

We matter...



A Staff-Care and Self-Care Workbook



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID
actalliance

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Norwegian Church Aid identified the need to strengthen staff care and self-care support for staff working directly with survivors of GBV and women and girls at risk of violence and exploitation, and this workbook was created specifically for that purpose. This workbook aims to build upon components from NCA's personnel management and health, environment and safety planning tools, and to move concepts and theory of staff-care and self-care into practical application. This resource and the accompanying workshop facilitation guides are intended to be used both by managers and leaders of GBV programming as well as GBV staff.

We would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this resource: Ellie Hutchinson, Mansi Panjwani and Kate Nevens for developing the resource and facilitation guide, Silje Heitmann for her recognition of the need for this workbook and guidance throughout the process, Kjersti Rogde Næss for her advisement and review of the workbook, Julie Krause for advising throughout the development and process, and NCA staff for their willingness to participate in interviews with the consultants to build an initial knowledge base to build from.

This resource would not have been possible without the generous support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Consent was obtained for all photos used in this resource. No photos depict survivors of GBV.
Cover photo: Pakistan 2017, Håvard Bjelland NCA.*

PREFACE

In order to strengthen NCA's GBV staff care and self-care support for staff working directly with survivors of GBV and women and girls at risk of violence and exploitation, NCA hired a team of consultants to develop this much needed workbook. NCA wishes to continue strengthening the GBV programme's staff care and self-care work, particularly fitted to a context where external support systems are not available.

NCA's GBV programme includes GBV case management services, clinical management of rape services and mental health and psychosocial support services. GBV Case Workers and other personnel working directly with survivors of GBV are at risk of vicarious trauma. Their indirect exposure to a traumatic event through first-hand accounts may increase their risk of vicarious traumatisation.

Staff care packages often focus on stress management, learning about cumulative stress, critical incident stress and secondary trauma, including various means for identifying signs of stress and negative coping mechanisms. NCA has these references included in our personnel management and health, environment and safety planning tools. However, having a theoretical focus on stress is not sufficient, and this workbook aims to create space to transfer theory to practice. Self-care, everyone's responsibility in addressing their own wellbeing, is important within a staff care package. Ensuring that each staff has the necessary tools and space to focus on their own wellbeing, NCA wished to support staff in creating their own positive coping mechanisms.

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INTRODUCTION

This workbook has been created to support staff and teams to think about holistic wellbeing in the work that you do as GBV workers. It can also be used by other teams to support wellbeing both at work and beyond. It has been created to reduce, prevent and respond to issues such as vicarious trauma, intergenerational trauma, structural oppression, compassion fatigue, stress and burnout. Throughout the workbook, you will find exercises, activities and tips to help you develop and nurture compassion, commitment, connection, communication, consistency and creativity to support you, your teams and your organizational resilience and happiness.

The workbook was created to improve staff care and self-care routines for staff working on prevention and response to GBV in humanitarian settings, after undertaking a literature review and speaking with NCA staff, partners and other INGO staff about what works for them. Whilst the workbook was created specifically for staff working on GBV programmes, it can be used by staff in other programmes as well. Approaches specifically to working during COVID-19 and public health emergency activities and reflections are highlighted in [aqua](#).

Within the workbook, there is also an acknowledgement of stressors relating to power and oppression, structural sexism, your own experiences of GBV, as well the impact of the pandemic on the people you are supporting and working with.

Equality and justice are a key part to your wellbeing. Social, political, and economic stressors will play a large role in your day to day wellbeing and work, and it's important to recognise that marginalised groups will experience additional stresses and traumas.

For people working in humanitarian settings, you might also find that there's an expectation that you should "sacrifice" yourself for your work, or that other people have it worse than you. You might even hear that self-care and staff care is selfish, or that you need to "toughen up". These ideas often come from social norms that dictate how certain people, particularly women, and workplaces, "should" behave. The workbook uses female nouns as majority of staff working on prevention and response to GBV are women, however the workbook should be used by everyone.

Unlearning these norms, and dedicating time to yourself, your staff teams, and your organisation can be an act of compassionate, joyful, resistance. Compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout are some of the impacts of not taking care of yourself and others, which can result in serious mental health challenges. Find out more about these terms in the next section.

Understanding of self-care and staff care

The workbook draws on intersectional and feminist understandings of self-care, staff care and the difference between the two. This means understanding that due to global prevalence of GBV, it is likely that many female staff will themselves have experienced or witnessed GBV in their own lives. If you've experienced violence or abuse yourself, in your own community, or you've witnessed harm to others in either your personal or professional life, working in stressful environments can trigger anxiety, depression and re-traumatisation. As such, good, regular, consistent staff care and self-care can provide both a foundation to prevent burnout and can help teams and individuals to recover from trauma, violence or fear.

Self-care is how individuals approach their own care and wellbeing. It's about the activities, practices and approaches you take to keep yourself well, manage and recover from stress, overwhelm or trauma. A feminist lens also recognises that there may be many social, economic and cultural stresses specifically that women face, and community and collective responses to these socio-political stresses are needed.

Staff care is the practices an organisation puts in place to ensure the wellbeing of their teams. This includes annual leave, pay and conditions as well as building trust, safe spaces for reflection and supporting individuals to undertake self-care activities. Understanding the barriers that women face at work, caring responsibilities they may hold in the community or at home, and the violence and oppression that may face in society is also a key part of feminist staff care approaches. These aspects all take place within broader organisational culture, unless you are supported by your organisation, you cannot truly take care of your teams or yourself. If you can't take care of yourself, you won't be able to live organisational values. Therefore, all three elements are essential to your wellbeing.

Every organisation or workplace has a culture and a sense of collective identity. An organisation's culture is made up of the values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviours and attitudes of the people within it. This culture influences how people behave and feel at work, and plays an extremely key role in staff wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of volunteers, partner organisations and the people you work with.

Duty of Care is an organisation's moral and legal obligation to ensure the safety or wellbeing of others; the aim should be a workplace where staff and partners can thrive. Duty of care is multi-dimensional and often incorporates policies and practices around: safety and security; recruitment, working hours and benefits; and health and wellbeing, including psychological health. Our workbook is looking primarily at the third of these, though may touch on the other two, as they all interrelate.

HOW TO USE THE WORKBOOK

This workbook has been divided into two main sections; the focus of all sections is on national teams, not deployed staff, but many of the activities will be relevant to both.

- **Section 1 on staff care is primarily for team leaders, but can be used by anyone**
- **Section 2 on self-care is for everyone**

Throughout the workbook, you'll also find sections on the impact of COVID-19 and other public health emergencies highlighted in **aqua** as well as things to think about for women, LGBTQI communities and disabled people in **magenta**.

Within the workbook you'll find spaces to write, draw, scribble or rip up- it's your workbook and feel free to use it however you want!

You don't have to be specially trained in trauma response or have prior knowledge of terms and practices, this workbook is yours, and everyone should be able to use it.

PRINCIPLES: THE 6 Cs!

Within the workbook there are exercises, activities and things to think about that build on 6 principles of self-care and staff care that have been developed specifically for this workbook. Whether you are using the workbook as an individual or as a team leader, these guiding principles can help shape your approach to self-care and staff care.

CONNECTION

Connecting with social movements, the environment, friends and family, culture and communities builds our wellbeing. It reminds us that we are not alone and that we are important.

COMPASSION

Self compassion means allowing ourselves to feel whatever we're feeling without judgement and talking to ourselves as we would talk to a friend. Compassion towards others, and as a team leader, means finding out the root cause for what is stopping team members achieving their goals.

COMMUNICATION

Setting boundaries, being clear on what we need and want from ourselves, our friends and families as well as and our teams strengthens our own wellbeing.

CREATIVITY

Being creative on our own, or thinking creatively about what our teams need, is essential to our self-care and staff-care. Feel free to creatively alter the exercises that are recommended here in a manner that suits you or your team needs better important.

CONSISTENCY

Self-care and staff care must happen consistently, if we see them as an add on, they are easily dropped.

COMMITMENT

As part of NCA's vision, this principle revolves around committed leadership towards ensuring empowered and engaged employees. Committing to your own self-care also means making sure that you prioritise your own mental health and wellbeing.

KEY TERMS

BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

Burnout is “caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations. Contributing factors include professional isolation, working with a difficult client population, long hours with limited resources, ambiguous success, unreciprocated giving, and failure to live up to one’s own expectations. The symptoms are depression, cynicism, boredom, loss of compassion and discouragement. Burnout can be pervasive, and recovery can be difficult. Compassion fatigue, as opposed to burnout, can be of sudden onset and is a natural consequence of working with people who have experienced stressful events” (Benson and McGraith 2005)

BURDEN OF CARE

Socially, women are usually expected to take on more caregiving than men. This means that women often find themselves doing more in the home, as well as in the workplace.

Global public health emergencies, such as COVID-19, highlight the “double burden” many women have experienced, that of childcare and home-schooling as well as continuing to work, with the same expectations on productivity and team engagement.

