

# Strategies for OTs - B

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## *Psychological Health and Safety in the Occupational Therapy Workplace*

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This presentation is a continuation of Strategies for OTs – Part A, and will be looking at more ways in which Occupational Therapists can maintain their psychological health at work. The primary focus of the presentation will be on Self-care and the cultivation of mindfulness, and it will be argued that these two themes should form the foundation of all strategies designed to prevent against compassion fatigue and burnout. Other strategies to be briefed upon include building resiliency, the use of role models, saying ‘no’, and knowing your rights as a worker.

### **Self-care:**

Self-care is a mindset as much as it is range of specific activities to be prescribed. It should invoke the cultivation of mindful presence which involves being fully conscious and aware in the present moment. This can come both during work hours (as when a therapist follows Reid’s model (2009) of cultivating mindfulness within OT practice) and outside of work hours (as one develops their emotional or spiritual strength by engaging mindfully in other tasks)

Reid (2009)

1. Taking Stock, Preparing :cultural competence; the intent to practice mindfully before meeting client
2. Active Availability: watching moment unfold with open attention
3. Reflectivity: ask reflective questions of the self; invite ambiguity and an open mind, question internal dialogue. Be aware of kneejerk cognitive, emotional reactions that may be maladaptive
4. Practice: look at the bigger picture, observe self and new techniques

Being mindful allows the therapist to identify potential symptoms of burnout, focus on the positive aspects of their job in a gentle and redeeming state, and allows one to engage in ‘spiritual self-care’ by which meaning is generated both within the job and outside of it. We must be open to attempting more than one strategy. We also cannot make the assumption that we will automatically engage in healthy self-care activities just because we are Occupational Therapists – knowing is not the same as doing.

More Examples of self-care:

- Lifestyle balance – keep a routine
- Eat regularly
- Do relaxation exercises
- Read inspirational literature

### **Building Resiliency:**

Resiliency describes the ability to withstand stressful situations. While building on the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual self through self-care activities are no doubt helpful in building resiliency, an interesting finding from the study by

Ashby et al. (2013) is that professional resilience of occupational therapists are sustained by using strategies that assert our professional identity. Reasons for this occurring with Occupational Therapists include a poor understanding of our scope of practice and responsibilities in different settings by other health care professionals and management types. This can result in a lack of respect and autonomy being paid to our profession in particular. Learning to be assertive and advocating for our profession is thus in our psychological best interests.

To this end, the importance of **Role Models** cannot be understated. Learning from others in our field who have worked the system longer allows us to gain not only skills related to job competency, but also ideas on coping mechanisms and a sense of professional validation.

We must also **learn to say NO and know our rights as workers**. We may be saying NO to extra responsibilities that may be passed on by other healthcare professionals we work with. We may also be saying NO to clients and ourselves by enforcing work boundaries. Saying NO allows us to better know our limits and take on the right amount of work that is personally satisfying but does not lead to burnout.

### **Conclusion:**

The strategies outlined are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. However the following strategies from a solid foundation for handling the stresses that occupational therapy practice may pose.

- Developing a mindful attitude and undertaking in self-care tasks that have meaning to us
- Having confidence in our role as OTs and leaning on other OTs for support
- Focusing on the positives of what we do
- Knowing our rights as workers and learning to say NO

### **RESOURCES**

<http://www.mncdgp.org.au/system/files/Booklet%203%20-%20Self-care%20for%20Health%20Care%20Professionals.pdf>

Handout created by the Mid North Coast Division of General Practice, Coffs Harbour, explaining self-care for professionals with a focus on mindfulness and a range of exercises and suggestions

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