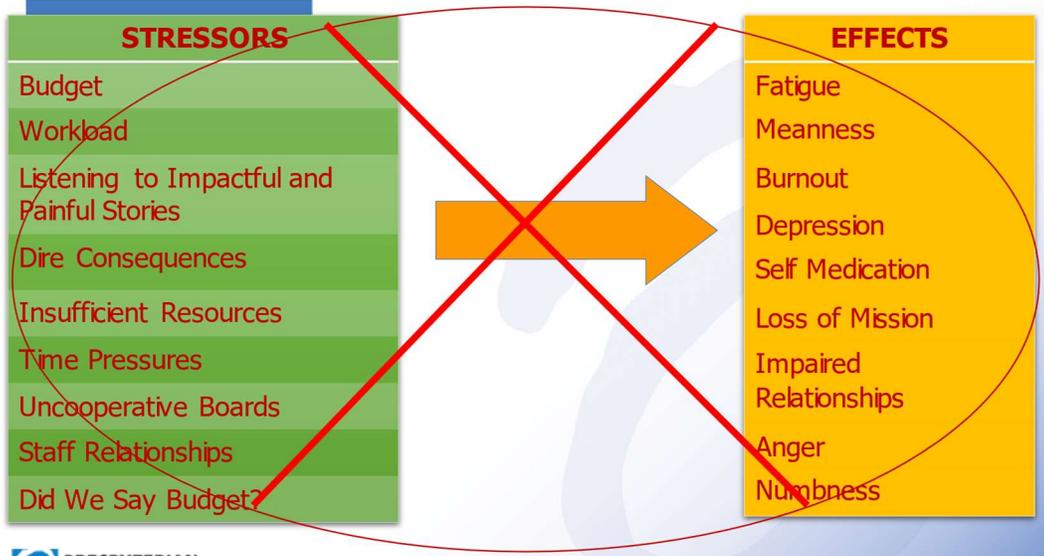


Burnout

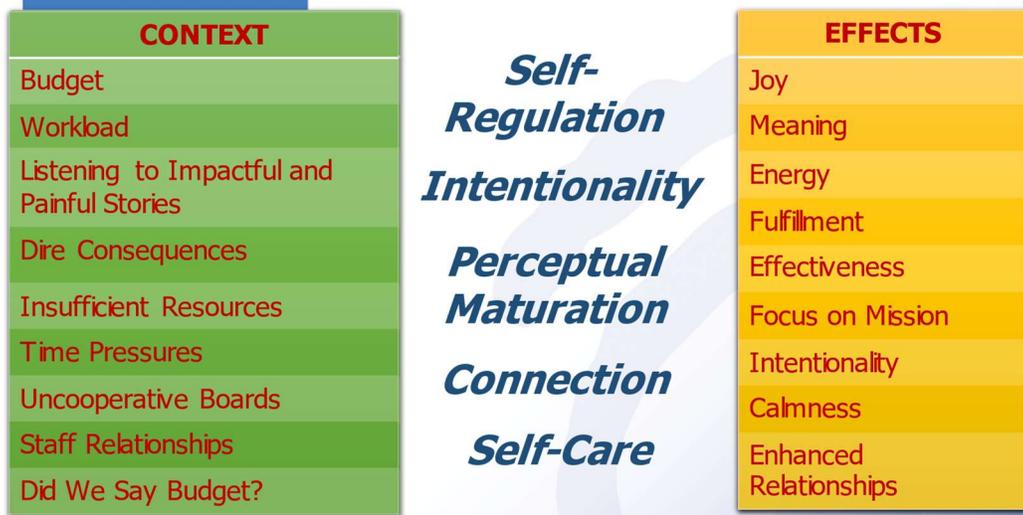
“The chronic condition of
perceived demands
outweighing
perceived resources”

- Gentry & Baranowsky, 1998

Stressors and Effect



Stressors and Effect





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*Between stimulus and response
there is a space.*

*In that space is our power to
choose our response.*

*In our response lies our
growth and our freedom.*

Viktor Frankl



Building and Sustaining Resilience



Practices for Building Resilience

1. **Self-regulation** – ability to immediately shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance (especially when perceiving threat)
2. **Intentionality** – Principle-based vs. demand driven; faithfulness to covenant
3. **Perceptual Maturation/Self-validation** – other’s reaction and valuation do not determine behavior; integrity has greater value than reputation
4. **Connection** – develop and utilize support network
5. **Self-care** – aerobic activity (3x/week) primary

Self Regulation

Awareness of our on-going physiological responses to perceived threat

Ability to regulate these responses by relaxing muscles (while fully engaged)

Identifying Triggers



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Self Regulation

4-7-8 Breathing

Peripheral vision

Strong Back-Soft Front



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Intentionality



Intentionality

DO I GO WHERE I AIM MYSELF?