SYMPATHY, EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they mean different things. Sympathy can be thought of in terms of feeling “sorry for someone”. Compassion, on the other hand can be seen as “I feel sorry with you” and empathy can be understood as “I feel with you”. Whilst empathy can be a great tool for listening and connecting, it’s also important to think about what this means in terms of offering support to survivors of GBV. If you’re experiencing vicarious trauma, it’s likely you are empathising with survivors to such an extent that you’re having a hard time working out whose feeling you’re feeling. Is it yours? Or is it someone else’s? Strengthening our compassionate responses means we can feel alongside someone else, but we don’t share their pain. It’s useful to reflect on what these mean to you and how to maintain boundaries between the two.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Vicarious trauma is when you not only feel compassion towards those you’re working with, but strong empathetic ties with their experiences. This means you find it hard to separate out their feelings with your own; you struggle to concentrate and focus and you find it hard to stop thinking about what has happened to that person. As a result, you may begin to experience similar symptoms of stress or PTSD.

PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) means that people continue to experience the symptoms of stress and trauma long after a traumatic event, and may be triggered by certain stressful or difficult events, images or sounds.



STAFF CARE

WHAT: This section has been designed for staff wellbeing at NCA. We encourage team leaders and managers to refer to this section in understanding how they can best support the wellbeing of their staff and create an environment of empowered and engaged employees who can work at their highest potential towards a just world.

WHY: NCA recognizes that its most important assets in achieving its vision for a just world are empowered and engaged employees. This workbook is a conscious decision in working towards developing committed leadership towards the same. Staff wellbeing is a crucial component to achieving this vision that NCA holds for all its personnel, and it is the responsibility of managers to ensure that space is created and supported for staff to undertake self-care.

FOR WHOM: This section is particularly relevant for team leaders and managers whose work involves being responsible for one or more members of staff/personnel of NCA apart from themselves.

HOW: We have highlighted key principles which serve as crucial values that are core to working towards your team's wellbeing in enabling their full potential. All activities and recommendations are aligned with these key principles.

In this section, you will be introduced to the importance of staff care and to exercises you can use regularly for your team's wellbeing. Team leaders and managers are not only responsible for their own well-being, but also for the wellbeing of their team members.

This section explores how team leaders and managers can support the wellbeing of their team members, both individually and as a whole. Although many of these activities may be initiated by the team leader or manager, it is ideal for the team members to champion the wellbeing programme, encouraging them to create or propose newer initiatives that can enhance the team's wellbeing.

1.1 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Most people say that they feel most supported at work when they have good relationships with their colleagues and when their organisation takes an active interest in their wellbeing. These are things that are relatively simple to achieve. It's not about huge amounts of resources or technical capacity. Organisational culture doesn't just come from 'top down': it can be built and changed by everyone involved in an organisation, working together to establish a culture of compassion and care.

Healthy Organisations

In small groups, look over the list below of what a healthy and compassionate organisational culture might look like. You can fill in your own ideas in the blank spaces.

Characteristics of a healthy and compassionate organisational culture might include:

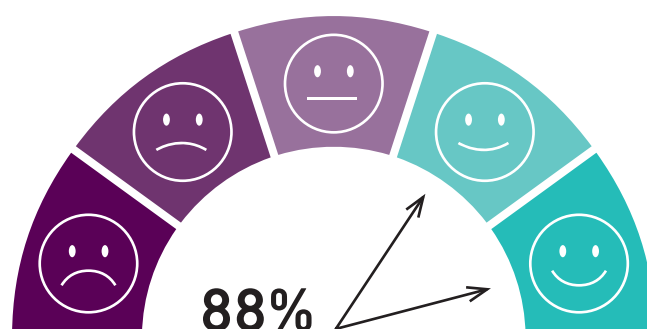
- Trust and connections between people
- Empathy for colleagues; Colleagues notice signs of upset or distress
- Strong communications and people really listening to each other
- A sense of community and solidarity
- Equality and (racial and gender) justice
- Shared values and vision
- People feel respected, valued and empowered
- Staff feel they can speak out and be actively involved in decision-making
- Integrity, honesty and openness
- Commitment to work/life balance
- Accountability and commitment to learning and improving; culture of reflection
- Flexibility and adaptability in the face of change and challenges
- Room for constructive and respectful disagreement

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Have a conversation with your team about these characteristics, and ask:

- What do you think of this list? Is it too idealistic? Have we missed any essential characteristics? Please add as many as you can think of!
- Which do you think are the most important characteristics and why? See if you can choose a top three as a team. Write them on scraps of paper and see if you can agree on an order to arrange them in.
- Which of these characteristics do you feel your organisation embodies? What could be improved on? You could use a rating system, below – or a star, like the wellbeing star, make it the organisational wellbeing star!



What do you think might be positive organisational characteristics we can build on? What would you do to try and address these issues? In small groups fill out the below table and come together to share what you've found.

Healthy workplace characteristic	What needs to happen to support this?	Who needs to be involved in taking this action?
<p><i>Example: People work allotted hours; go home at 5pm (unless it is an emergency) to spend time with their family, friends, take care of themselves.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team to decide what constitutes emergencies and what does not. (Not everything is an emergency. We are in this for the long haul) • Team members (including managers) can create a system where they can rotate on emergency assignments • Each team member has mutually agreed upon deliverables with their manager for the week/month, that allows them to plan their work timetable • Team leader/Manager to stress on the importance of creating a balance with work roles and other aspects of one's life. Manager to lead by example. • A short review meeting once in two months can happen to acknowledge the team's efforts and what the team can do better to meet this goal. 	<p><i>Team leader/Manager and all team members</i></p>

Healthy workplace characteristic	What needs to happen to support this?	Who needs to be involved in taking this action?



Identifying shared vision for wellbeing

For this group exercise, you need to be in a relatively big space, outdoors if possible.

What do you think a happy and well team looks like?

As individuals, everyone takes a pen and piece of paper (A4 or larger) and draw what comes to mind - you can use pictures and words. Once everyone has completed their drawing, you should place it at the front of the room or space, secured with a stone if they are outside. Everyone can come and look at the pictures and tell each other about what they've drawn.

How do we get there¹?

Next, divide into groups of three (if you are in a mixed gender group, consider dividing into men-only and women-only mini groups). In your groups, take up to 5 more pieces of A4 paper, and write down some potential actions or strategies you think an organisation could take to try and create the happy and well team you have just discussed. For example, you might suggest that your organisation could set a room aside for prayer, meditation or breastfeeding/nursing in your building.

Once your group has written up to five different actions or strategies, set them out on the floor in the shape of an imaginary flowing river, leading towards the 'island' of wellbeing that was created earlier.

Once each of the teams have set out their river alongside each other, everyone then walks down the river stepping on the 'stones' that they feel are most important. When you stop on a stone, you can explain to the group why you chose that stone.



Things to think about: If your team has men and women staff members, how did their responses differ? Did it tell you anything about the different needs of men and women? Are there other groups of people who might have specific needs when it comes to an organisation's approach to staff wellbeing?

Creating and supporting safe spaces through peer to peer support

Peer to peer support is often one of the biggest factors in maintaining wellbeing at work. These networks can be groups driven by the staff (or may have an external/in-house facilitator), and through this, team members feel supported and begin to form relationships of trust and empathy.

A safe space is one where team members can discuss their challenges without the fear of being judged or reprimanded. The group holds space for their team member and listens while s/he shares. Some examples of groups could include (but are not limited to) spaces for women, spaces for men, spaces for LGBTQI staff. This space is not only for those who are feeling stressed, challenging grave illnesses, but also for those who may be struggling at work, in relationships and with everyday stressors.

¹ Adapted from Kvinna till Kvinna's [Integrated Security: The Manual](#)

Tips on creating and supporting safe spaces:

- A team leader can identify existing employees on the team who are qualified to assist other team members in topics related to mental health wellbeing. If no existing employee has undertaken a mental health first aid course, it is recommended to encourage some of the team members to avail the training.
- Being a trained 'peer support volunteer' can be included in the team member's official job description and the 'time allotted' can be mutually agreed upon. For example, 5% of an employee's role could be towards supporting safe spaces at the workplace. That is dedicating 2 hours a week towards this role.
- It is ideal to not make this an 'extra thing' for employees, as they may not avail of the opportunity if it is beyond work hours. It is recommended to schedule peer support safe spaces within the regular work week. Some suggestions for the same include- having it once a month for 1-1.5 hours. We also recommend having a fixed date that suits your team so team members can put this into their calendars and prioritise accordingly. Avoid moving these dates once decided.
- It is recommended to have these groups run in a physically safe space as well. This means a room that is not distracting, is comfortable and where employees will not be disturbed for the duration of the meeting.
- We highly recommend creating ground rules alongside the team. These may include confidentiality, honesty, integrity, respect, and so on. Creating these with the group allows the group to take ownership of their actions in helping the group succeed.
- Have a review meeting once in two months or so to check for the optimisation of this group.
- Please note: This is not a blame-house or a solution-finding meeting. It is neither one for gossip. It is a safe space where people feel secure and comfortable enough to share their challenges without the fear of being judged. And peers provide a listening space. Feel free to share about the 3 levels of listening (an activity we have added for you) with your team.
- It is recommended to not make these meetings mandatory, but all steps to be taken to communicate that it is available and encouraged.

Mental health awareness discussions

It is important to host sensitive awareness workshops or discussions that focus on reducing stigma and increasing empathy. Team members might not recognise when they need time off, or maybe managers need support on how to support their team members; this is useful for everyone. It breaks stereotypes and creates a more inclusive and empathetic culture.

It is recommended to ask a professional to lead such a session (preferably someone from the country you are working in) and maybe collect suggestions from the team members through an anonymous note at the end, where they highlight what the team can better do to support their team members.

