

Cry. Sweat. Rejoice. 10 Tips for Taking Care of Yourself in Victim Services

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You can't give what you don't have. It's common sense. Leadership, counseling, and management skills can be represented by money in a checking account. You would not write a check for \$10,000 on an account with a balance of \$5,200. Yet, every day, many of us focus on helping others without thinking about our own needs.

Working in victim services and advocacy puts professionals at risk of burnout and vicarious traumatization. It's imperative to take the steps necessary to take care of yourself, your staff, and your colleagues.

We are composed of mind, body, and spirit. Deposits need to be distributed across all 3 aspects of our lives.

Mind:

1. Laugh. Keep items that make you smile and laugh in your desk. Examples include rubber chickens, funny postcards, and action figures.
2. Cry. In victim services, you hear horrendous stories. People are seeing you after they've had the worst experiences of their entire lives. It is okay to be moved and deeply saddened by what you hear. As professionals, we are trained to remain professional and somewhat detached. During meetings with clients, it should be about the client and it's not the right time to cry. When you are by yourself, give yourself permission to cry...to even bawl if you feel like it. Honor yourself and the person's story by truly feeling the emotions that are evoked. Crying can be a catharsis that frees you to move on to the next emotion.
3. Bask. Surround yourself with evidence of your success. Have your diplomas nicely framed. Display photos of yourself with people you admire.

Body:

4. Sleep. Make a conscious effort to get at least 7 hours every night.
5. Eat. Consume healthy foods and snacks every 3 hours to keep your insulin levels stable.
6. Sweat. Our bodies need a physical release after stressful situations such as court, counseling, and working with challenging individuals. Doing something physical for as little as 10 minutes each day can make a positive difference in your mental state. Find an activity where you really sweat. Something that makes your hair wet and you feel sweat dripping down the middle of your back. When you find something that makes you sweat profusely, your mind will be absorbed in whatever you are doing and you will get the much needed physical release. Group activities such as playing basketball or singles tennis are great choices to connect with others at the same time as sweating. I have recently discovered an aerobic class called Zumba. It is an exercise class based on high energy salsa and hip hop dancing. It is loads of fun and there is tons of sweating. Find an activity you truly enjoy that makes you sweat.

Spirit:

7. Motivate. Motivation has to be cultivated on a daily basis. Find items that inspire you and post them in a conspicuous place. Each month, you are welcome to visit <http://drthea.com/pages/downloads/motivational-materials/> and download motivational materials.

8. Listen. Surround yourself with positive comforting background music, like Michael Brant DeMaria's, throughout the day.

9. Create. Embrace the creative part of your personality either by engaging in creative pursuits such as painting, writing, etc. or appreciating the arts through activities such as visiting museums or attending plays.

10. Rejoice. Sing. Be happy. Be in the moment. Find and play a song that you can't hear without singing out loud. Try to do this once a day.

By following the cry, sweat, rejoice progression, you will honor your experience and make deposits that you will then be able to share with others in need.

You are following a noble calling in your life, helping victims on their journeys from being victims to becoming survivors. By taking care of your mind, body, and spirit you will be prepared to make a difference in people's lives every day. Cry. Sweat. Rejoice.



Thea Lobell, Ph.D. works with human service organizations to implement proven business practices while keeping their passion of helping people every day. Visit <http://drthea.com> to learn more about her keynote speaking and 1 day retreat.