



THE FRONTLINE RESILIENCE HANDBOOK



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FRONTLINE RESILIENCE WORKBOOK

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Why Do You Need Resilience?



Frontline workers regularly face stress and traumatic events on the job.

When your work involves helping other people in times of crisis, you can expect to experience stress on the job. You will inevitably be exposed to traumatic events as a witness during an incident, in supporting others afterward or through involvement as a direct victim yourself.

You're trained to deal with the experience of walking into, or hearing about, the tragic scenes of other people's trauma. You know what your role is, and you have the tools needed to get the job done. As you gain experience, you refine your skills and sharpen your tools. The graphic details don't disturb you as much, and you have a confidence that comes from the knowledge and competence you've developed over time.

Early in a career on the frontline, you figure out how you're going to cope with what you do. Maybe you have a regular workout routine. Perhaps it's a tight network of peers who "get you". Sometimes, it starts as a drink or two to help when sleep is elusive. Those who can't find ways to cope often don't stay in the field long.

Frontline workers may suffer professionally and personally due to trauma exposure.

Someone in a frontline role may suffer from trauma as a result of specific incidents over the course of their career. A scene gone terribly wrong. A threat to their own life, or to the life of a colleague. A horrific incident with a personal connection. A bad decision in an impossible split second. These are the moments that stay with you, jarring you awake from bad dreams, leading you to doubt yourself and causing you to get lost in a spiral of "what if...".

Alternately, the work itself takes a toll over time. So many people wounded, dead, grieving. Problems; always problems and very few solutions that are both effective and efficient. Endless paperwork and volatile politics. Policies that don't make sense and don't meet the needs. This is the business that you face day in and day out, building up layers of pain until one day it's just so heavy you can't carry it.

Both types of suffering are bound to have an impact on life at work and at home. This can shorten careers, contribute to health problems and have a negative impact on family relationships and friendships.



What Can You Do to Build Resilience?



Start by understanding the impact of the stress and trauma that comes from this work.

DEFINITIONS

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Compassion Fatigue

The emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events. (Figley, 1995)

<https://www.stress.org/military/for-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue>

Profound emotional and physical exhaustion that erodes empathy, hope and compassion. (Mathieu, F. The Compassion Fatigue Workbook, 2012)

Trauma

An occurrence wherein an individual sees or experiences a risk to their own life or physical safety or that of other people and feels terror, fear, or helplessness. (Pam, 2013)

<https://psychologydictionary.org/trauma/>

Secondary Traumatic Stress

The emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.

<https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress/>

Vicarious Trauma

The emotional residue of exposure from working with people and hearing their trauma stories, witnessing the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/trauma-disaster/fact-sheet-9---vicarious-trauma.pdf>

Burnout

A state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>

Moral Injury

The damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct. <https://moralinjuryproject.syr.edu/about-moral-injury/>

Sanctuary Trauma

Occurs when an individual who suffered a severe stressor next encounters what was expected to be a supportive and protective environment and discovers only more trauma. <https://steverosephd.com/sanctuary-trauma-and-the-sacred/>



Recognizing Signs & Symptoms



Nine Warning Signs That You Are Suffering Adverse Effects of Frontline Work

- Isolation and Withdrawal
- Irritability
- Difficulty Sleeping
- Anger and Aggression
- Emotional Numbness
- Lack of Communication
- Distrust and Loss of Work Satisfaction
- Depression and/or Anxiety
- Substance Use as a Need or Habit

There are a variety of tools you can use to consider your personal situation. You may be experiencing signs and symptoms of stress and trauma that you didn't even know were signals of difficulty because you have just been functioning this way for so long. Periodically checking in with yourself using one or more of these tests can help you become aware of the state of your well-being, so that you can responsively adapt your self care.

Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Scale – ProQOL IV or ProQOL 5 is available in English and 28 other languages at this link:

https://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html

Holmes-Rahe Stress Inventory is available in English only at this link:

<https://www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory>





Accept the Reality of Suffering & Have Self-Compassion

Manage Expectations:

You can expect to experience stress, trauma and suffering when you choose a career as a frontline worker. Whatever your role, you will be exposed to traumatic incidents, graphic information and the many types of harm that befall humans. It would be great if professional education, training and orientations made this clear from the beginning, because it would help new recruits prepare for the pain and plan to prioritize self-care. Unfortunately, while curriculum and agendas are packed with theory and skills practice, the important topic of resilience is often overlooked. Worse, it is still stigmatizing to talk about the mental health impacts of doing frontline work. This combination makes it hard to know what to expect, and if you don't know what to expect it's much harder to plan and prepare to cope.