As a team leader this can give you an insight into your team's needs and accordingly organise next steps. It might be beneficial to have a trained mental health first aider on the team. Based on an employee's interest and competencies, a team leader could perhaps encourage her to build on this training as part of the professional development.

1.2 BUILDING TRUST AND SOLIDARITY

Trusting others is essential to our wellbeing, particularly in teams where we are relying on each other for support during times of stress. It can take a long time to build trust, and trust can also be broken very quickly.

Solidarity and support

On your own, or in small groups, think through the following reflection questions

Reflection questions²:

- How do you demonstrate solidarity to a colleague who is in need of your support?
- How would you like a colleague to respond to you when you are in need of support?
- Do you ever create space at work to learn and reflect on developing relationships with others? What might such a space look like?
- What challenges have you had in the past working with other colleagues or teams in your organisation? How have you overcome these challenges?

If you feel able to, share what you have found with others in your team. Are there similarities or differences?

Identifying with others

Write down seven aspects about yourself that you particularly value in yourself and in others. For example, 'I am kind' or 'I am committed'.

Write down seven issues that you particularly care about, and that feels inspired when others care about too. For example, 'I care about ending violence against women'

Write down seven interests that you might share with others. For example, an interest in poetry, or politics.

Which of these do you think are most important to establishing ties and relationship with;

- Members of your family
- Members of your community
- Colleagues at your organisation
- Members of a social movement or collective

Using four different coloured pens or stickers, mark which personal characteristics are most important.

When everyone in your team has completed this task, take a wander around your workplace and see what others have written, and see what you share in common, and what is complementary

This exercise can help you identify what influences your roles within a team, and how a team can come together with many different, complementary traits and ideas, and how your work can be influenced and reflect what you care about.

² Adapted from The Feminist Organisational Development Tool
<https://www.africanfeministforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/The-Feminist-Organisational-Development-Tool-English.pdf?x55323>



Exploring boundaries

Understanding each other's personal boundaries is an important part of establishing trust. Personal boundaries are the physical, emotional, psychological limits we establish between ourselves and other people. You might also have boundaries around time, or money, or sharing ideas.

If you tend to keep others at a distance (emotionally or physically), you might have quite rigid boundaries. If you tend to get quite involved with others, or overshare information, you might have quite porous boundaries. Healthy boundaries tend to strike a balance between these and allow us to maintain our own identity and wellbeing and respect the identity and wellbeing of others (see also section 2.3 in the self-care section).³

Most people have different boundaries in different settings: for example, in work or at home. In a team, the different members will all have quite different boundaries.

Try this exercise in pairs to see what feels okay to you and others in terms of physical space⁴:

- Each pair should stand around 5 meters apart, facing one another
- The two people should maintain eye contact the whole time!
- Person #1 will stand still, and person #2 will walk slowly towards person #1
- Person #1 can use three hand signals as person #2 walks towards them: hands out in front palms up to indicate they can come towards them; hands out palms down to slow down; hands behind their back to signal to the other person to stop walking
- As the standing person feels person #2 moving towards them, they use their hand signals to indicate what feels right - either to encourage them to move closer or to stop or slow down.
- Once the partners have got as close as they feel comfortable, switch roles and repeat the exercise

After the exercise, have a discussion about how it felt in the two different roles.

- How did the exercise help you to understand your own physical boundaries?
- How did you understand your partner's physical boundaries?
- What other types of boundaries did you feel were present, for you or your partner?
- Did the exercise create a feeling of trust between you? Did it make you feel uncomfortable at all?
- How would it be different if you knew this person very well from you having just met them?

In groups of three, see if you can come up with a list of emotional or psychological boundaries people might have at work. For example, not wanting to share information about their families.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Are these healthy boundaries? If so, why? How might you encourage and support healthy boundary setting in your team? Reflect on if it's different for different people. Does the nature of your role change this? Why? Are the same boundaries expected for team leaders or managers and team members?

³ From <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/boundaries-psychoeducation-printout.pdf>

⁴ Adapted from Kvinna till Kvinna's [Integrated Security: The Manual](#)

Next, think about these scenarios and in small groups discuss what boundaries might be crossed and how the individuals might respond to it.

M is struggling with family issues and is a very open and communicative person. Her line manager, K, isn't comfortable with sharing lots of information. M has started to use their supervision session to talk at length about what's going on at home.

What could K do to establish boundaries? What does M need right now? Is there information missing in this case study? (for example, what is "at length" and to whom?)

E doesn't like to talk about politics as it has caused many serious issues in their hometown. J loves to talk about politics and tries to engage E in a conversation about "what's happening right now". What could E say to affirm their boundaries? Is there anything missing in this case study? For example, how long have they known each other, and what power relationship exists?

S has recently moved to a new house due to a relationship breakdown and has told R, their line manager. They overhear R telling the HR team but had thought it was confidential. What boundary has been crossed here? What other information do you need?

These scenarios can help us to think about how we all have different boundaries, as well as our own different ways of communicating when our boundaries have been crossed. Constructively asserting our boundaries can be a difficult, but essential part of building connections, trust and solidarity with each other.

1.3 COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS

As a team leader, it is highly recommended that you create opportunities and spaces for regular and open communication with your team. The best way to do that is to ask the team for suggestions or reach out to other team leaders and feel free to adopt best practices that will encourage your team members to share honestly and openly about what they are able to do well and where they can do better. It is also important to create a space where the team members are able to provide honest feedback on the challenges they are facing at work in a way that feels safe for them. Usually, having a dialogue to understand more, offering support where needed and developing action steps to ensure the team member feels empowered enough to take on the task are signs of compassion at the workplace. On another note, compassion at the workplace is also reflected when a team leader is aware of who is underworked, who is overworked, how to balance work among the team and ensure that the team member takes time off on weekends and avails of the compensation leave as well.

How are you Listening?

This is especially useful, both in individual and group settings.

As a team leader or manager, listening is a crucial skill to understand where the team member is, developing empathy towards where they are, and what kind of support he/she/they might need. This is a great skill to build that can potentially allow for your team members to have a space where they can be open and honest about how they feel mentally, emotionally and physically. Listening also builds trust as it makes the other person feel 'heard' and respected.

Skill Drill: As a team leader, you may be engaging with your team members in various scenarios individually and as a group and though it may be assumed that listening is taking place, it is important to understand what is the quality of listening we are providing our team members.

Here is a quick checklist to see at what level you are listening:

Level One – Internal Listening: At this level, the attention is on ourselves — we are listening to the sound of our own inner voice. We may hear the words of the other person, but our attention is on what it means to us personally- our own opinions, stories, judgments — our own feelings, needs, and itches. There are many times when listening at Level One is necessary and even helpful such as when we are paying close attention to our own needs to rest or need for rejuvenation, and so on. However, listening at Level One may not allow us to build bonds of trust with our team members as all our focus is on ourselves at this time.

What does Level One look like: We may be nodding, and going, "uh huh," but inside they are saying things like: "I had an experience just like that." or "This is starting to bore me" or "What should I order tonight?" or even "How can I respond so that I am not judged?"

Level Two – Focused Listening: In this level, attention is sharply focused on the other person — and listening is directed at the speaker. All attention is directed one way to the speaker's words. Think of a parent with a sick baby; all of their attention is hard focused on the child. There might be great chaos all around the parent, but he/she/they stay focused on the child and the child's needs.

What does Level Two look like: "I have time for you." Not just "I have time to address the problem" but "I have time for you". This is where the listener is listening intently to every word spoken.

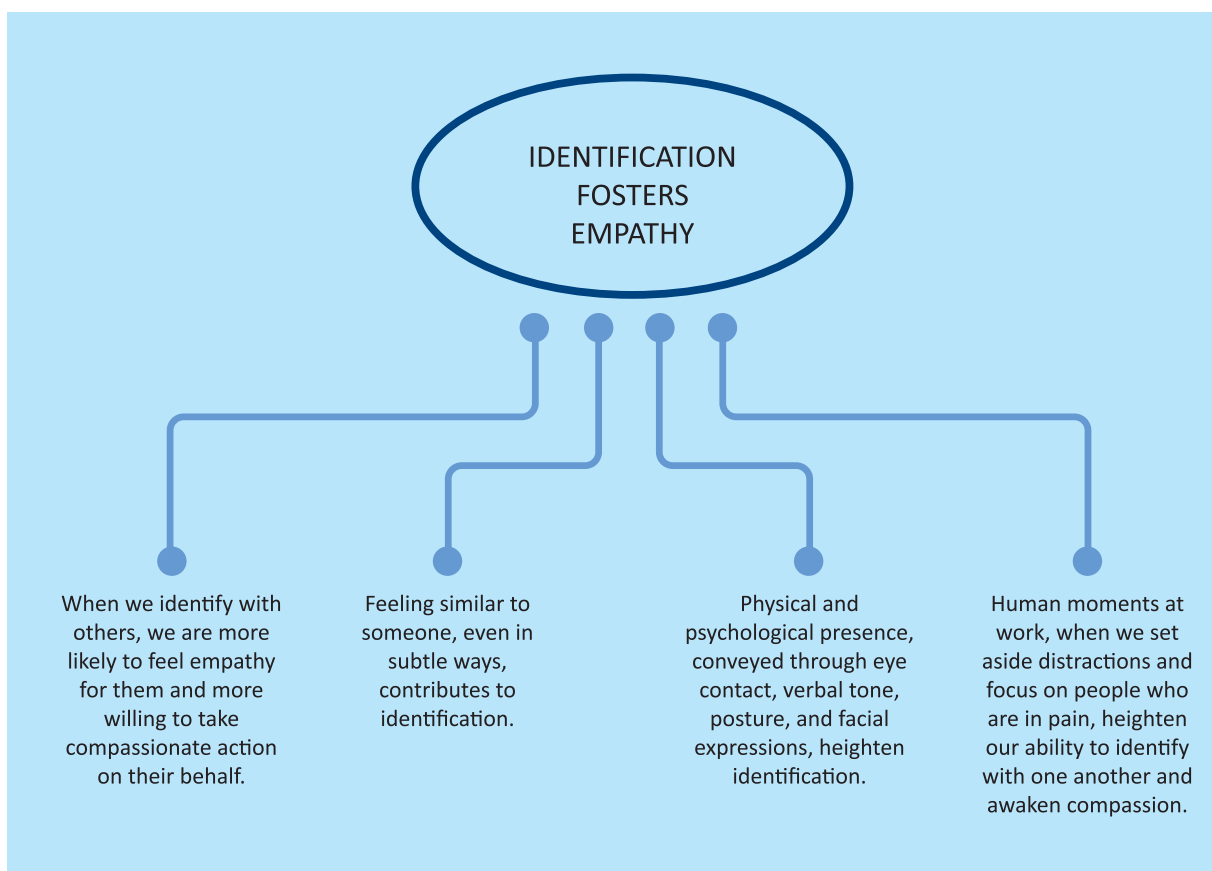
Level Three – 360 degrees Listening: In this level, attention is soft focused; listening at 360 degrees- “listening” for every nuance in the conversation. Awareness includes everything: what you see, hear and feel. We are aware of the energy between us and others. We are also aware of how that energy is changing; we detect sadness, lightness, shifts in attitude.