Requires self-regulation
Living/working in accordance
with Mission/Covenant
Internal focus of control
Principle-based living



Intentionality

PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT

- Short and sweet
- Can be understood by a third grader
- Can remember verbatim when the pressure is on



Formula for Hope

**Intention into word +
relaxation =**

- Comfort in Body
- Increased Thinking Capacity
- Living with Intentionality & Integrity



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Perceptual Maturation



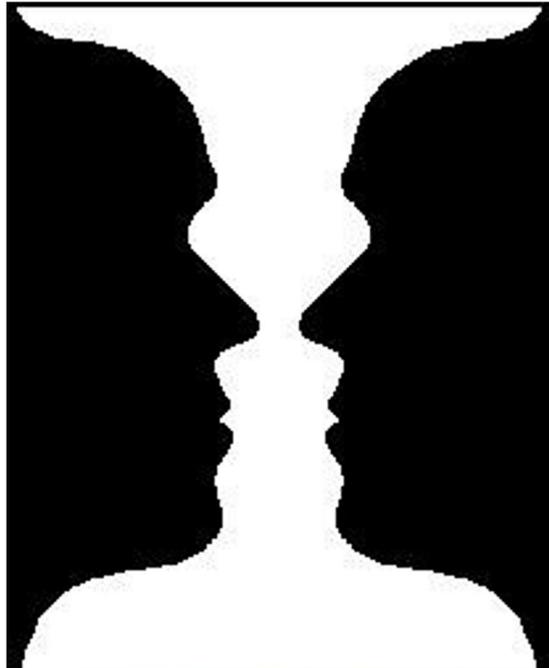
*“Change the way
you look at
things and the
things you look
at change.”*



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Perceptual Maturation

Just as you can regulate your body,
you can regulate your thinking

This is a disciplined process of
thinking and attention



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Perceptual Maturation

Perception of Workplace



Perception of Self



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Perceptual Maturation

Perception of Workplace

- Threat Assessment
- Choice vs. Demand
- Principle-based
- Practicing Mission
- Bring Calm into an Anxious Systems



Perceptual Maturation

Perception of Self

- Self vs. Other validation
- Mindfulness
 - Calm body
 - Observing mind
 - Detaching from outcomes
- Teachable
- Attitude of Gratitude
- training yourself
- to be happy



Connection



Create sanctuary and community
Ability to safely “tell on yourself”/confession and forgiveness

Licensing others to confront symptoms

Responsibility to “train” support group

Opportunity to narrate secondary traumatic stress experiences

Intentional Listening Partner



An intentional listening partner is someone who:

- ✓ Will not judge you
- ✓ Is willing to be available within 48 hours if you request time to talk
- ✓ Will listen without interrupting for 15-20 minutes
- ✓ Will be able to offer what you need



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Self-Care



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Self Care: Refueling & Revitalization



Aerobic activity
(3x/week)

Music/Art/Sport

Solitude/Spirituality/
Nature

Intentional Plan

Sleep and food
choices



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Road to Resilience

1. **Self-Regulate**- be aware of your body for muscle tension and stop squeezing muscles.
2. **Be Intentional** – be guided your Mission/Code-of-Honor, bring into alignment transgressions (even small ones)
3. **Perceptual Maturation**- attend to what you can control & accept the rest, be at choice, selfvalidated, not in danger
4. **Connect with Other**- share difficulties, get support
5. **Care for Yourself**- Put on your running/walking shoes 3x/week, evolve spirituality, be creative, get good sleep, eat well



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Resources for Self-Care

Many apps are available for relaxing, breathing, meditation. Some are sounds of water or other sounds of nature. Others offer various kinds of music. Some offer chimes. Some offer a burning fire. Think about what types of activities offer you the most joy and release from stress and search those on your App Store. Some of our favorites are these:

 <p>Breathe2Relax</p>	 <p>Fireplace HD</p>
 <p>Provider Resilience</p>	 <p>Calming Sounds</p>
 <p>Aquarium HD</p>	 <p>Chakra Chimes</p>
 <p>University of Minnesota Responder Self-Care</p>	 <p>Centering Prayer Contemplative Outreach</p>



These tools can be used either in the moment of interaction with another person or in other stressful moments during the day. Some are ideal in a minute to five minutes of solitude. Others can be done anywhere. Some can help to reduce feelings of “brain fog” or disorientation and increase alertness and mental focus. Weave these into your workdays and beyond to reduce your stress and to work at your maximum potential.

Relaxing and Grounding

Breathing

Observe Your Breath. Sit comfortably erect and observe your breathing without trying to control it. Just notice your breath go in and out.

Vigorous Exhale. Inhale a deep breath. Pursing your lips, exhale as powerfully as you can. Repeat 4 times.

4-7-8. Close your mouth and with tongue touching soft palate beside upper front teeth, inhale quietly through your nose to a (silent) count of four. Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale audibly through your mouth to a count of eight. This equals one breath cycle. Complete four cycles, then breathe normally. *What is important is the ratio of 4-7-8 for inhale, hold, exhale. You will be able to slow it down, which is desirable. Do it at least twice a day.* [Dr. Andrew Weil. www.drweil.com] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRPh_GaiL8s

Diaphragm Breathing. Close your eyes if you wish. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen and notice which part of your body moves when you breathe as usual. We invite you to breathe, mindful of using your diaphragm, so that your chest does not need to move and your abdomen does. Keeping your hands placed, breathe in, extending your diaphragm. Then breathe out, contracting your diaphragm. Do two more deep breaths on your own, without the hand placement. Notice how you feel. Many find themselves feeling more relaxed and clear-headed.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tighten your muscles as much as you can, then release them slowly, consciously letting go of all the tension they hold. Begin with your facial muscles, moving to neck, then shoulders and back, downward to upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands and fingers, then downward to torso, then pelvic area, and on to thighs, calves, ankles, feet, toes.