You can expect:

- to see your fellow humans at their worst. You are likely to see people in terrible pain, with horrific physical and psychological injuries, sometimes acting out in violent and lethal ways.
- to witness and experience agony, tragedy, sorrow, fear, helplessness and hopelessness.
- to be overwhelmed with sensory stimulus including sights, sounds, smells, physical sensations and sometimes taste. These are the sensations you will revisit when you experience flashbacks, reliving the details in your mind long after the event is over.
- to be expected to do your job and cope with anything, complete the paperwork quickly and correctly, and do it all again, and again, and again
- to forget most of the details of the people you help and the situations you deal with. Some of the things you deal with will blend together in your memory over time as you simply act from your training and experience – just another day on the job.
- to carry some of these stories with you for the rest of your life. Occasionally, someone you help will touch your heart and you will be able to see their face, remember their name and know their story decades later. It becomes yours, too.
- to walk in the world with knowledge about awful and horrendous things while others remain blissfully unaware, safe in their inexperience. Sometimes you will envy them, but sometimes you will forget that you were like them once, long ago, and you will roll your eyes and make dismissive noises because they don't know what you know.
- to forget that, amid the pain, tragedy and chaos, life also holds joy, love and peace. It is there, but you will sometimes forget and sometimes even deny it.





The Struggle for Self-Compassion

It is likely that you are in this field because you have empathy and compassion for others. You want to alleviate suffering and solve problems so people can live safely, comfortably and well. You are generous with your time and energy when others are in need. You go toward the crisis and arrive ready to help. It's not just what you do, it's who you are.

It may not surprise you to know that frontline professionals commonly struggle to offer to themselves what they so readily give to others. It's easy to put the needs of others first, striving for perfection to fend off the harsh judgment of your inner critic.

Consider the possibility of turning that compassionate nature toward yourself. To live is to experience suffering, as much as comfort, love and peace. When you are suffering with the weight of your experiences, be gentle with yourself. Allow yourself to feel all of your feelings – even the difficult ones that can be so hard to admit, accept and sit with. Acknowledge your own pain. Offer yourself the same kindness and tenderness that you would offer anyone who needs your help. Notice your efforts and your strengths and give yourself gentle approval for doing the best you can under difficult circumstances. Remember that no one is perfect. Perfection is a social construct, subjective and changing for a fickle audience. You are doing your best, and it is good enough. You may rest and give yourself time to heal. This is the same advice you give to the hurt and wounded people you help.

Self-compassion is the process of having kindness toward the self during the very human experience of suffering. It allows the self to experience negative emotions as well as positive ones as we work through the experience of suffering and move toward balance and healing. (adapted from Kristen Neff, 2020, self-compassion.org)



Select Strategies for Self Care and Resilience.



Resilience is the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma and stress.

(adapted from the American Psychological Association, Road to Resilience, 2015)

Personal Resilience Factors:

Acceptance of Change

Change is coming. No matter who you are or what you do, you will experience change throughout your life. Some change is predictable as we move through developmental stages, while other changes are unpredictable, dropped into your life without warning or time to prepare. It's not important whether you are a change-seeker, who regularly looks for new opportunities, or a change avoider, who prefers to keep things the same as much as possible. What is important is knowing yourself so you can prepare yourself for change that is inevitable and examine whether your desire for change is actually a strategy to avoid something you might be better to deal with in your life.

Coping Skills

How you cope with your thoughts and feelings is important. It's impossible to keep thoughts from popping into your mind and equally unavoidable to stop feelings from washing over you. This means you need ways to cope when you have negative thoughts or difficult feelings. Some of the ways we cope include strategies for pausing and challenging your negative thoughts, engaging in positive self-talk, healthy activities to temporarily distract us or relieve tension, and being able to explore and express powerful feelings. Developing good coping skills tend to improve when we prioritize good self-care strategies.

Creative Problem Solving

Problems happen, big and small, on a regular basis throughout life. Being able to think creatively, with a focus on solutions, can help you avoid getting stuck in a problem or having to handle the same problem repeatedly. When you find yourself struggling with the same issue, try stepping back from the struggle for a moment to assess the goal. Sometimes the struggle is about trying to impose your wishes on someone else or convince someone your way is right. If the goal is to accomplish a task, you may need to be willing to brainstorm new ideas and compromise rather than try to control the process. When you need to solve a problem, see what happens when you ask yourself: What needs to happen? If I stop what I am trying, what else might work? Am I willing to try another idea?