What does Level Three look like: We are conscious of the underlying mood, or tone, or the impact of the conversation on the other person. At this level of listening, our senses are at their highest, even being able to hold space for what the speaker is not saying but feeling.

As a team leader, being aware of our level of listening allows us to create opportunities of trust and safety within our team promoting their overall wellbeing.

Activity⁵: Choose a member of your team to observe a team or organisational meeting they are not usually part of. She will not participate in the meeting but will watch for specific behaviours: for example, is anyone in the meeting struggling to be heard or listened to? Is anyone in the meeting displaying particularly good active listening skills, and how did they do this? After the meeting, everyone can sit together and discuss what was observed.

From: *Compassion at Work Toolkit* <https://oscarkilo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Compassion-at-Work-Toolkit-FINAL-5-December-2017.pdf>



⁵ Adapted from <http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-for-web1.pdf>

Team Check-ins

A check-in is a simple yet effective way to look out for your people, their energy levels, and for what is usually left unsaid. This allows you to check on your team member's personal and professional wellbeing.

A great way to get a pulse of the team is to have a 'check-in' planned into the meeting. Allot the first 10 minutes of the meeting to check in with the team.

CHECK-IN QUESTIONS ARE:

- Open ended questions
- Slightly abstract questions
- Not an icebreaker. There is a clear purpose of looking for the unsaid and checking on the team's energy levels

TIPS FOR CHECK-INS:

- Slot 10–15 minutes at the top of the meeting. It is worth it! Make it your own – Participants can draw/ write/ share.
- Go Slow! It is ok if there is silence. Stay with it. Let there be gentle pauses between people sharing.
- This is a space to share, to acknowledge, to see and be seen. It is not a space to agree/ disagree. Make it a safe space by modelling it. Set expectations for sharing.

SOME SAMPLE CHECK-IN QUESTIONS ARE:

- What is present for you right now/What is alive in you?
- If you had to take an 'Inner Selfie', what would it look like – 'How is my head, heart and body doing?'
- What words would you use to describe where your head is? And where your heart is?
- Given our work so far, what do you feel best about?
- What is one interest of yours that others in this group might not know about?
- What is one thing you hope to get accomplished at today's meeting?
- What is to be compassionate/kind/loving/productive/resilient right now?
- What is important for you right now?
- What is growing here among us?
- What has been the highlight of your week (or month) so far?
- What is one thing that brings you energy and joy?

- _____
- _____
- _____



Feel free to add more check-in questions to this list. In a meeting, ask any one question that you feel will give you an insight into how your team is doing. If you are not sure of how they might respond, you may choose to go first, sharing vulnerably and authentically, your team members will follow suit.


1.4 BRINGING YOUR TEAM TOGETHER AND CREATING CONNECTIONS

The principle of 'connection' is to highlight two aspects of a team leader's role in their team's wellbeing. The first being, for a team leader to be a 'connect' (like a bridge) between what their team needs and what NCA can offer to support them on their journey. The other aspect is for the team leader to build a trustworthy connection with the team members. This connection is professional and yet is one where the team members feel comfortable enough to share their highs and lows, their celebrations and challenges with their team leader. The leader can build trustworthy connections through various individual and team activities.

What does your team do right now?

As a team, circle the options you all already do together towards building deeper and more trustworthy connections. Feel free to fill some more activities that you do together but may not be mentioned here.

Eat regular lunch together	Celebrating holiday/religious events together		Play team building games together
Volunteering together for a social cause		Celebrating birthdays of colleagues together	
Team retreats		Organising a potluck	Play sports together
	Mentoring programme	15 minute Coffee Chats with the Team lead (Q and A)	Meeting outside the office space for a meal/drinks/activities once a while



After your team does the above exercise, have a candid discussion on the following:

1. How often are these activities done by the team?
2. What would the team like to do more of?
3. How can we together create time and space for what the team finds valuable?
4. Is there any activity we could do better? How?
5. Is there any inspiration from these activities on what else we could do as a team to build trust and connection?

Inspiration corner

Have the team be creative and turn a regular room, or a corner of the office, into an inspiring, joyful one. Ask the team to bring in items from their home environment, or create something, that represents somewhere or something safe and welcoming. This could be plants, photos, blankets, books; whatever they want to share. Arrange the room if you can with soft lighting, relaxing cushions or blankets.

Use the space as a breakout area, but also to meet and talk through your goals and aspirations for the year, and the things you value and are grateful for. Perhaps choose one day a month when you come together in the inspiration corner. Try encouraging employees to bring in food or snacks that tie to their backgrounds – a favourite family recipe or a dish with cultural significance, or a snack that represents home.

Activities and questions you can explore:



Five words


Everyone thinks of five words to tell their story. This could be places they have been, where they were born, things that are meaningful to them (book, poems, films etc), lessons they learnt from people they are inspired by. It can be as loose as they like. Everyone has five or ten minutes to write these down, note that you will be sharing these words with everyone, so only share what feels comfortable. After everyone has finished, go round the group and talk through the five words each person picked and why.

Life Maps⁶

This is a great activity for the team to build connections, get to know each other deeply and in encouraging trust and empathy. This is a slightly longer activity and may take about 90 minutes – 2 hours (depending on team size). We recommend not doing this with more than a group of 10 at once.

Get your team together and hand out some drawing sheets and colour pens, markers or crayons.


Explain to the team that Life Maps are drawings or visual representations of significant milestones in making them the people they are today. Examples of significant moments could include a certain birthday, or school, or the birth/death of a loved one, a tragic circumstance, a life altering opportunity and so on.



This is **YOUR** life map, so it is not better or worse than someone else's. Even a seemingly small incident could have been a turning point in your life's journey and does not need to be exciting to others. Your life map is all about showing what is important to you.

⁶ Referred from https://www.vistacampus.gov/system/files/legacy/50/Training/TrainingResources/LeadershipTrainingModule/life_maps.pdf

Have each person (including you) draw up their life maps. One need not worry about being artistic. Encourage the team to use any kind of depiction through symbols, colours, stick figures to communicate their milestones on their maps. Play some nice, soft music that the team enjoys in the background.



RECOMMENDED TIME:
Drawing Life Maps:
10–15 minutes. Sharing
Life Maps: 5–7 minutes
each team member

Once everyone has drawn, the team sits around in a circle and a volunteer begins sharing by holding up their life map for the team to see. To encourage vulnerability and set the tone, you may want to share first. Your openness and honesty will encourage your team members to share too.

After everyone has shared, you could decide to do handshakes or hugs or high fives or namaste (bowing with hands folded) as is culturally and gender sensitive. This serves as a closure to the activity and for the participants.

Pro Tips:

- Do share the time expectations with the team to ensure everyone gets a chance to speak.
- We also recommend not asking any questions during or after anyone shares. It might be quite difficult for someone to open up and share certain truths of their life.
- Do let your team know that you are available if any of them would like to speak to you or another team member they feel comfortable with about their own sharing
- If someone cries during this activity, let us allow for it as crying too, may be healing. Let us be there to support fully.

Love Week

Choose an annual 'Love Week' for your team. Every year, before Love Week starts, every member of your team secretly draws a name of one of their colleagues from a hat. During Love Week, you are an 'Secret Angel' for the person you've drawn from the hat. Your duty as their Secret Angel is to find creative and mysterious ways to secretly show that person love and appreciation during Love Week - without buying any gifts! Don't reveal your identity!



USING THE WORD LOVE:

In much of our work, we're often encouraged to be and act "professional" and to separate ourselves from the people that we're working with. Whilst this can be important in terms of maintaining boundaries, it's also really important to reconnect with what drives us to do the work. It often comes from a place of compassion and love. Love for your community, love for other people struggling, and love for those who are working hard to make positive change. It might feel uncomfortable or strange to use "love" in a work context, but it's useful to remind us why we do what we do and strengthen the connections within our teams.