Pelvic Floor Relaxation

Many of us tighten our pelvic floor when we are stressed. Nerves in that area communicate to the brain to fight or flee. We can move back into our high thinking by relaxing that area. The pelvic floor includes not only the gluts (buttocks) but also the inner muscles that control elimination, a good part of the lower trunk. A good practice is to tighten all those muscles as much as you can, then gradually release until the whole pelvic floor is totally relaxed. Notice how this impacts your whole body, including your brain.

Strong Back, Soft Front

In the midst of a stressful situation, straighten your back, imagining a string pulling you up from the top of your head. Then take a deep diaphragm breath, relaxing your front outward and mentally softening toward the person/situation you are facing. This process allows you to be strong and vulnerable simultaneously, relaxes your body, and allows you to think more clearly and logically and plan your actions accordingly rather than simply being reactive.

This process was developed by Roshi Joan Halifax, creator of the *Being with Dying* project. Roshi Joan says of this practice: It is about the relationship between equanimity and compassion. 'Strong back' is equanimity and your capacity to really uphold yourself. 'Soft front' is opening to things as they are.... The place in your body where these two meet – strong back and soft front – is the brave, tender ground in which to root our caring deeply. To learn more, do an internet search for *Strong Back, Soft Front Joan Halifax*.

Doorknob Affirmation

As you get in your car, walk down the hall to a stressful situation, or you open the door to go into a meeting, think to yourself, *I do this work because . . .* This reminder of your motivation places your sense of purpose and meaning at the forefront of what you are about to do. (adapted from Ashley Davis Bush, *Little and Often: Using Micro-Practices for Self-Care*, Psychotherapynetworker.org, p. 27.)

Peripheral Vision Exercise

Please stand up and allow some space between yourself and those near you. Place both arms in front of you, shoulder height with both index fingers pointing up. Focus on your finger tips. Slowly move both arms outward, and keep looking at both fingers. Stop at the point where you can still just see both fingertips. You are using peripheral vision.

Tactile Grounding Tools

When you are drifting off while sitting in a boring meeting—or spacing out from anxiety while standing at a podium—you can try this tool. You need to be able to use a part of your body to initiate some voluntary tactile contact. Hands are easiest, but sometimes you can use feet as well.

- You need to have easy access to some objects that your hands can touch—paper clips or coins in your pockets, your clothing, or a podium, chair, or sofa.
- Let your fingers quickly and quietly explore an object.
- Invite your mind to attend to the tactile qualities you experience: size, shape, texture, temperature, etc.
- You may also use your feet to tap the floor or bump against the chair. This simple exercise of voluntary touching and intentional noticing can usually bring you back into a more focused and alert state quickly.
- Take off your shoes and feel your toes and the soles of your feet against the floor or the grass or dirt. Feel the energy of the earth come up through your feet, your legs and your body, all the way to the top of your head. Any time you feel that you need grounding, even in the middle of a meeting, you can do this.

Sound Grounding Tools

Ring a chime or a Tibetan bell, beat a drum, clang a cymbal -- any sound that resonates through your body and grounds you.

Bilateral Grounding Tools

Many experts believe that adding a component of intentional bilateral movement intensifies the desired effect of increased mental focus and alertness.

- Let your hands rest on the sides of your chair. Then let each hand take a turn tapping or rubbing the surface and notice what you feel.
- Or, look at a tree several feet away. Look to the left and observe one side of the tree, then shift your gaze to the right and take in visual details on that side.
- Repeat these movements of hands or eyes several times to sharpen your mental focus.

Centering

- Sit comfortably erect, feet on floor, hands on your lap, eyes closed or almost closed. Allow a word or phrase that soothes to come to you. It might be a word like *peace, hope, soothe, joy, love*, or a phrase like *Water washes my soul* or *The heartbeat of hope is love*. Create your own phrase.

Repeat that word or phrase over and over in your mind until you come to a place of stillness and are not focused on anything outward. If people or things come to your mind, kiss them lightly and allow them to move on.

- You might choose a leaf or a flower, a painting or a ball, a meaningful symbol or something as mundane as a matchstick or a stone. Focus deeply on that object, shutting out all else. Dwell with your focus on that object until the time feels complete, maybe 1-5 minutes or more.

Both these processes can take you to the still point within where your peace and wisdom dwell. Dwell there for a time, maybe 5-15 minutes.

A Peaceful Place with a Wisdom Figure

Imagine yourself in a place that is restful, peaceful, relaxing. It might be the swing on your grandmother's porch, the beach, a favorite park, your own garden. In your imagination, listen to the sounds; smell the scents; feel the quality of the air on your skin; taste the flavors; watch the movements and stillness; feel the response of your muscles, your longing to move or be still or jump or lie down.

