



African American Behavioral Health
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

PRIORITIZING SELF – CARE

A Guide for Faith Leaders

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Purpose of this Self-Care Guide

The goal of this guide is to identify some of the challenges of Faith leaders and provide strategies they can use to address these challenges. It is important that Faith leaders take the steps necessary to adopt a healthier lifestyle and involve themselves in activities that will enhance their overall health and well-being.

The suggestions in this guide are just that – merely suggestions. Each Faith leader has their own individual needs and priorities according to their specific role and lifestyle.

Disclaimer:

The use of this Self-Care Guide is not intended to substitute for a therapeutic relationship with a licensed or certified mental health provider. This guide is intended for voluntary use and for psychoeducational purposes only.

What is Self-Care ?

In your faith practice, you may have recommended self-care to many people. **“Self-Care”** - basically, caring for oneself - includes the actions and practices that individuals engage in to maintain and improve their overall well-being. These activities can range from using relaxation techniques to seeking medical advice.

Self-Care Involves:

- Making healthy lifestyle choices
- Self-monitoring
- Self-management

Self-Care is not selfishness!

Self-Care is actually an unselfish act. It lets people recharge, rejuvenate and care for themselves, to be at their best. People who regularly care for others are often the ones most in need of self-care. The more profoundly your words and actions might affect other people, the more important it is to use regular self-care techniques.

What are the benefits?

Benefits of Self-Care: In a world that is often fast-paced and demanding, taking time for yourself encourages physical health, mental clarity, emotional stability and spiritual wellness.

Short-Term Benefits:

- **Reduced Stress Levels:** By giving you opportunities to relax, both mentally and physically, prioritizing self-care can help you manage and cope with stressors in your daily life.
- **Increasing Self-Worth:** The more you take care of yourself, the more effective you'll be at cultivating your sense of self-respect, confidence and inner peace.
- **Enhanced Focus and Productivity:** Replenishing mental, emotional and spiritual energy ultimately leads to higher levels of productivity and success.

Long-Term Benefits

- **Disease Prevention:** Following self-care practices such as maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in regular exercise, managing stress and getting adequate rest reduces the risk of heart attack, stroke, and obesity.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** By taking proactive self-care measures, you can experience a significant improvement in your well-being that leads to a greater sense of contentment and happiness

(Bottaro, 2023)

Boundary Setting

“Setting boundaries” refers to establishing and communicating personal limits and expectations in relationships or interactions with other people. It also involves defining which behaviors are acceptable to you and which behaviors are not.

For Faith leaders, boundary setting is pivotal in maintaining their well-being and effectiveness in their roles. It involves establishing limits around their time, emotional energy and personal space to prevent burnout. Faith leaders must establish and communicate their boundaries to their congregation, colleagues, etc., to ensure mutual respect and understanding in their interactions with people.

Setting Healthy Boundaries:

- Be firm
- Be clear
- Set reasonable consequences for crossing boundaries

(Arzt, 2023)

Intentional Boundary Setting

- **Identify what your needs and boundaries are:** This involves reflecting on what is most important and what makes you feel comfortable, respected and valued.
- **Communicate your boundaries:** Communicating your boundaries involves expressing them clearly, assertively and respectfully.
- **Tolerate the emotions behind boundary setting:** It's natural to feel uncomfortable, anxious and guilty when you assert your needs and limits. Practice self-compassion, so you can validate your feelings without judging them.
- **Boundary Violation:** When boundaries are being violated, it's crucial to address the situation promptly and assertively. Identify and explain the unacceptable behavior, express your feelings and set consequences for the boundary violations.

Facets of Self-Care

Spiritual Self-Care: Involves nurturing the inner self and connecting with something greater than yourself.

Physical Self-Care: Involves taking care of your body's physical needs and well-being.

Mental Self-Care: Focuses on nurturing and maintaining your psychological and cognitive well-being. Mental self-care helps stimulate the mind and improve brain functioning.

Emotional Self-Care: Involves recognizing, understanding and managing your emotions in healthy ways. Emotional self-care fosters emotional resilience and self-awareness.

Environmental Self-Care: Focuses on nurturing the kinds of connections with the natural world and your immediate surroundings that promote well-being.

Financial Self-Care: Involves taking steps to manage, organize, and improve your financial well-being.

Social Self-Care: Focuses on nurturing your relationships with family and friends and maintaining your connection with your supportive network(s).

Recreational Self-Care: Involves engaging in enjoyable activities that help you relax, unwind and recharge.