⁷ Adapted from <http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-for-web1.pdf>

Team Day Out

Days out bring the team together in a setting outside of the office or the community setting where they are working. It is an inspiring space that allows one to bring forth their highest creative processes as well as rest and rejuvenate by spending time in nature. It also allows the team to know each other better outside of the workspace, building in opportunities for more empathetic functioning.

This could take place once or twice a year, depending on a variety of factors including budget and purpose. Although you may be restricted by budget and movement, you may be able to undertake a retreat in an alternative space. If you are able to move freely, choose a space surrounded by nature through trees, or water or any space that can serve as naturally inspiring to the team. You could also consider a half day for a joint activity - such as cooking a meal together

1.5 SUPPORTING STAFF WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE: FOR TEAM LEADERS

It is important to host sensitive awareness workshops or discussions that focus on reducing stigma and increasing empathy. Team members might not recognise when they need time off, or maybe managers need support on how to support their team members; this is useful for everyone. It breaks stereotypes and creates a more inclusive and empathetic culture.

Good practice and policy

Here are some basic considerations for organisations. These can lessen the risk of vicarious trauma by helping humanitarian workers feel supported, valued, competent, and connected:

- Adequate salary and time off (including R & R) for all staff;
- Sufficient orientation, professional training, and management supervision for staff to feel competent and supported in their jobs;
- Plans for staff safety (including security training and briefing on security protocols);
- Access to medical and mental health support services including:
- Health insurance;
- Information/training about the psychological and spiritual hazards of the work and effective self-care;
- Access to good confidential counselling support as needed; and
- Support for families around issues such as child care, separation, and relocation.

Headington Institute: Vicarious Trauma for Managers

1.6 RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO PROBLEMS

Sometimes members of your team will experience particularly stressful situations or incidences. Below, we have outlined a couple of activities that can help to identify cumulative trauma and stress, as well as an activity on responding to incidents after something has happened

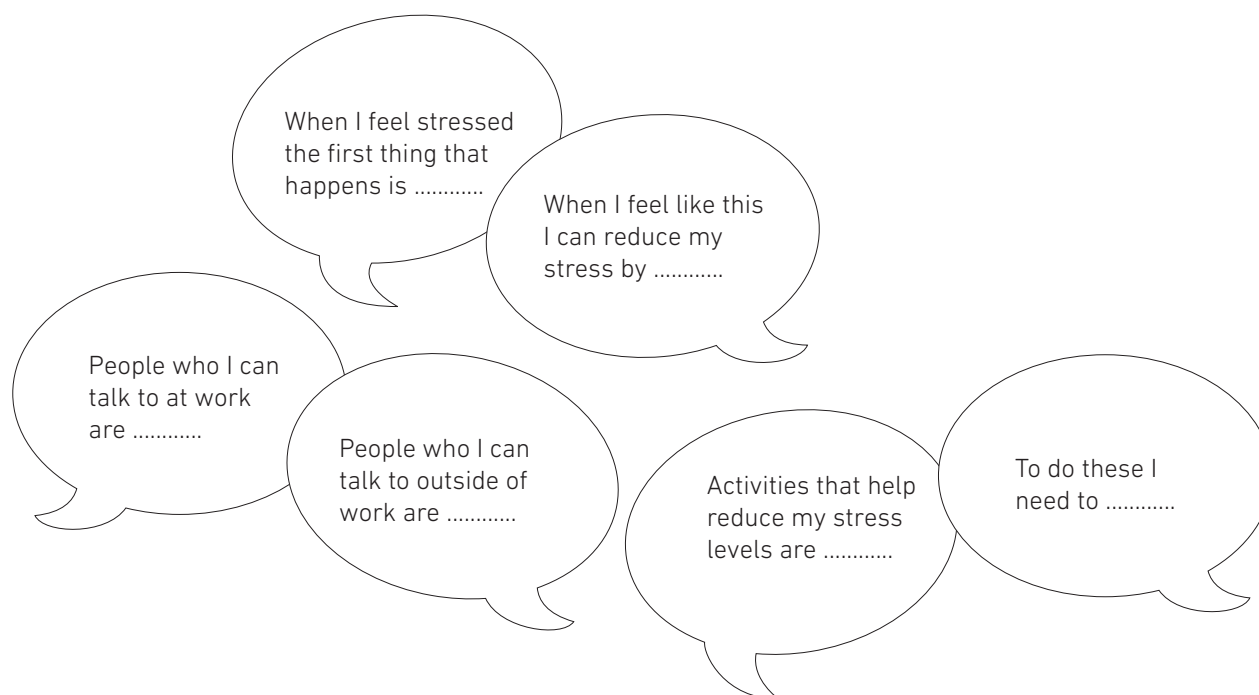
Helping staff to manage cumulative stress and trauma

A large part of your role as team leader is to support good staff-care and self-care and connect with your staff in a way that they feel comfortable to open up to you before they need help. In your regular one to ones, ensure that you start each session asking simple questions such as:



If you've noticed team members are not taking leave, breaks, or struggling with workload, be sure to flag this up with them.

In these regular one to ones, and with new team members, ask team members to complete the worksheet adapted from Mind's wellness action plan⁸. Although this can be just for them, it may be useful for you to talk through in your supervision sessions.



⁸ <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/guide-to-waps-employees/employees-guide-form/>

Responding to incidences

Despite our best efforts, incidents or accidents may occur at the workplace that could affect the overall wellbeing of staff members. As a team leader, one's role in such a situation is two-fold:

- how do I respond to incidents and
- how can I access the support my team needs (to avoid further incidents)

Responding to Incidents

A team leader can prepare for responding to incidents in 3 steps:

- Assessing your office's/organisations capacity to respond to an emergency: This is about being prepared. Ask yourself questions such as:
- How many mental health first aiders do I have on my team?
- Who are the people I can reach out to for supporting my team member's needs immediately? (internally and externally) What are their specialisations?

In case of a physical injury:

- What does my first aid kit have and where is it located? How often is it refilled? Who knows where the kit is, and who does not?
- Providing support: A mental health first aider's role is to provide initial and immediate support till professional help arrives. As a team leader, you can provide immediate support by reaching out to the mental health first aider on your team. It is also helpful, over time, to build on your own skills of starting a conversation to support the individual till someone arrives.
- Referring to more specialised support: With your preparation done beforehand, we are sure you already know whom to reach out to within NCA who will provide a more personalised and professional support for your team member's sustainable wellbeing.

LOOK



- Check for safety
- Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs
- Check for people with serious distress reactions



LISTEN

- Approach people who may need support
- Ask about people's needs and concerns
- Listen to people, and help them to feel calm



LINK

- Help people address basic needs and access services
- Help people cope with problems
- Give information
- Connect people with loved ones and social support

Accessing support as a team leader

As a team leader, one essential skill is to pre-empt as well as understand what your team needs towards building a more sustainable approach to wellbeing. You cannot fulfil all your team's needs by yourself. So here are some tips on what you can do to access support internally and externally:

- You can continue to consistently champion your team's needs by building alliances with those who can support. These alliances can be found within the team itself. Think of people who can champion the team culture and become a source of support within the larger team.
- Reach out to head office or counselling and support services if you need additional support
- When you evaluate your team member's performance, do keep a section on reviewing their workload, their overtime, hours of work, productivity and so on. This helps employees understand the seriousness of a sustainable approach to wellbeing.

Here are some low-cost suggestions on supporting your team by accessing other resources:

- Increased supervision to help manage workloads
- Offering remote and flexible working hours
- Providing training and development opportunities for building resilience
- Offering an informal mentoring/buddy system

1.7 DURING COVID-19 / PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

During a public health emergency such as COVID-19, staff care and support should be an even higher priority. It is particularly important to take time to consider the different needs and situations of various members of your team, including thinking about:

- Staff members who are isolated, living on their own or dealing with existing underlying vulnerabilities (including gender-based violence in their homes)
- Staff members with caring responsibilities at home or in their communities
- Staff who are grieving, who may not be able to perform normal mourning rituals
- Staff who are particularly overworked or overburdened, especially frontline workers with particular emotional connections and responsibilities towards the communities they are working with
- Taking care of yourself! While team leaders play a crucial support role for staff during an emergency, it is also important to remember your own needs. You cannot take care of others if you do not take care of yourself, so start with maintaining your own health and wellbeing in challenging times.

Be aware of people's circumstances and be as flexible as possible. All staff will need time to slow down, process information and manage stress.