As you dwell with these sensations, imagine that you are sitting with someone who has been very significant as a wisdom figure in your life: a mentor, a grandparent, a parent, a friend, a teacher. In your imagination, tell this person what's happening with you, where you are with it, what your longings are. Feel free to ask your wisdom figure a question or for help. Listen for his/her response. This is a good activity to do in your journal.

Gratitude Walk

A gratitude walk provides grounding, relaxing, and energizing all at the same time. A gratitude walk can be done in the minute it takes to walk to the restroom or water fountain, or you might take a 15-minute break to do a gratitude walk outside. The principles are the same.

While you are walking, focus your awareness on sights, sounds, physical sensations, and smells around you. If you are in your office, notice a person for whom you are grateful or a painting on the wall or the general ambience of your organization that serves or the view from a window. If you go outside, look at the clouds and the trees and the ground and let yourself be amazed. Listen attentively to the sounds of nature and enjoy the sound of a bird or the rustling of leaves. Let your

face feel the breeze or your fingers feel the tingling of little blades of grass or the rough texture of bark or the sensation of the sun.

When you look, listen, touch, and smell, be especially receptive to sights, sounds, sensations, and smells that you perceive as beautiful or awe-inspiring. Be receptive to observing things that elicit in your heart a sense of wonder, joy, or peace. Be willing to practice saying “thank you” silently as you notice special objects or sensations and perhaps associate your observations with other special moments in your memory.

To help you concretize this experience, sometimes look for an object or two you can take back with you.

As you walk and observe what’s around you, thoughts will certainly come marching through your mind. When thoughts and judgments appear, gently move them aside and re-focus your awareness on the sights, sounds, touches, and aromas for which you are grateful.

Candle

For many people, gazing into a flame is very soothing. When you have difficult work to do, try lighting a candle and gazing into the flame. Watch the dancing of the flame. Watch the tallow as it melts and flows down the candle. Take in the warmth and light of the candle. Notice how it does not rush. Breathe deeply as you focus completely on the candle. If you can stay with it long enough, watch the wick curl and embrace itself as it finishes its purpose of providing warmth and light. Notice how the wick drops off. If your setting allows, keep the candle burning while you do your work.

Releasing at End of Day

It’s important at the end of a workday to have a way to release the people and work of the day, to shift your focus away from the needs of the people with whom you work -- to yourself, your friends and your family. Sometimes a ritual of release can help restore you physically, as well as emotionally and spiritually.

Wring It Out

Sit upright in a chair. Slowly and gently twist your body to the right from your hips to your head. Turn around as far to the right as you can. (You might wish to grab the chair handle to help you turn further.) Hold for 10 seconds or longer, allowing your muscles to relax and stretch. Add an extra stretch with a deep inhale, letting your chest expand. Then exhale as you come back to the front. Then repeat this process to the left. As you wring yourself and exhale, imagine that you’re a sponge that’s absorbed your clients’ energies. You want to squeeze out this sponge, freeing yourself from their concerns. Take a moment to notice how your body feels after you twist. Once you’re done, shake your arms in front of you as you release the day’s work. From Ashley Davis Bush, *Little and Often: Using Micro-Practices for Self-Care*. Psychotherapynetworker.org, p. 27.

What went well today?

Ponder for a moment on what went well today. List 3 things that went well. Pause for gratitude for those.

Releasing Ritual

Design a ritual for the end of the day in which you release to God's care the people, concerns or situations that feel incomplete, worrisome or demanding of more attention.

- You might write the list of those on a piece of paper, fold it, and place it in a special container on your desk or somewhere in your home with a commitment to leave it there until tomorrow.
- You might doodle or create colors on a page to express the feelings you have of frustration or fear or trouble letting go of.
- In the morning, you can return to paper to bring fresh energy, or you may find you have released the concerns sufficiently to move on in new ways.

Energizing

March in Place

March in place, knees high, arms swinging, crossing right elbow to left knee and left elbow to right knee.

Move and Laugh

- Spend a few minutes moving your body. Reach for the sky. Reach for the horizons. Rotate your body at the waist. Bend your body at the waist in both directions; rotate in a circle. Drop your hands to the floor, then very slowly come up one vertebra at a time.
- Stand with your hands on your hips, feet shoulder width apart, and begin to laugh a rolling deep belly laugh. Roll your torso around as you laugh. Dance around as you laugh, if you wish. Rock while you laugh. But laugh, long and loud and deep. Laugh till it turns to tears if you need. But laugh. When you're done, feel the energy flowing through your body in places where you thought only tension reigned.

Sing

Sing a song that you love, jazz it up, move with it, sing loud, sing soft, sing silly, sing high, sing deep. If you can do body movements like clapping or tapping feet, even better. Let yourself feel the energy rising as you energize your song more and more.

Think Fast

Have a little contest with yourself or people around you to see who (individual or group) can make up the most words starting with a given letter within three minutes or so.

Intentional Listening Partner

An intentional listening partner is helpful for many reasons.

You may need just to talk out your reactions to the difficult stories you are hearing.

You may realize that there are some things you specifically want to work on to build your resilience, and it would be helpful to you to buddy up with someone to share your progress and challenges.