Sense of Control

It feels good to believe you have some control over your life. Humans enjoy feeling empowered to make decisions. At the same time, many of the details of your life are out of your control. When you have an employer, there are policies and procedures to follow, workplace rules and schedules that someone else sets. When you're in the community or at home, you have obligations and responsibilities to others that must sometimes come ahead of your own desires. It's important to recognize that the only thing you can control is your own choices and responses to the situations you are in. You may not be able to choose what time you have to start your shift, but you can decide how early you wake up, and what routines prepare you for work. You can't control how others behave, but you can determine how you respond to them, and sometimes you can choose not to interact with them.

Healthy Boundaries

It can feel pretty good to say yes, especially when you're a natural helper. You have a career that involves caring for others, you may do volunteer work and you are likely the "go-to" person when one of your friends or family members has a problem to solve. It's nice to be wanted and to be supportive. It can also be draining, leaving you feeling depleted and deprived. Think about how you can say no to some things you currently take on, so that you can say yes to yourself. Say yes to fun family activities instead of just chores. How about a yes to time for playfulness, mindfulness and self care.

Optimism and Perspective

Resilience includes having an ability to see positive possibilities. Realistic optimism allows you to identify avenues for hope even in tough circumstances. It doesn't ask you to ignore problems and pretend that everything is wonderful. It involves an ability to see and accept challenges, while holding the belief that things can and will shift so that you can feel good again. Perspective can help in developing realistic optimism. When you can only see a situation from one angle, you can get stuck in the difficulties and miss potential constructive alternatives.





Sense of Humour

Having a sense of humour can really help you survive stress and trauma. It's quite a natural coping mechanism to think of morbid jokes when you deal with life and death and the impact of violence and trauma in the lives of humans. When this is your work, day in and day out, sometimes it is funny when things go a little awry or you're dealing with something repeatedly. Knowing your audience and choosing your timing are the keys to using humour successfully to help manage your own range of feelings about the really hard experiences.

Some people also feel a benefit when they watch a funny movie or listen to a comedian's performance or take in some other form of humour. A light-hearted distraction can provide a much-needed respite from problems. Laughter itself truly is good medicine. It changes our focus and allows a physical release. We just feel better after a good laugh.

Gratitude

Even in your most difficult times, you can find something to be grateful for. When you take time to shift your thinking away from your problems and look for "small wins", you're actually training your mind to seek out the good. Humans are really quite good at noticing negatives and danger, which is how we have survived as a species. When you sense danger, you react through fight or flight, and sometimes freeze in your effort to survive. Work on the frontlines often strengthens our ability to sense danger, and you spend a lot of time preparing to face it. That can mean you get out of practice at noticing the positives. Pausing for gratitude in some way every day can help you with realistic optimism and perspective in the face of troubling times, too.

Self Care

Ultimately, all of these resilience factors are related to good self-care. When you prioritize your well-being, make time for rejuvenating activities that energize you or calm you according to your needs and take good care of yourself, you are building your capacity to cope with adversity, trauma and stress. Effective self-care is something you do regularly and holistically, devoting time and attention to your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-existence. By taking care of yourself, you help to ensure you'll continue to be able to provide excellent care to others who are important in your professional and personal life.





Self Care Strategies

For the Mind

Keep Learning

You finished school. You likely have mandatory trainings to keep your certification and satisfy your regulatory body. That's good, but it's not enough to keep your mind nimble. Look for opportunities for learning that capture your attention. Is there something that is related to your work that you feel keen about? Follow that interest and seek out specialized training. Is there something outside of work that appeals to you? Take workshops and continuing education courses. Even if you never reach expert level, you will gain knowledge, skills and experience as you continue to grow through a variety of learning.

Take Breaks

Everyone needs rest from time to time. Plan breaks away from work and everyday responsibilities. Pause learning temporarily. Unfollow social media and unplug technology whenever you can, for a few hours or a few days. Taking time to rest refreshes your energy and gives you strength to pick up where you left off and carry on giving excellent care at work and at home in a positive, engaged way.

For the Body

Nutrition

It seems simple, but fuelling your body is one of the best building blocks for resilience. Choose a balanced diet that incorporates your favourite foods. Use pre-cut veggies and other ingredients that make it easier and faster to prepare simple meals and snacks. If this is a challenging goal for you, remember it's always easier to add than to remove. You don't have to eliminate comfort foods that lack nutrition. Instead, try to add healthier choices into your menu. Gradually you may start to crave your go-to comfort foods less, enjoy the more nutritionally dense foods more and improve your overall diet. Don't forget to drink your water!