Tips and techniques for team leaders during a public health emergency⁹

- **Lead by example** modelling healthy work behaviours (such as not working overtime and taking breaks); share your own self-care strategies and methods, and don't be afraid to show your own vulnerability
- **Communicate clearly, accurately and frequently** about staying safe during the crisis, work arrangements (including pay, working hours, any changes to roles and responsibilities, sick pay and annual leave) and any support services that are available.
- **Have good conversations:** show your teams that wellbeing matters to you, encourage teams to share with each other and hold regular meetings with female staff and volunteers about their needs, concerns and ideas, including asking what risks they are facing and additional needs they might have
- **Help staff members take control and involve staff, particularly women, in decision-making,** and be open and available to collaborative problem-solving. Encourage team members to take things step by step, especially if they are feeling overwhelmed
- **Create a culture of care:** promoting and making time for positive self-care strategies and providing extra mini-trainings on managing stress and working on gender-based violence

⁹ Adapted from Basic Psychosocial Skills- A Guide for COVID-19 Responders & GBV AoR (2020) Staff Care and Support During COVID-19 Crisis https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MHPSS-for-Staff_COVID-19-crisis_23-April-2020.pdf and Yaker, Robyn, & Erskine, Dorcas (2020), GBV Case Management and the COVID-19 Pandemic Available at: <http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1882/guidance-on-gbv-case-management-in-the-face-of-covid-19-outbreak-final-draft.pdf>



issues during COVID-19. Encourage staff to work in sustainable ways, including ensuring that staff have regular breaks, take their annual leave, are supported to work flexible hours, and have time to connect with family and friends

- **Set up flexible, light-touch support systems**, such as a buddying system between colleagues or a 'wellbeing and care' check-in call system for staff outside of the office.

A public health emergency will likely create additional work, stressors and needs for a GBV team, but it is really important for team leaders to focus their attention on humanity over productivity while trying to work out how to provide GBV services.

Comforting language to use during a crisis

It can be difficult to know how to respond if your team is experiencing difficulties. Consider using messages and questions such as¹⁰:

- You are not alone.
- We think about you and your loved ones often.
- I'm sorry this is happening/has happened.
- Is there anything we can do?
- We are with you. Many people are with you and want the best for you.

Take time to recognise people's contributions and thank them for their work. Try and emphasise and reinforce the staff member's strengths, for example their positive attitude, empathy, kindness, or how their presence gives hope to others. Don't forget to express concern about the wellbeing of your team, not just the quality of work that they are doing!

There's also a lot of social stigma associated with COVID-19, so it is good to be careful about the kind of language you use about the virus, including

- **Do** talk about 'people who have COVID-19' or 'people who are being treated for COVID-19' or 'people who have died after contracting COVID-19'
- **Avoid** referring to people as 'COVID-19 cases' or 'victims'
- **Avoid** talking about people 'spreading the virus' or infecting others, as this can imply blame
- **Do** talk positively about prevention and measures to keep people safe
- **Avoid** emphasising messages of threat
- **Avoid** rolling out new pieces of work or communication
- **Do** talk informally with your team, but remember that for those with caring responsibilities informal "coffee breaks" may be more burdensome than helpful
- **Do** focus on wellbeing rather than productivity

⁹ Adapted from GBV AoR (2020) Staff Care and Support During COVID-19 Crisis https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MHPSS-for-Staff_COVID-19-crisis_23-April-2020.pdf



Organisational culture in the time of COVID-19

How an organisation responds to crisis is often closely connected to the underlying culture of the organisation, particularly in terms of what gets prioritised.

Take some time to think about how your organisation and your team have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, or other public health emergencies in the past (such as Ebola). Did your organisation prioritise wellbeing?

Discussion questions in small groups

- What do you think your organisation as a whole has done well during the pandemic? What has your team done well? Do you think there are any underlying points about the culture of your organisation (such as people generally being kind to one another) that might have helped your organisation respond well to a crisis?
 - On post-it notes or scraps of paper write down
 - 5 things you think have been good about your organisation's response to COVID-19
 - 2 underlying cultural issues that might have helped your organisation's response
 - Stick them up on the wall and compare them to other group's answers
- Are there areas where you feel your organisation has done less well in responding to the pandemic? What could have been done better? Do you think there are any underlying points about the culture of your organisation (such as resistance to change) that might have hindered your organisation from responding well to a crisis?
 - On post-it notes or scraps of paper, write down
 - 5 things you think could be improved in terms of your organisation's response to COVID-19
 - 2 underlying cultural issues that might have hindered your organisation's response
 - Stick them up on the wall and compare them to other group's answers
- Looking at the map you've created on the wall, what are the top three lessons you can draw from this?
 - What actions would you take to incorporate these lessons into the everyday culture of your workplace?
 - What might you want to share with other teams or partner organisations about what you've learned? How would you share this information?

...the first of these is the fact that the ...

...the second of these is the fact that the ...

...the third of these is the fact that the ...

...the fourth of these is the fact that the ...

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...the eighteenth of these is the fact that the ...

MAKING TIME AND SPACE FOR SELF-CARE: FOR EVERYONE, TOGETHER AND INDIVIDUALLY

In the previous section, we looked at staff care, and in this section, we'll turn our attention to thinking about ways to make time for self-care. Regardless of our position in the organisation, without taking the time or making the effort for our wellbeing, how can we expect to be at our best selves at home, at work, with our loved ones and even with ourselves?

Self-care is both a practice and an approach. It means making sure we have time in our day to really look after ourselves, and it means thinking about how every aspect of our life supports our wellbeing. When we take care of ourselves, the decisions we make and the actions we take mean we not only show up for ourselves, but we show up for our communities, families, colleagues and societies.

Reminding ourselves of the things we enjoy, our values, our right to self-care through self-compassion, happiness and physical wellbeing can provide you with the tools to see self-care as an approach as well as activities you can practice. For people with oppressed identities self-care can also be an act of resistance; resting, self-love, community support and kindness can go against lots of social norms and stereotypes about how people should behave. In this section, we've suggested a number of activities you can do to help build your resilience, as well as tools you can draw on when you're feeling overwhelmed, fearful or when something has happened.

What: This section focuses on self-care practices and approaches to use, whether in times of crisis or not. We use an intersectional and feminist approach to understanding self-care. **This means understanding that some groups of people will face additional barriers to self-care, as well as additional stressors impacting on their wellbeing. This can include experiences of racism, colonialism, caring responsibilities and physical safety and the impact this then has on people's mental health and wellbeing.**

Why: **Due to the prevalence of GBV globally, women workers who are responding to GBV may have also experienced trauma or abuse in their own lives, their communities or those that they are close to. Workers may also experience vicarious trauma, PTSD, compassion fatigue and burnout. Recognising this requires specific self-care tools and activities to prevent and respond to these potential risks to wellbeing.**

For Whom: These activities are for everyone. You can do them on your own, or in groups

How: In this section, you'll find activities that reaffirm our 6 key principles for self-care, that are intended to be used as part of a regular, consistent practice to prevent burn out, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. Some are creative and require a pen and pencil whilst others require a quiet space. There are also activities you can draw on to support someone else, or yourself when something has happened. You can pick and mix ones that you find work best for you.

2.1 FINDING BALANCE

When we take care of ourselves, we're likely to find that our lives are more balanced, and we're more connected to those we care for, ourselves and the world we live in. During busy work times, it'll be unlikely you're able to do everything you enjoy doing, but something you can think about is what is sustainable and what is achievable. Is it sustainable to work long days for two weeks, or three? What about two months? Is it achievable to be eating really well if you're not able to easily access fresh food right now? Is that sustainable? A useful tool to check in with ourselves about how much balance we have in our lives is the wellness wheel.

On the wellbeing wheel below, you'll see 10 points from the centre to the outside. The centre point represents 0, or not at all, and the outer points represents 10 or a lot/all the time.

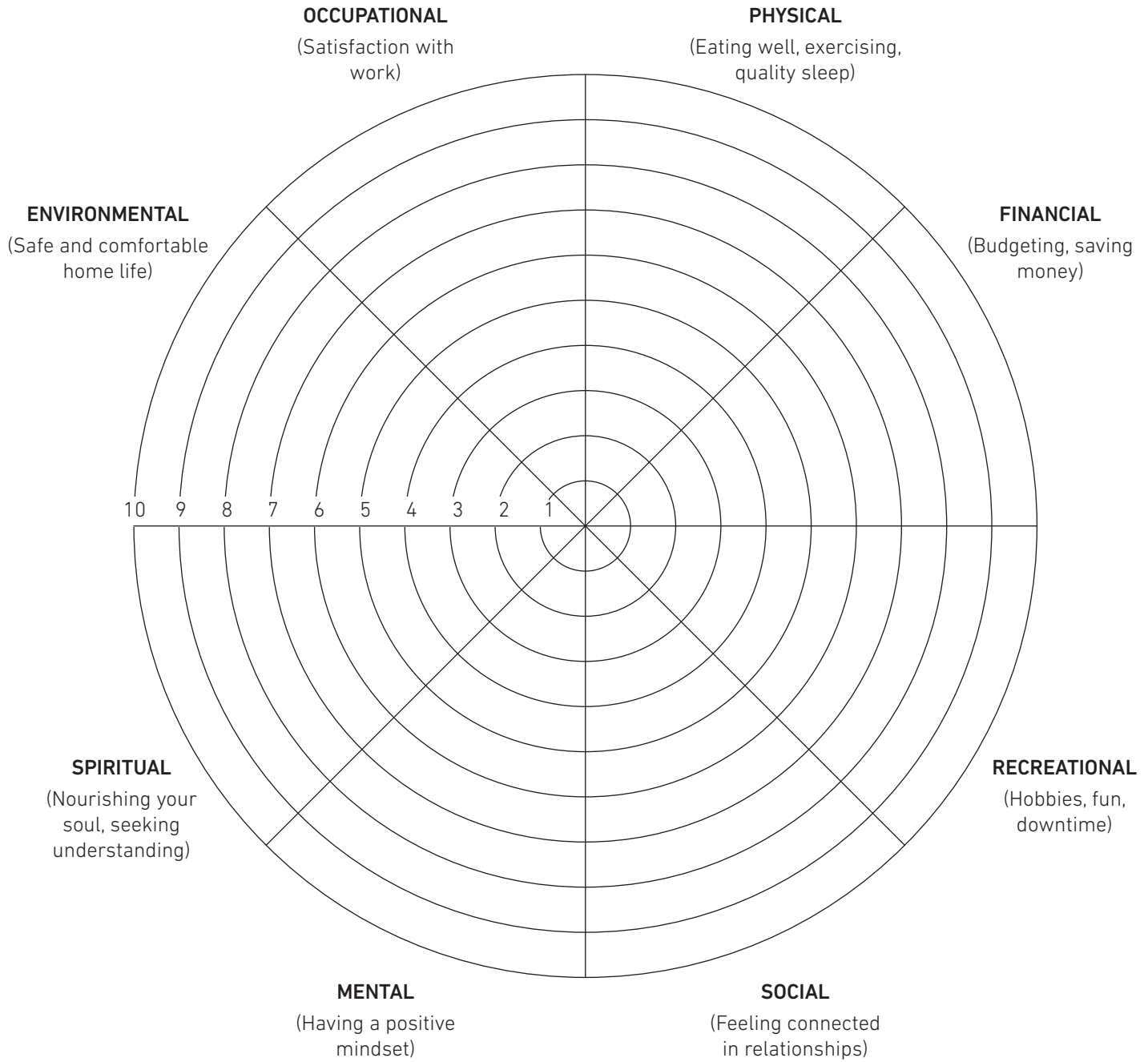
On your own, mark how much time you spend on each aspect of your life with a dot on the line.