You may need someone to talk to when stress has gotten the better of you.

An Intentional Listening Partner is someone who:

- Will not judge us.
- Will keep confidential everything we say.
- Can be available within a day of when we ask for time to talk.
- Will not give us advice unless we ask for it
- Won't talk about their own issues when we've asked them to give us time to talk about what's on our mind.

You can let your intentional listening partner know what you would like them to do or what kind of help you want.

You can consider whether you'd like to offer to do the same for your Intentional Listening Partner.

It is best to choose someone other than your spouse, partner or close relative.

From time to time, you may want to make a contract with your intentional listening partner for venting or unburdening. Explain that you will ask in advance for their time and what you are looking for.

Then when you need to talk, you might say something like this: *"I've got something going on that I'd like to talk about and I wonder if you might have some time in the next day or two to listen to me."* Make a specific plan with your partner for your conversation.

Little and Often

Using Micro-Practices for Self-Care - By Ashley Davis Bush

It was a series of upending life events over a period of years---some bad, some good, all unexpected and disorienting---that gradually propelled me into a state of mind-numbing, body-exhausting burnout. First, there was my husband's cancer, his surgery, and the seven months spent watching him suffer through the body-diminishing, spirit-breaking ordeal of chemotherapy. During those months, I'd prayed and cried and white-knuckled my way through an endless, dark valley of alternating fear, anguish, and desperate hope.

But then it was over. My husband got better. The casseroles stopped appearing on our doorsteps, and the encouraging cards and calls stopped coming. We both plunged heart and soul back into our lives. Daniel, as if to make up for the time he'd lost, started full-time graduate school in mental health counseling. I began expanding my practice to cover the costs of his schooling and the pile of medical bills we'd accumulated. I also signed a contract on a book deal, with a deadline looming. Meanwhile, we had five children of our blended family still at home, four of whom were teenagers. Life felt something like walking uphill, against the wind, in a blizzard.

The Breakdown

And I got tired---tired all the time, and irritable much of the time with Daniel and the kids. Worse, I began feeling apathetic at work, even as my clients' painful stories began following me home, haunting my dreams at night. Then my back blew out, as if telling me I couldn't bear the weight of my life. As I recalled the story of a colleague who, going through a similar state, had quit the field altogether to open a Greek restaurant, I began to wonder if this was classic burnout.

At work, the final straw came one evening when my seventh client of the day---a 34-year-old woman devastated by the unexpected loss of her mother---sat across from me, and I found myself, a grief counselor for more than 20 years, wanting to slap her across the face and say, "Get over it!" That I could even think and feel such a thing was a body blow to my sense of professional ethics and self-respect. What kind of therapist feels like that about a grieving client?

Suddenly, I felt not only overworked and undernourished, but potentially unhelpful, or even damaging, to the people I wanted to help. I began to wonder if it was time for me to pack it in and look into the restaurant business.

I began to read any book I could find on burnout, anything about being personally or professionally fried, toasted, mashed, boiled, and charred. The dominant advice was simple: do more self-care. Unfortunately, the suggestions, which I've since come to call macro self-care, usually seemed to require substantial commitments of time, effort, and often money: take more vacations, meditate 40 minutes daily, join a health club or at least do yoga and get aerobic exercise four or five times a week, begin painting or cooking or gardening, go to a spa, spend time in nature, make lists every day of what you're grateful for, get more sleep, and so on. It wasn't that there was anything necessarily wrong with these suggestions, but always implicit was the idea that self-care needed to be a big, life-changing project, and that unless you approached it with that kind of investment, you were wasting your time.

This seemed unrealistic and exasperating, if not downright ludicrous. It seemed that only people who already lived pretty easygoing, stress-free lives could summon the time, energy, and emotional wherewithal to take up this demanding new career in self-nurture. Already overwhelmed, I felt even more paralyzed by these endless lists, especially when added to the long list of obligations and duties of my daily life. But I was also desperate. I had to try something, anything. Which was the easiest? I wondered.

I decided to try a walk outside during lunch, satisfying two goals: get fresh air and exercise. Even that proved too hard. Each day, I'd start with the best of intentions, but by the end of the day, I kept finding that I just couldn't squeeze it in or, truth be told, couldn't summon the motivation. So what else could I try? The spa day was expensive and didn't appeal to me, while trying to meditate for 40 or even 20 minutes a day with my to-do list hammering at my brain would've sent me shrieking from my lotus pose.

So there I was, failing at my work life and home life, unable even to get it together for basic self-care! This was demoralizing.

The Breakthrough

Fortunately, a few days later, something happened that started me on a different kind of route to burnout prevention---an approach that even I could follow. It all began when I started to come unglued during an intake interview with a grieving mother, who was telling me in excruciating detail about discovering her 18-year-old son's dead body in his bedroom after he'd hung himself with a belt in the closet.

Although I'd heard numerous graphic and heartbreaking stories throughout my career, this time, I actually started to feel lightheaded. I considered excusing myself to go to the bathroom but was afraid I'd faint if I stood up. I thought about redirecting the conversation, but in that moment, I couldn't actually speak. I just kept nodding.