Physical Activity

In this age of convenience, it's common to do much less physically demanding activity in your daily lives than your ancestors, who worked without the benefits of machines and technology. Some frontline jobs are very active, often contributing to a good baseline physical strength and flexibility. Physical activity outside of work can be important to involve muscles and movement you don't usually engage at work. It's also a great way to release any tension you're holding, whether it's through the stretching and strengthening of yoga, the rhythmic movement of cardio or the measured pace of heavy lifting.





Sleep

When you sleep, you heal physically and psychologically. At rest, your body directs energy toward regenerating cells. In your sleep cycle, your brain is at work processing your experiences and settling them into storage somewhere in your grey matter. When you don't sleep, you can become run down physically, lacking energy, feeling depressed and unmotivated. You are more vulnerable to having accidents, you are likely to have a lower tolerance for distress and less ability to solve problems.

Sleep hygiene is a term that encompasses many factors conducive to sleep:

Environment – make sure the room is quiet, dark and cool. This will signal to your body that it can slow down, rest and focus energy to internal processes, free from the responsibilities and activities of the day.

Body – follow routines that gradually release tension and allow your body to relax.

Avoid –

- vigorous exercise, which can boost energy and leave you feeling more alert
- screen time, which can fool your brain into thinking it is daytime and stimulate your mind too much to slow into sleep
- caffeine, which will circulate in your system for several hours
- alcohol, which can give a false sense of relaxation as it enters your system, but may disrupt sleep and depress your mood.

For Your Spirit

Make Time

Do things you love. This requires planning and commitment. It is so easy to fill your days with tasks related to work, family responsibility, home maintenance and community obligations. Being “busy” can feel important and productive. It's also true that a full calendar can be a way to avoid being alone or being quiet. If you keep going you don't have to think about your feelings or memories that cause discomfort or distress. Make time for the things you love to do and relearn how to be with yourself.





Connect

Human beings flourish in connection with one another. Social networks are important for your sense of well-being. To thrive, you need people who understand you, accept you and love you. This is true, even if you don't need very many people at all.

Ensure you develop and protect relationships. Identify people whose company you enjoy, people who support you and celebrate you. Make time for talking with them and spending time together. These interactions are uplifting and fulfilling. Keep in mind that if you're an introvert, just a few connections with people who meet these criteria will do! You're seeking quality of relationship over quantity. It's good practice for extroverts to look for quality relationships as well, even if many of the contacts are more fleeting.

Find Meaning and Purpose

Humans tend to be happiest when they feel there is meaning in the way they spend their time, and a purpose for their existence. Your work on the frontlines likely gives you a sense of meaning and purpose, as you can see the essential needs you address on a day-to-day basis on the job. It can contribute to an identity crisis, however, if the only meaning and purpose you have is centred on your employment. Well-rounded, resilient people tend to also develop meaningful interests and important relationships outside of work that encourage the maintenance of a healthy balance.



Why Bother to Build Resilience?



In Pursuit of Self-preservation

If you hope to have a long, fulfilling career and live an engaged, enjoyable life it will be necessary to create a plan that takes into account the building blocks of resilience and to practice strategies for self care. Everyone is different, of course, so you will have an exclusive personal list of priorities and actions designed to help you live your best life. Although all of the factors mentioned are important, it is up to you to decide which ones are important enough to make time for in your busy life. Choosing to engage in self care for resilience means that you are likely to remain physically and emotionally well overall, and more readily recover from stress and trauma.

In Pursuit of Excellence

Providing exceptional care is a common goal for professionals working on the frontlines. The ability to perform efficiently and effectively rests on your own health and well-being. You know when you are in top form, feeling good and ready for whatever comes next. It's generally when you have had a good rest, you feel adequately fueled, your mind is alert, and your spirit is at peace. It's true that the specific activities that help you achieve this state of readiness are unique to the individual, and it's also true that they're all related to these resilience factors in some way.

Pitfalls and Challenges on the Path

Habits Are Powerful

Habits help with establishing routines that move you easily through your days, weeks, months and years. You make it a habit to brush your teeth at certain times. You develop the habits of eating particular foods, going certain places and interacting with specific people. You have traditions you keep and customs you honour.