After you've finished this, join the dots across the wheel. It's likely you'll have a misshapen wheel. This exercise helps us to understand what parts of our lives we're maybe not spending enough time on; for example, if you've marked 9 in work but 0 in relationships, you might want to think about how you could bring that up a bit higher. How can you also bring compassion to this exercise? It is simply not possible to have 10's all round, sometimes 5's all round might be more realistic. That's ok. The benefit of this tool is to help you think how you can enjoy all parts of your life, as best you can.

For groups

You could also use this activity as part of a retreat or a meeting, if you're doing this as part of a team exercise, if you feel comfortable, you can share with your colleagues what your wheel looks like. If you feel able to, you can talk through some of the challenges and opportunities in making your wheel smoother. Something to think about is what is realistic right now. Is it 5's? 6's? What feels ok and how can you support each other to do more of what supports your wellbeing.

WELLNESS WHEEL



2.2 UNDERSTANDING OUR EMOTIONS

When we make time to reflect on how we're feeling, and connect with our emotions, we're more able to identify stress when it occurs, and think about ways to manage this. Two activities to use either on your own, or in groups are below.

Individual

On a piece of paper, draw a picture of yourself, reflecting how you are feeling right now. You can write, draw, or use different colours to represent your feelings, thoughts, worries around the portrait, and take your time to colour in or decorate your portrait how you wish.

Now think about a time when you were feeling very happy, and draw this portrait, annotating with thoughts, feelings and what else was going on to bring about this feeling of happiness, you can also use patterns or colours to describe how you felt.

Now, think about a time when you didn't feel so great, and draw this picture.

What is different about them? What was going on? How did those feelings come out? Did you get angry, or irritable with people? Or did you retreat to be on your own? Sadness, anger and anxiety are all messages to ourselves, reminding us to check in and take care of ourselves, and are completely normal responses to challenging times.

Understanding our emotions and knowing how we respond to difficult feelings can help build our self-compassion. Identifying early on how we're feeling, and connecting with these feelings as they emerge rather than suppressing our emotions, can help us to intervene early with stress and overwhelm and prevent issues like burnout and compassion fatigue.

For groups

This exercise is useful for teams where there already exists a lot of trust and support. The aim of this exercise is to help us communicate how we're feeling, and build compassion for others and how they might express their feelings.

Everyone is asked to draw a picture of happiness; this could be a squiggle, a portrait or anything that comes to mind. If you feel comfortable, share your drawings in your group, and talk about any similarities or differences that you can see. Now, draw a picture of sadness, and share these. Next draw two more pictures of fear and anger; what do they look like for everyone? Do you all express these feelings in the same way? Some people might express sadness through crying, others through anger. What can we learn about each other through this exercise?

It's useful to understand how we all express feelings differently, so that we can become more connected as a team. For some people, they might become frustrated when they're sad, and for others they might take themselves off for a walk on their own. Knowing that we all express our feelings differently can help us to understand each other, giving each other space to work through our feelings in ways that suit us as individuals.



2.3 PRIORITIES AND BOUNDARIES

A key part of setting boundaries is making sure we are able to focus on what we need to do, what our priorities are, and putting our work aside at the end of the day. If we're not able to focus, we're likely to become overwhelmed, stressed, say yes to too many things and not be able to switch off. Self-care becomes another thing to do on our to do list, and is easily dropped for something "more important", this can lead to vicarious trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue, and stops us taking care of ourselves, our communities and those we are working with and for.

Boundaries

Knowing when to say yes, and when to say no is a key component of self-care. If we overstretch ourselves and say yes to everything, we're more likely to burnout or experience compassion fatigue. For women, this is particularly important, as often social norms dictate that women should be caregivers, and assertive women are often looked upon with judgement. Learning how to say no, and being assertive about our boundaries can really help in how we care for ourselves.

Think about what aggression, passivity and assertiveness mean to you and what body language you associate with them. Assertiveness is expressing how you honestly feel, without being domineering. Sometimes when we are assertive, other people will have an emotional reaction to this, but that's ok, expressing yourself honestly stops resentment building up, and helps you to set boundaries in other areas of your life. Sometimes, it might not be safe to be assertive, so speak to a trusted friend or colleague about ways in which you can speak your truth, and remain safe.

Practice assertiveness by thinking about this scenario: A friend has borrowed a pan from you a while ago and hasn't given it back. They ask to borrow another one, but don't mention the first pan they still haven't returned. You don't really want to lend them another one, but you don't want to hurt their feelings. What could you do?

Think about what solution you want to achieve and what words you might use to achieve this. What would your body language look like?

Practicing a safe scenario like this can help us to feel comfortable being assertive, and to plan for times when we need to set boundaries at work or in our relationships.

Things to think about

Setting boundaries and saying no can be incredibly hard (and sometimes dangerous or risky) for women, and so practicing on your own, or with trusted people can help build your confidence in the first instance.

Focus

Sometimes, we also need to set boundaries with ourselves, as well as with others, to make sure we're able to focus on what we're doing in that moment. This could be focusing on our self-care, but also on work, or making time to socialise and relax with friends. Tips to enhance our focus include;

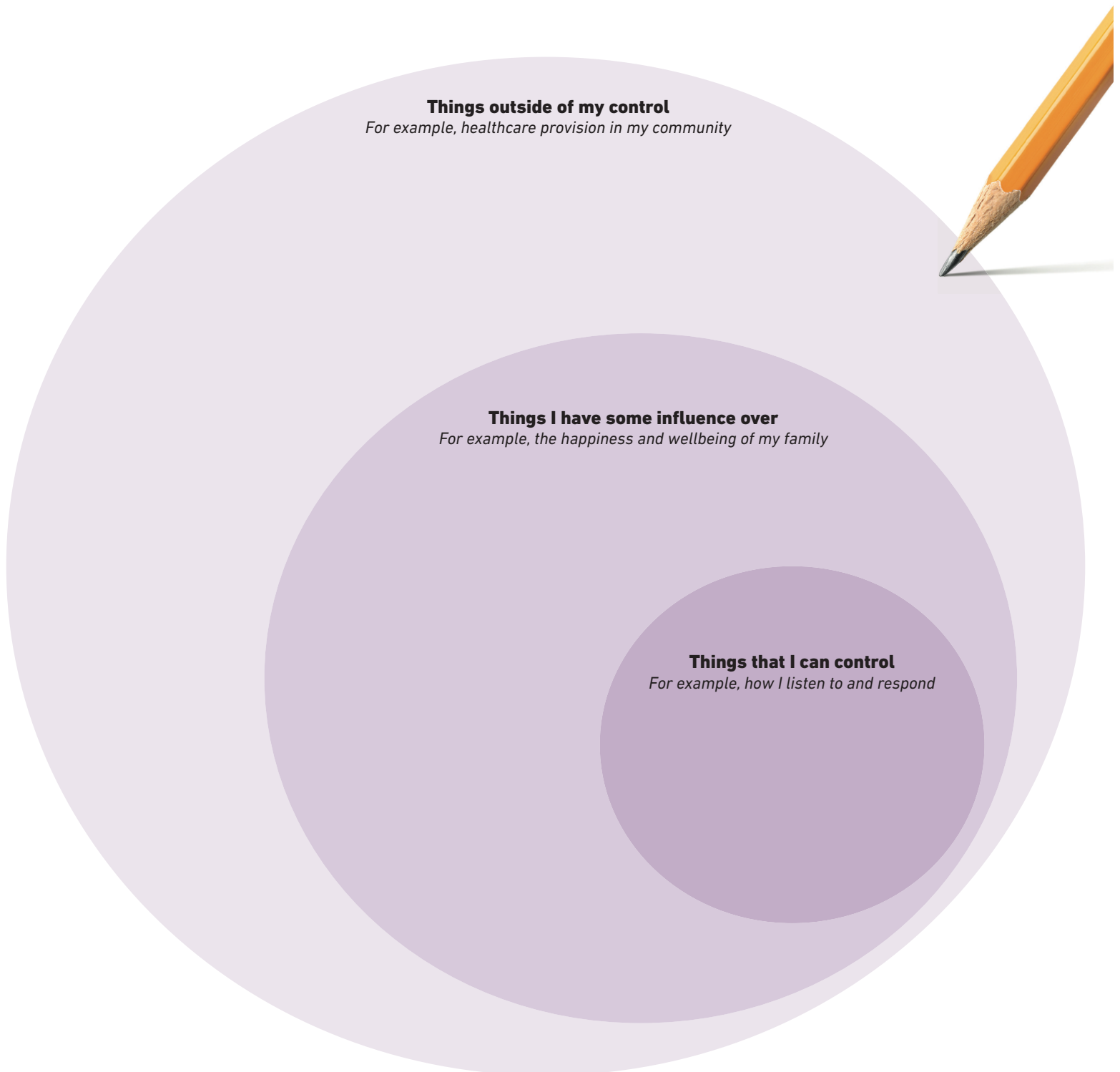
- Knowing your distractions and scheduling time to do these
- Recognising the importance of concentration; whether it's taking the time to do these self-care exercises, hanging out with friends, reading, sleeping or seeing family, the more we build our focus, the more we can really enjoy what we're doing while we're doing it. We're not thinking about what we should do next, or what's on our to do list.
- Deep breathing; at the start, middle and end of your day set a few minutes aside to breathe deeply with your eyes closed for a few minutes. This simple act can really help focus the mind, and is particularly helpful when you've finished something, and about to move on to do something else.
- You might find it helpful to keep a diary or journal, writing how you're feeling and what's going on for you. Your journal is just for you, and can be a safe place to work through your feelings and remind yourself of your priorities, goals and values. You can sketch, doodle, rip it up, or write how you feel.
- Make time to experience your feelings; if you're angry, can you rip up some paper, punch a pillow? If you're sad, allow yourself to cry, if you're lonely, recognise what you're feeling. Scheduling time for this may seem counter-intuitive, but if we suppress these feelings they will only come back stronger.