And then I remembered an exercise called "strong back, soft front" I'd heard about in a webinar by Buddhist abbot Joan Halifax, author of *Being with the Dying*. She'd devised the practice for people working with the dying and their families to help them strengthen their back for support and soften their front for compassion. So right there in the session, I pulled my belly button toward my spine and straightened my back, imagining a string pulling me up from the top of my head. Then I took a deep belly breath, relaxing my stomach outwards and mentally softening toward my client. This process took all of 15 seconds while my client kept tearfully telling her story, unaware of my experience.

It worked. I felt better. The deep breathing had stimulated my parasympathetic nervous system, making me immediately more relaxed. I regained my dual awareness and recognized that my client's feelings weren't my own. I felt more present in the room as my mind cleared.

After my client left, I asked myself, What just happened? I'd had a freakout followed by a turnaround. I'd engaged in a spontaneous, brief practice that had helped me feel calmer right in the midst of a disturbing experience. I'd interrupted a stress response without interrupting the session---and it hadn't cost any money or taken much time. In essence, I'd protected and replenished myself through the use of a directed and intentional practice of micro self-care.

The Shift

I felt I was onto something, and the germ of an idea---micro self-care---began to grow. Self-care wasn't just a remote possibility outside of the office: it was available inside the office, even during a session. So why not try more quickie, self-replenishing practices throughout the day, every day? While macro self-care was great when I could fit it in, micro self-care was available at all times, on demand. I could assemble an array of brief tools that would be simple, free, and doable.

Micro self-care, I decided, is about the benefits of making small changes with reliable frequency. This mirrors what we're learning from the newest developments in self-directed neuroplasticity---that the brain's ability to reorganize itself with new neural networks happens with the targeted use of brief, repetitive experiences. The emphasis is on repetition. Small and frequent works better to create desirable neural pathways than big and seldom.

I've heard Rick Hanson, author of *Hardwiring Happiness*, call this the "law of little things." I've heard Linda Graham, author of *Bouncing Back*, quoting British psychologist Paul Gilbert's words to describe it as "little and often." She's said that 5 minutes of mindfulness meditation every day for a week yields better results than 20 minutes of mindfulness meditation just on the weekend.

Targeting creates the biggest bang for the buck. So just as neuroplasticity practices can be targeted for more self-compassion, more peacefulness, or less emotional reactivity, I learned I could target my micro-practices for the three effects I needed most: relaxing, energizing, and grounding. Why these areas? Because they're the antidotes to our three biggest occupational hazards.

- When we're burning out, we need relaxation to help us dial down so that we feel replenished, at ease, and in a place to begin again.
- When we're feeling compassion fatigue, when our empathy is lacking and we lack the motivation for emotional engagement, we need to energize our sense of purpose and wellness.

- When we're exposed to trauma, we need to ground ourselves so we don't drift off in a dissociative fog. Grounding allows us to be safe harbor in the midst of a tempest. We're exposed to all three of these hazards daily and therefore need protection and restoration daily as well.

The Plan

I knew that for these behavioral changes to have any effect on my life, they needed to become routine---a series of habits as ingrained as brushing my teeth or drinking my afternoon cup of tea. And I also knew that habits are best formed when they include a trigger, or prompt. So I strategically incorporated a grounding tool at the beginning of my workday so I could start the day feeling anchored and steady, an energizing tool right after lunch in the middle of my workday to counteract the postlunch afternoon energy slump, and a relaxing tool at the end of my workday, to help me leave work at the office, before transitioning to home.

My initial grounding practice was a one-minute meditation, timed on my phone, inspired by Martin Boroson's book *One-Moment Meditation*, which argues that it only takes a minute to reduce your stress and refresh your mind. I focused on one minute of breathing but added a few words. On the in-breath, I thought I am calm and on the out-breath, I thought, I am grounded. Occasionally, I added a background sound of ocean waves from a free app of nature sounds. What I noticed is that this short practice allowed me to start my day from a place of peaceful centeredness, rather than from the usual careening rush of a breathless "go, go, go."

For my postlunch practice, I marched in place, knees high, arms swinging, crossing my right elbow to my left knee and my left elbow to my right knee. I learned this exercise, called the Cross Crawl, from Donna Eden, author of *Energy Medicine*, as a way to balance and energize the nervous system. I added the words I am awake and ready to the practice. After doing this, I could feel the blood flowing through my body, readying me to face the next appointment with enthusiasm, rather than the sluggishness that often comes with the postlunch blues.

My end-of-day practice was an ancient yogic breathing technique I learned from Andrew Weil. You inhale for the count of four, hold your breath for the count of seven, and exhale your breath as if blowing out through a straw to the count of eight. This is repeated three times. Called the 4-7-8 breath or diaphragmatic breathing, this is a standard relaxation resource in the EMDR therapy protocol. For me, it created a state shift in which I could truly leave my work behind and transition more freely to a pleasant evening at home.

For a week, I diligently worked with these three practices. As I used them, I told myself, I'm doing this to take care of myself today. I'm doing this because I need restoration and I deserve self-care. In fact, highlighting the compassionate nature of these activities increased my felt sense of being renewed and fortified my intention to continue.