Change can be quite difficult. Often, you will move through your usual patterns without even considering any changes. At times, some of your habits may cause problems in your life which begins the process of thinking about change as a possibility to avoid those problems. It can take quite a while before you're ready to move from thinking about change to actually doing something different. Once you do something different, it's time to assess whether it solved the problem or not. If it





doesn't solve the problem, it's time to decide whether to try something else, or go back to your old habits. If it does solve the problem, the next challenge lies in maintaining the change.

It can be quite a process to make even a small change. As a result, you've likely experienced this cycle many times over the course of your life. When you're thinking of making a change to incorporate something new, plan to practice the change for at least 30 days to help establish your new habit. Repetition over time forms new physical memories and new associations, which can mean the change is more likely to become a new habit, taking the place of whatever action was causing a problem.

Expectations Are Powerful

Professionals on the frontlines are commonly called upon to perform compassionately both on and off the job. Your work demands that you hold space for the suffering of others and do what you can to reduce or end that suffering. In your personal life, you are likely often called upon by family and friends to extend that same compassion and expertise through formal channels in volunteer work and informally through favours. As a result, you may have developed a network of people who rely on you to meet their needs – often without any thought to your own – across all areas of your life. It can be hard to set new boundaries in the face of long-standing patterns where you step up, take action and solve problems.

Your own expectations are often part of this equation too. Many people working on the frontlines hold themselves to a very high standard. Some would certainly qualify to hold the title of "Perfectionist". This is often a strength. We want frontline workers who are able to perform consistently and competently, and the self-motivated diligence and perseverance demonstrated by so many professionals gives us confidence that their important jobs will be done well. The challenge can come when you don't leave room for the mistakes and flaws that are simply part of human experience. You strive for perfection, and it's true that you can have a perfect score in a subject like math. However, it's also true that perfect performance is simply a social construct for humans who will sometimes get sick, sometimes struggle and sometimes make mistakes. It's important to strive for excellence, while at the same time accepting your inevitable limits.



What Steps Can You Take Now?



Be Self-Aware

Complete one or more of the checklists included at the links on page 7 to help identify any signs and symptoms of stress and trauma you're experiencing. It's important to remember that your status is dynamic and changes over time. What's happening for you will likely be different today than it was 3 months ago and compared to what it will be like when 3 more months have passed. If you've had a recent incident or situation you've been dealing with, it's likely you'll have more signs and symptoms than if things have been going pretty smoothly in your life for a while.

Set SMART Goals

Specific – break your bigger goal down into small steps. For example, if you want to improve your nutrition, a specific goal would be to add vegetables to lunch and dinner.

Measurable – decide on your ideal numbers. For example, you want to add 1 serving of vegetables to lunch and 2 servings of vegetables to dinner.

Achievable – choose something you believe you can do with the resources you have. For example, can you add 1 serving of vegetables to lunch and 2 servings of vegetables to dinner every day, or would it be better to start with 5 days each week, or perhaps just on workdays or days off.

Relevant – pick a goal that is related to your need or desire. For example, adding vegetables to lunch and dinner is more likely to improve your nutrition than cutting out chips or candy, which still leaves you plenty of non-nutritious choices to make.

Time-bound – set time frames for your goal. For example, you will begin adding vegetables to lunch and dinner tomorrow after your weekly grocery shop, and you will continue to add vegetables to lunch and dinner for at least 30 days.

Strengthen

Give yourself one or more physical outlet to strengthen your body and release physical tension. Choose any physical activity you like to do. Add it your calendar, using the SMART goal concepts. Maybe you will do yoga before bed two days and walk around the block after work 5 days this week.

Movement helps our body, mind and spirit. Try to do some of your activity outdoors for the added benefit of feeling connected to nature, which is also good for you.



Connect

Make a date with a family member or friend. Meet for a meal, plan a hike together or sign up for the same workshop.

If you can't be together in person, schedule a virtual date. Make a coffee or pour a drink and sit down for a phone call or video chat. Choose a movie to watch and chat over a video or text platform as the movie plays in your respective homes.

Send someone a handwritten thank you card, or a brief note to say hello. Most people enjoy receiving mail that isn't a bill or advertising

Calm

Was there a creative activity you enjoyed doing as a child? Maybe you sang or painted or wrote stories. Expressive arts offer the opportunity for soothing sound or movement and allow you to explore and express feelings with more than words. The act of creating can offer playfulness and a sense of connection to the senses that can be missing when you are struggling with thoughts and feelings about stress and trauma. Pick up some inexpensive supplies and plan a creative date.

