



## Strengthening Your Resilience: Take Care of Yourself as You Care for Others

*“We are best able to help others when we are clear-thinking, calm, strong, and healthy ourselves” -Patricia Kerig*

Your work as a juvenile justice professional involves ensuring the safety of others, including youth, families, and the community, which can be stressful at the best of times. These responsibilities are particularly stressful when coupled with additional stresses, worries about your health and your families' health, and uncertainties in your personal life. Your ability to care for others for a sustained amount of time requires you to care for your own wellbeing, strengthen your resilience, and find ways to recharge your batteries so you can be effective in your professional roles. Doing these things is equivalent to putting your oxygen mask on first before helping others with theirs. In order to effectively help others, you must take care of yourself first.

It is important to note that as this resource is designed for you to care of yourself, the frontline worker, the organization you work with also needs to support and address your wellness and health. For example, your organization has a responsibility to support their staff's ability to care for themselves by providing supervision, structures of support, and a safe working environment. This is particularly important during a pandemic in which many justice workers must take additional health risks that impact them and their families. As you consider ways to support yourself, also consider how you can support your system to strengthen a supportive environment.

### Ways to Care for Myself

People sometimes think of self-care as something you do for yourself at the end of the workday. But self-care is an important professional skill you should employ when you work in stressful environments. It is imperative to build a toolkit of strategies you can use when stress levels get high on the job. Here are some foundational tips for your wellness:

- Self-care strategies don't have to be complicated or time-consuming. Use those that fit with your current schedule and your current energy level.
- Be strategic for when you use these strategies. Create a plan of incorporating strategies that can be used during roll call, just before shift transitions, or in conjunction with youth.
- Strategies you can add to your plan include: Take a deep breath; picture in your mind the face of the person who is your emotional center; think of the words to a song or prayer that always lifts your spirits; remind yourself “I'll get through this;” or use a relaxation or mindfulness app on your smart phone.
- Strategies you can use with your co-workers include offers of gratitude, humor, checking-in with one another, and celebrating successes! For example, what is the most rewarding moment you've had this week? What is the best compliment you've received from a co-worker? Who is one person whose life you have touched through this work recently? Using these strategies regularly is best rather than waiting until you are “boiling over.”
- Create a plan for how you will transition to work and from work and consider strategies that can help you with these transitions. For example, blast your favorite music as you commute or walk around the block before you start work.

- Recognize your signs of when you are stressed:
  - You may experience stress as physical (e.g., feeling exhausted, sleeping poorly, suffering from headaches/backaches/stomach aches); behavioral (e.g., irritability, socially isolating ourselves, increased substance use); psychological (e.g., emotional exhaustion, feeling ineffective, loss of pleasure in life, cynicism); or professional (e.g., overburdened sense of responsibility, difficulty making decisions, having trouble separating work and personal life).
  - A tool for doing a private self-check is freely available online at [http://www.proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL\\_5\\_English\\_Self-Score\\_3-2012.pdf](http://www.proqol.org/uploads/ProQOL_5_English_Self-Score_3-2012.pdf), and gives you a quick read of where you stand with your levels of burnout and stress, as well as the positive feelings of satisfaction in your work that can balance out that stress.
- Be aware of stressful events at your organization that may contribute to feelings of powerlessness or unsafety such as a greater risk of contracting COVID-19 for staff and youth in locked facilities, parents unable to visit youth due to social distancing restraints, and required overtime due to shortages in staff or forced reduction in staffing. Identifying these situations and finding people who understand these types of challenges can help you manage these stressful experiences without becoming overwhelmed.

### Questions to Ask Yourself When Monitoring Your Stress

#### While you are at work:

What are two or three main goals for this work shift? How will you know when you've accomplished them or if you've made some progress towards them if you can't make it all happen now?

What support are you getting from your workplace to help you do your job? What else do you need?

What can you do right here and now to recover your balance and take care of yourself when stress levels get high at work?

#### While you are at home:

What are you doing to ensure your family's safety? If you aren't entirely sure if you are ensuring their safety, for example, by potentially bringing the virus home because of exposure at work, what's your best plan?

What is your main goal when you're with (a) your spouse/partner, (b) your child(ren), (c) your parents or other older adult family members? – How do you know if you're achieving it?

What are the simple things that recharge your batteries and remind you of the joys in life?

### Do's and Don'ts to Strengthen Your Resilience and to Care for Yourself and Others

**DO** use stress management skills as well as support from co-workers, friends, and family to help you recoup or maintain your resilience when stress levels get high.

**DON'T** talk the talk without walking the walk. Use the skills and strategies you teach to youth in your own life.

**DO** use stress reduction strategies during your workday that are simple, non-time-consuming, and effective for you. For example, if you have only 1 minute, pull out your cell phone and look at a photo of someone who makes you smile. If you have 10 minutes, grab a bottle of water and a coworker you trust and take a brisk walk while you talk it out. If you have 20 minutes, use an app on your phone to do a mindfulness or relaxation exercise.

**DON'T** think that stress reduction strategies need to be complicated, time-consuming, or have to wait until you get home.

**DO** take the time to learn what works for you to manage your stress and strengthen your resilience. Remember, everyone is different and what works for you is what matters.

**DON'T** give up if a stress management strategy doesn't work or if something others recommend doesn't do the job for you. Building resilience is like keeping a high-performance car running; you need to constantly use your tools to tinker with it to keep it running smoothly

**DO** use the strategies that work for you. Resilience is like a muscle and it only stays strong if you exercise it.

**DON'T** just read about or think about stress management, self-care, or resilience-building strategies. That would be like trying to fix a flat tire by only reading your car's owner's manual.

**DO** leave job-related frustrations, worries, and unfinished business at work with a commitment that you'll deal with them when you return. Let time at home be your opportunity to recharge, refresh, and reconnect with loved ones. Consider building in a ritual to your day to mark the transition between work and home. For example, say to yourself as you exit the building, "this is work and it stays here."

**DON'T** let your work stress become a source of stress for the people in your personal life.

**DO** remember that taking care of yourself is essential to your ability to care for others and is a critical professional skill for justice professionals.

**DON'T** fall into the trap of thinking that time spent on self-care is "selfish." "We have an obligation to our clients, as well as ourselves, our colleagues and our loved ones, not to be damaged by the work we do." (footnote)

**DO** engage others you trust in helping you monitor your stress level and reveal when you are showing signs that it is time to use your stress management skills, and offer to provide the same feedback to them.

**DON'T** give in to the temptation to socially isolate. COVID-19 requires us to remain physically distant, but not socially distant.

**DO** take a moment to focus your mind on what you value about your work and take to heart the ways in which your work helps to make the world a better place.

**DON'T** let the bad moments erase the ones that have served to give your work meaning, purpose, and satisfaction.



## Suggested Citation

### Suggested Citation:

Kerig, P. (2020). *Strengthening your resilience: Take care of yourself as you care for others*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Adapted from Kerig, P. K. (2019). *Enhancing resilience among providers of trauma-informed care: A curriculum for protection against secondary traumatic stress among non-mental health professionals*. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 28(5), 613-630.