Immediately, I noticed that I actually felt better, both in and out of the office. Because the brain loves novelty, I scoured my therapist toolkit for simple practices I could add that I'd already learned at one time, including meditation, prayer, visualization, affirmation, positive psychology, yoga, breathing, energy medicine, tapping, poetry, and song. I searched for short, simple, easy but powerful practices.

While it might have seemed overwhelming to amass a concoction of to-do tools, I started small and I thought "morsel." If a practice felt like a chore, I tossed it. It had to be brief and effective but enjoyable. My criteria for inclusion was, "Is this practice the behavioral equivalent of a morsel of chocolate?" In this way, I named the best practices and wrote them down on notecards. I consistently used the basic plan of three a day. Within a month, I felt inspired to add more of these very short exercises, depending on what I felt like I needed---sometimes before a session, after a session, before writing case notes, after a hard session, during a distressing session, in the bathroom, during lunch, during tea break, or in the car. At first, I had to stop and remind myself each time---now for a moment of meditation, now for a visualization, now to read a short poem. But the more I practiced, the more natural and automatic these moments of self-care became.

The beauty of each micro-exercise was that it provided a moment of respite and restoration during the onward rush of the day. Each small, intentional pause to refresh or relax made me feel nurtured and confident that I was doing something good for myself and perfectly attainable. I didn't have to move mountains---or even hills!---but these small gestures of self-repair, like shaking a small, sharp stone out of your shoe, had a cumulative effect over the course of the day, an effect much larger than the smallness of the effort would suggest.

As the weeks passed, I felt less overwhelmed by life, increasingly calmer and centered. I also felt more open to my clients and their struggles. Even throughout days when I was exceptionally busy, I knew that I had an arsenal of simple, effective means for self-care. I could check my calendar, see a full day ahead, and not panic. I could prepare for multiple emotional sessions without becoming daunted. Today, years later, I'm more on equanimity cruise control than in crisis mode. That said, life is still life. Last year, I grieved the loss of my beloved 15-year-old golden retriever. This year, I launch another child to college, which includes a mixture of pride and joy, as well as emotional and financial strain. And clients continue to come with heartbreaking stories.

So what have I learned? It's true that self-care is fundamental to my ability to be my best self, personally and professionally. And I haven't thrown out macro self-care with the bathwater, engaging in those activities as time allows. But it's the paradigm shift to targeted micro self-care, the cultivation of small replenishing moments throughout the day, that continues to make a crucial difference in my ongoing stress level. I guess my grandmother was right when she told me that "less is more."

Sidebar

Targeted micro self-care is a vastly overlooked way of preventing burnout, secondary traumatization, and compassion fatigue. Here are several more practices to get you started.

Ashley Davis Bush has been practicing in the field for more than 20 years. She has a private practice and is a *Huffington Post* contributor as well as the author of six self-help books, including **Simple Self-Care for Therapists**. This article was originally published in the Psychotherapy Networker Magazine.

**Presbyterian Disaster Assistance
Virtual Emotional and Spiritual Care Offerings:
Updated April 5, 2021**

PDA has been offering virtual Emotional and Spiritual Care programs since the COVID pandemic began a year ago. As most congregations are experiencing or planning in-person worship and other gatherings, the content and discussions in our virtual offerings are shifting to address post-quarantine blessings and challenges for faith leaders and the need for hope in the midst of lament and grief. Our programs also are responsive to the recent and ongoing challenges posed by tornadoes, flooding, and other natural disasters as well as continuing issues of racial justice, the tragedy of mass shootings and other human caused disasters. In all of our virtual programs, PDA team members facilitate and offer materials on maintaining self-care and building personal resilience through relationships, story telling and spiritual practices. Participants have the opportunity to share their experiences and wisdom with one another.

Please contact Kathy Riley, PDA national staff and Team Lead for Emotional and Spiritual Care at Kathryn.Riley@pcusa.org for more information or to schedule a program. Our programs are open to teaching elders, ruling elders, deacons and other congregational members.

Faith Leader Support Discussions

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is continuing to offer virtual, conversational meetings that are tailored to the participants' situation, and we are now offering a 60 or 90-minute option. A panel of PDA presenters offers opportunities for reflection and tools for self-care and resilience and responds to questions and comments from faith leaders. The 90 -minute program includes opportunities for small-group breakout conversations.

Resilience & Renewal: A Three-Hour Virtual Retreat

This three-hour virtual retreat is designed to give faith leaders and all who serve others a chance to take a breath and a break in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We offer this program to pastors and separately, to groups of ruling elders and other congregational leaders. Participants experience essential healing and resilience-building tools, including story telling, strengthening positive connections with others, and spiritual practices. This retreat, grounded in relaxation and self-care techniques, provides an opportunity to experience a time of respite.

Building Resilience

We offer this 60 or 90- minute *Building Resilience* program to groups, or the recorded version can be viewed at any time. Members of PDA teach in-the-moment tools to engage the relaxation response in body and mind and engage participants in creating a personalized self- care and resilience-building plan, with attention to the particular issues facing faith leaders. The 90-minute version offers participants time to share their experiences and helpful practices.