Alternately, select a guided meditation on-line or on an app, settle yourself in and give it a try. If you are new to meditation, choose two or three different sources of audio or video meditations to sample. Set aside some time when you will be able to be still and uninterrupted. It's ok to start small. A 2-3 minute guided meditation is a great start to building your confidence with meditation. As you listen to these introductory exercises, consider whether you like the voice and if the words are resonating with you. There are a wide variety of recorded meditations available, many at no charge, so search around until you find one that feels right for you. Once you find one you like, try to listen to it several days a week for a few weeks. Challenge yourself to sit for 3 minutes in the beginning, and as you get used to it, add a minute or more every week for four weeks. See if you can get to 15 minutes.



How Can Counselling Help?



Counselling offers you a personalized opportunity to talk about your thoughts and feelings related to your experiences. A typical session with a counsellor is 50-60 minutes dedicated to you. With an effective counsellor, you can untangle the complex threads of your experiences to better understand yourself and find the best way forward in your life.

Good counselling offers:

- *A neutral perspective and safe zone for exploration.* Your counsellor should be accepting and non-judgmental. They should focus on you, learning your story and your perceptions without imposing their experience or world view on you. Your counsellor should be curious and ask questions to discover details without making assumptions about you or your situation.
- *Education, validation, reassurance.* Your counsellor should offer general information about the situation you face based on research and learning. They can provide you with evidence that confirms what you are experiencing, which helps to validate your thoughts and feelings. They may share data and examples that reassure you as you move through difficult situations toward healing.
- *Ideas and tools for coping strategies.* Your counsellor should offer you a variety of suggestions to try. Ideally, the counsellor will invite you to try different exercises that may help you. If you don't want to try them, or if you try and they don't work, your counsellor will work with you to explore this and adapt exercises in ways that be more effective for you. The process of healing is a trial and collaborative adventure where your counsellor is a knowledgeable and skilled guide but you are highly involved in planning the course and itinerary of your work.





What to look for in counselling:

- *A person you feel is interested in you and your story.* Take the time to call before scheduling an appointment if you can. Even in a short telephone conversation with a counsellor you can find out a lot about how talking with them feels for you. The working relationship is a very important part of effective counselling. That first conversation may give you a strong positive or negative feeling about the counsellor, and it's good to trust your instincts. It may be that you feel neutral, and in that case, it doesn't hurt to schedule an appointment and get to know the counsellor a bit more before making your decision to go ahead or to look for someone else.
- *Someone who has knowledge and experience with the type of challenges you're facing.* You can often find out if a counsellor has a particular area of expertise when you receive a referral by someone you trust, such as your family doctor. You can also research the counsellor on their website or through an internet search, which may tell you the focus of their work. A good relationship is very important, but you also want someone who has information and skills that will apply to your situation.
- *A space where you feel comfortable talking.* Ideally the counsellor's office will be welcoming, soothing and convenient for you to travel to. Accessibility may be an important concern to investigate as well, particularly if you have any mobility issues. If virtual counselling will be occurring, the counsellor should be experienced with telephone, email or video counselling strategies. They should be able to explain the challenges of virtual counselling compared to in-person counselling and have a clear plan to maintain privacy and overcome technical glitches.





Some Practical Next Steps

- *Create a personalized self-care menu.* Print the PDF template and add menu items, including a variety of your favourite self-care activities. Post it somewhere you will see it frequently as a helpful reminder of possibilities when you need them.
- *Connect with family and friends.* Make a date with someone whose company you enjoy for an in-person or virtual hang out. Consider making it a regular, recurring event that you can look forward to without having to go to a lot of trouble organizing.
- *Find peer support by associating with colleagues.* Plan an informal gathering in-person or on-line. Alternately, bring together co-workers you appreciate with the intention of meeting regularly. Take the opportunity to talk about work with a focus on healthy and effective coping strategies.
- *Get professional support.* Schedule a therapy session as a mental health check-up, even if you're not in distress now. Make it a semi-annual or annual event and you'll build a relationship with someone who has the ability to help you when you do find yourself struggling.





About the author:

Maureen Pollard is a Registered Social Worker with a private practice in Cobourg, ON, Canada. She has worked with individuals, families and groups since 1991 and takes a strengths-based, client-centred, collaborative approach using an eclectic range of therapeutic strategies and tools.



SELF CARE MENU

APPETIZERS

5-10 Minutes

ENTREES

30-60 Minutes

DESSERTS

15-20 Minutes

BEVERAGES

1-2 Minutes

CHEF'S SPECIAL

1-2 days

Give Your Self



A Hand!