

Supporting self-care

Safe systems of work

The healthcare service needs to ensure managers are supported to lead a safer culture (see **Leading a safer culture purpose statement**). A safer culture provides healthcare workers (workers) with an empowering, respectful, and safe working environment that has risk identification and control measures in place. Achieving this environment requires clear and consistent policies, safe staffing levels (including skills-mix), fair and equitable rosters and a positive work culture and practice environment. If you are concerned with any elements of your work environment, you should raise your concerns with a senior manager and/or the healthcare service and consider informing your relevant union.

Self-care

After stressful incidents such as occupational violence (OV), positive self-care can aid in the recovery process. Self-care is a personal practice that an individual may choose to with the intention of helping to create calm and promote coping mechanisms.

Positive practices typically promote calm both emotionally and physically, allowing the person to relax (known as self-care). Negative practices create the opposite effect increasing stress and agitation which can impede a person's ability to cope with a situation and in some situations even make it worse. Examples of negative self-care include excessive physical activity that leads to exhaustion or injury or an increased reliance on alcohol or other drugs.

When talking with workers about self-care it is important to identify the difference between positive and negative self-care practices and encourage them to identify and focus on those that will have an ongoing positive influence on their health and wellbeing.

Positive self-care can be as simple as making sure to take regular breaks, eating a healthy diet or following a 'check out' of work type process that helps with the process of 'switching off' from work (e.g., **B4Home Checklist**). Other self-care options include practising mindfulness, engaging in regular exercise, undertaking reflection or supervision with a colleague, or connecting with support services such as the EAP.

Reasons to engage in self-care

Understanding the benefits of self-care and having personal strategies, can help managers to talk about self-care with their workers.

Indications a worker could benefit from learning more about self-care:

- they are regularly feeling tired/exhausted
- they have persistent feelings of hopelessness
- they are having difficulty empathising with others
- they are feeling anxious
- they are becoming unwell more often or for a prolonged period, or they seem to have less immunity to illness
- they have been involved in a stressful event, such an OV* incident.

*An OV incident may exacerbate pre-existing symptoms, making self-care an important consideration for everyone who was involved.

Manager's role in self-care

Managers can raise engagement in positive self-care with their staff by:

- leading a safer culture
- undertaking their own self-care (leading by example)
- talking about self-care (benefits, types, and options) with their staff (e.g., at team meetings)
- providing self-care education or training opportunities for workers
- supporting workers to engage with positive self-care strategies
- being alert to changes in workers' health and wellbeing and supporting workers to recognise when all is not going well.

Types of self-care

The type of self-care you use will be unique to your life and needs. The following are some examples you could consider:

| Type | How | Ideas |
|------------------|---|--|
| Physical | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat regular and healthy meals.• Have healthy sleep habits (making sure you get enough sleep).• Engage in regular exercise.• Commit to getting regular medical check-ups. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan your meals for the day or a period of time.• Aim for at least 6-8 hours each night.• Start with a gentle walk if you are just starting out. |
| Emotional | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage in positive activities.• Acknowledge and celebrate your accomplishments.• Don't bottle emotions up, find ways to express how you are feeling in a healthy way. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any activity that makes you feel good.• Share your success with friends and family.• Seek professional assistance if you need. |

| Type | How | Ideas |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Spiritual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read inspirational literature. • Spend time engaging in self-reflection activities/practices. • Find time to enjoy the outdoors and nature. • Invest time in meditation or exploring spiritual connections. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head to your library and borrow a book. • Consider regular supervision with a colleague who you trust. • Go for a walk or a run. • Practice yoga. |
| Professional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue meaningful work. • Invest in positive relationships with co-workers. • Work on/utilise time management skills to have a positive work-life balance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess whether your job is making you happy. • Make time to socialise outside of work hours. • Leave work on time, consider a B4Home checklist or practice that signals an end to your workday. |
| Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in healthy relationships. • Make time for family and friends. • Schedule dates with your partner/spouse. • Ask for support from family and friends. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider those that are not positive and whether you continue to invest in them. • Date nights – family, partner, friends. • Talk to your family/friends when you need support. |
| Financial | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how finances impact your quality of life. • Create a budget or financial plan (as required). • Pay off debt (as required). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an appointment with a financial planner. • Be honest about your financial requirements. |
| Psychological | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time for yourself. • Make time to disconnect from electronic devices. • Consider learning a new skill. • Consider accessing psychotherapy, life coaching or counselling through EAP if needed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set aside daily time where you do something for yourself. • Start by turning off your Wi-Fi/Bluetooth. • Languages, art, or cooking. • A list of EAP and other support services is available in the ⇒ Support services factsheet. |

Key considerations for self-care after OV

The most important thing to remember after experiencing an OV incident is to give yourself time and be kind to yourself. You have been through a stressful situation and giving yourself time to recover and work through the situation, will help you to cope with any distress or strong feelings you may experience.

Talking about your feelings and the experience can be a great way to unpack how you are feeling and identify ways to cope. More details in the **Debriefing factsheet**.

Where possible try and return to your usual routine as soon as possible, but recognise that you may need some extra time, or even to ask for modified duties. Talk with your manager about how you are feeling, what feels possible, and identifying if you need help in any areas so that you can work together to keep you connected to your workplace. Your manager has a duty of care to maintain confidentiality, but if you are ever unsure ask them, or reach out to the healthcare Human Resources Department or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for further information for alternative support and advice.

What if self-care is not enough

If you are ever feeling like things are not going well, you are not coping or you need to talk, remember that you have access to a number of support services and you can also reach out directly to your manager. More details in the **Support services factsheet**.

If you are experiencing significant or persistent distress following the OV incident it may indicate you need additional support. Some signs that you may need to speak to a professional include:

- you regularly feeling tired/exhausted
- your ability to cope and respond to situations is reduced and everything seems 'too big to handle'
- you have persistent feelings of hopelessness
- you are having difficulty empathising with others
- you are feeling anxious and there is no improvement in how you are feeling
- you are having difficulty completing usual tasks, work, or other activities
- you are becoming unwell more often or for a prolonged period, or you seem to have less immunity to illness.

Start off by talking to someone you trust (family, your manager, a colleague, your GP). Consider reaching out to a dedicated support service, such as an EAP provider. You may also consider your workplace's human resources department, Work Health and Safety representatives or your union or professional association.

⇒ Refer to the **Support services factsheet** for more details and options

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

ACT Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. ACT Health respects their continuing culture and connections to the land and the unique contributions they make to the life of this area. ACT Health also acknowledges and welcomes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the community we serve.

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