View/download the webinar recording for faith leaders: [ENGLISH](#) | [SPANISH](#) or general audiences [View/download the webinar recording](#). Anyone wishing to view these webinars should also download and print out the accompanying handout ([ENGLISH](#) | [SPANISH](#)), which participants will use as they participate in the webinar.



Common Signs of Stress

Adapted from the work of Jim Norman, M.
Ed., C.T.S., Oklahoma City, OK
Revised and adapted by Presbyterian
Disaster Assistance, 01/2015

After experiencing a traumatic event, or after a series of cumulative stressors, it is common—and normal—to experience a wide range of reactions. These responses may appear immediately after the event or some time later. They may last for a few days, a few weeks, or even longer. These are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Over time, many signs diminish. Consider seeking help if they persist or reappear after other upsetting or re-stimulating events. The following are some of the most common signs:

Circle any signs you have been experiencing and use this information to help you choose self-care and relaxation practices and tools

Emotional (feelings)	Cognitive (thinking)	Behavioral (doing)	Physical	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Terror • Anxiety/panic • Suspiciousness/paranoia • Rage • Apprehension • Depression • Vengeance • Shame • Humiliation • Guilt/survivors' guilt • Sadness • Grief • Emotional shock • Emotional outbursts • Loss of emotional control • Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness • Feelings of desperation • Emotional numbness • Irritability • Oversensitivity • Inappropriate emotional responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Nightmares • Suspiciousness • Flashbacks • Difficulty concentrating/making decisions • Spaciness • Memory problems • Shortened attention span • Overly critical • Blaming others • Poor problem-solving skills • Poor abstract thinking • Preoccupation with the event • Inability to recall all or parts of the event • Disorientation of time, place or person • Heightened or lowered awareness • Thoughts of suicide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to cry • Uncontrollable crying • Withdrawal • Antisocial acts • Blaming • Inability to rest • Hyper alertness • Pacing • Erratic movement • Emotional outbursts • Change in speech patterns • Increased alcohol/drug use • Avoidance of thoughts, feelings related to the event • Difficulty writing or talking • Changes in sexual functioning • Loss or increase of appetite • Verbal or physical violence • Changes from typical behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Rapid heart rate • Sleep disturbances or nightmares • Shallow breathing • Inability to rest/relax • Fatigue • Thirst • Twitches • Vomiting • Weakness • Chest pain • Visual difficulties • Nausea/diarrhea • Dizziness or faintness • Chills or sweating • Easily startled • Changes in appetite • Grinding teeth • Sitting and staring • Uncoordinated movement • Self-harm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning • Doubt • Emptiness • Loss of meaning • Feeling unforgiven • Identification of situation as punishment or martyrdom • Wish for magical solutions • Loss of direction • Cynicism • Apathy • Alienation • Mistrust • Crisis of faith • Sudden marked increase or decrease in expressions of faith • Anger at God – “Why?”

The same five areas in which you experience the effects of trauma or stress are also areas in which to focus your coping efforts. The following are some ideas others have found useful. Add to the table other ideas you have found helpful.

Circle the items you commonly use, and mark additional items you would like to begin using

Emotional (feelings)	Cognitive (thinking)	Behavioral (doing)	Physical	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of what you are feeling. • Allow yourself to experience what it is that you feel (Crying, shaking, and screaming are OK.) • Be responsible for expressing your emotions safely. • Voice what you are experiencing. • Be assertive when needed but check with a trusted person to see if you're overreacting. • Keep communication open with others. • Develop your sense of humor. • Find a vent partner, someone who will listen to you without interrupting or judging. • YOUR IDEAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the decisions you are already making. • Make small, daily decisions. • Save big decisions till later. • Avoid "all or nothing" thinking. • Get the most info you can to help make decisions. • Have a Plan B. • Remember you have choices. • Practice problem-solving skills that worked for you in the past. • Break large tasks into smaller ones. • YOUR IDEAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice moderation. • Limit demands on time and energy. • Write things down. • See a counselor. • Stay in touch with your support system. • Do activities that were previously enjoyable. • Take trips or different routes to work. • Ask others how they think you're doing. • Find new activities that are enjoyable and (mildly) challenging. • Do things that relax you and bring you joy. • Get involved with others. • Enjoy your pet. • Go fishing. • YOUR IDEAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice deep breathing. • See your doctor and dentist. • Exercise. • Maintain regular sleep patterns. • Minimize caffeine, alcohol, and sugar. • Eat well-balanced and regular meals. • Drink water. • Wear less restrictive clothing. • Engage in some physical luxuries—spas, massage, exercise trainers, baths. • Practice relaxation exercises. • Dance. • YOUR IDEAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray • Meditate. • Practice gratitude. • Discuss your spiritual concerns with spiritual leaders. • Balance time spent with others with time for yourself/with God. • Practice the rituals of your faith. • Attend spiritual retreats. • Visit new places of worship. • Be bold in asking the hard questions. • Read spiritual literature. • Read stories of other survivors who overcame hard times. • Tune in to your higher power: sing, paint, write poetry, journal. • Renew your sense of purpose. • YOUR IDEAS