(8 Areas of Self Care and How to Practice Them, 2022)

Challenges of Faith Leaders

Faith Leaders face a unique set of difficulties as they navigate their roles within their communities.

These challenges can include:

- Managing the emotional and spiritual needs of their congregations
- Balancing the demands of leadership with their own personal well-being
- Dealing with conflicts and disagreements within the community
- Serving as a source of support and guidance
- Facing criticism and resistance
- Dealing with personal challenges while serving others

These are only a few, but navigating these challenges requires resilience, self-care, reflection and a strong support system to help Faith leaders fulfill their roles effectively and authentically.

Burnout

One author describes burnout as a form of exhaustion caused by constantly feeling “swamped” (WebMD, 2020). It is a result of excessive and prolonged emotional, physical and mental stress.

It is helpful to think in terms of three types of burnout:

- Overload Burnout: When you work harder and harder, becoming frantic in your pursuit of success or survival
- Under-Challenged Burnout: When you feel under-appreciated and bored with your job
- Neglect Burnout: When you feel helpless at work

Signs of Burnout include feeling tired or exhausted, losing your sense of enthusiasm, and being unable to do your job. To deal with burnout, you can start by getting enough sleep, engaging in relaxing activities, and practicing mindfulness.

Burnout in Faith leaders is a significant concern, as the emotional, spiritual and relational demands of their roles can lead to exhaustion and feelings of being overwhelmed.

(Brennan, 2020)

Vicarious Trauma

The Jefferson Center for Mental Health describes vicarious trauma as an ongoing process of change over time that comes from witnessing or hearing about other people's suffering and needs.

Signs of Vicarious Trauma:

- Feeling on-edge
- Social withdrawal
- Becoming judgmental
- Expecting the worst of others
- A "why bother" attitude
- Discouragement

Coping with Vicarious Trauma:

- Journal
- Affirm your strengths
- Get adequate rest
- Seek support

Burnout in Faith leaders is a significant concern, as the emotional, spiritual, and relational demands of their roles can lead to exhaustion and feelings of being overwhelmed.

(Jefferson Center for Mental Health, 2014)

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is the ability to turn understanding, acceptance, and love toward yourself. It involves offering yourself the same care, and support you would offer others, and recognizing that you, too, are human and deserve grace and non-judgment.

Self-Compassion is particularly important in Faith leaders, as oftentimes they carry the weight of caring for others while neglecting their own well-being. Cultivating self-compassion allows Faith leaders to acknowledge their own limitations and imperfections with a sense of grace rather than self-criticism.

Ways to demonstrate self-compassion:

- Check in with yourself throughout the day
- Journal about the times you're hard on yourself
- Engage in guided meditation

(Haupt, 2023)

Additional Information

Faith Leaders carry a tremendous weight in terms of supporting others, making self-care essential. According to the Barna Group, 38% of U.S. Pastors thought about quitting their full-time ministries in 2021. One of the most alarming statistics is that 46% of younger pastors (aged 45 and under) are considering quitting full-time pastoring, compared to 34% of those aged 45 and up.

With these numbers on the rise, its important for Faith leaders to seek support from mentors, peers and mental health professionals.

Seeking therapy can be a helpful and important step for Faith leaders in prioritizing their mental health and well-being. Therapists can provide a nonjudgmental, safe space to identify and process your thoughts, emotions and spiritual aspirations.

(Barna Group, 2022)

Tips for Self-Care

Spiritual Self-Care:

- Meditation
- Practicing gratitude
- Being in nature
- Mindfulness

Physical Self-Care:

- Having a balanced diet
- Engaging in exercise
- Staying hydrated
- Making sleep a priority

Mental Self-Care:

- Setting goals and priorities
- Focusing on positivity
- Reading
- Journaling

Emotional Self-Care:

- Listening to music
 - Saying prayers and positive affirmations
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Tips for Self-Care

Environmental Self-Care:

- Decluttering your space
- Adding a desired scent to your environment
- Removing an unwanted scent from your environment
- Using an air purifier, humidifier, etc. if needed

Financial Self-Care:

- Creating a list of financial goals
- Learning about investing
- Checking your bank account balances
- Keeping track of your purchases

Social Self-Care:

- Nurturing relationships
- Prioritizing meaningful relationships
- Creating time for social activities
- Joining a social group

Recreational Self-Care:

- Engaging in enjoyable leisure activities
- Trying a new hobby

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