Understanding what is within your control

It can be helpful to take some time to remind yourself of what problems are outside of your control, to be gentle with yourself about when you are not able to help in a particular situation, and remain flexible to the changing conditions around us.

One useful exercise you can do is to visualise what you can and cannot control. Try filling in this diagram by yourself or with others.

This exercise can be particularly helpful during public health emergencies or during times of extreme stress and uncertainty.



Exploring relationships and power

Talking about power can be difficult. Power is often thought about as a negative word - to have power over someone. Much of our work on gender-based violence is about challenging the abuse of power. However, power can also be thought of positively - the power that we all have to change things, individually and collectively, and our ability to share power. Exploring how power impacts on our life and how abuses of it limit our ability to self-care can help support our self-compassion, by recognising the impact this has on our overall wellbeing.

Individually or as groups, have a think about people in your life who have the power to support you¹¹. These might be people at work, or family or friends. For each person, describe a time when they used their power in a positive way, and if it feels safe to, a time when they used their power in a negative way.

PEOPLE IN MY LIFE	POSITIVE USE OF POWER (SHARED POWER)	NEGATIVE USE OF POWER (POWER OVER)

What do you think was the intent behind these actions? Were they deliberate or unconscious/accidental? How did you react?

Now give some thought to how you use your power. Who in your community or workplace do you have the power to support? Using the same table above, describe times when you have used your power in different ways to affect them. How did they respond?

¹¹ Adapted from Kvinna till Kvinna's [Integrated Security: The Manual](#)

2.4 PHYSICAL HEALTH

A large part of our wellbeing is our physical health. What we eat, drink and how we exercise has a huge impact on how we feel, and making good choices with the options available to us is really important for consistent self-care. Exercising in nature, if we can, is a great way to rejuvenate and reconnect, as well as take care of our bodies. If you're experiencing high levels of stress, it's likely you will be experiencing a high surge of adrenaline. When this happens, sitting still and doing reflective exercises might be really challenging, and one way we can manage that excess adrenaline is through physical activity and exercise.

Noticing

If you're able to, next time you're out, whether you're on a hike in the hills, or taking a city walk see if you can notice new things around you, without outside distractions. Turn off your phone and music, and simply notice what is happening around you. What season is it? What colours can you see? What can you hear? Really take the time to notice what you see around you, whether it's people, plants, cars, buildings or the pavement beneath you. You can do this on your own or with other people.

Dancing

Dance is a great way of exercising, connecting with our cultures, and simply enjoying ourselves! If you can, put together a playlist of music that makes you feel good, or reminds you of people you care for, and get dancing! There's no right or wrong way to do this, just enjoy the process.

If you'd like to do this in a group, simple things like making a playlist or mixtape for other people, sharing music and dance from your own cultures and families can connect us with each other, as well as help us to re-connect with our own communities and traditions. If you're a woman, you might find it useful to have this as a woman only activity.

Things to think about

Walking, hiking, running and other outdoor activities might not be safe for many women, LGBTQI people or people with oppressed identities, or in unsafe environments. As such, other activities you can draw on to enhance your physical wellbeing, might be to access NCA's document on recommended exercises, or if available, there are a number of apps and online videos that can be used for those in limited movement environments. There are several activities you can do indoors such as jumping jacks, squats, burpees, imaginary jump rope, or using everyday household items as weights (you can even make your own weights from jerrycans or filled water bottles).

2.5 SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-COMPASSION

This exercise can help us connect with others doing transformative work, as well as reconnect us with our core values, helping to build our self-image and self-esteem. The work you are doing does connect you with something big, and it's important to take the time to celebrate this and your role in this work.

Individuals

Think of individuals, including women activists, artists, or organisers who inspire you.

- What is it about them that you admire? How do they hold themselves?
- How do they communicate?
- What changes did they bring about?
- What can you learn from them?

Now think about how you hold some of these characteristics, how are you carrying on their message or approach?

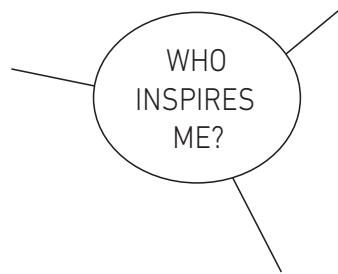
Write down some of the values that they hold that you admire, and try and write a paragraph for each value relating to a time when you did something that upheld that. For example, you might admire someone for being brave- write about a time when you were brave. Or you might admire someone for being creative; write about a time when you were creative.

For teams

You can use this activity in a team setting, sharing who inspires you and why. A useful way to do this is go round your group talking about your own personal inspirations. Have one person write up your answers, and note why these people are inspiring. Are there similarities between these people? What can we learn about other people in our team and how they're motivated? If you have the resources to, you can explore this further through making a zine on who inspires you and why. To do this, you'll need A5 pieces of card, some magazines, pens, paper, glue sticks and scissors. On your own, or in pairs, cut and paste words or images that speak to you about your inspirations; it might be phrases in a newspaper, images in a magazine, or something you want to write or draw yourself. Leave a small margin round the edges so that you can stick the pages together when you've finished. You can take as much time as you need to do your page, or pages. As zine's don't have to look "perfect", this is a great activity to get creative and share what brings you joy together.

Things to think about

If you are a woman, LGBTQI or a member of an oppressed and marginalised group, often role models can be quite hidden. You might want to also think about family members or community leaders who have inspired you, and how you can continue their legacy and values in your work.



2.6 EMOTIONAL SAFETY

Visualisation exercises can help us to feel more relaxed. When we are stressed, our bodies often go into flight, fight or freeze mode. We might feel a rush of adrenaline, clench our fists and jaws, feel lightheaded or not be able to move. Exercises that help us to feel emotionally safe when we're scared or overwhelmed, can help build our self-compassion. If you can, try to practice this once a week, so that you can return to it when you need to.

Find a quiet place to sit undisturbed for 5 minutes. On a chair or on the floor, stretch your arms above your head and take 3 deep breaths. If you can, close your eyes, soften your gaze, or focus on a stable object (for example, the floor or a table). Keep breathing really deeply. Let your shoulders and jaw relax. Imagine sitting somewhere that feels safe. This could be real or imagined. What does it look like? Feel like? What is the weather like? Are you on your own? With friends, loved ones, or pets? Breathe deeply for a couple of minutes, and try to build up a good picture of what this safe place looks like. After a few minutes, you can draw or write down what you imagined, and keep this as a reminder of your own private safe space. If you practice this exercise a number of times, you'll be able to build up a really good picture and be able to return to it quicker each time.

Things to think about

If you have personally experienced trauma, violence or abuse, sitting with your thoughts can be really challenging. If you find this exercise triggering or difficult, or you're not able to identify a safe space, just take some deep breaths. You can build up to this exercise through practice, and when you're ready.

2.7 REST AND RESTORATION AND RECONNECTION

Sleeplessness, nightmares and waking are very common side effects of stress. One of the ways you can rest your body and your mind, even when you're not able to sleep is through movement, mindful rest and naps.

Movement

When we experience stress, our bodies hold that tension, most often in our shoulders, necks, backs or jaws. If we don't relax these areas, we create a cycle of tense bodies and tenser minds. If you have personally experienced trauma, your body will be carrying a lot of tension long after the event, and might find your body tenses up in similar ways when you experience something else frightening or unsettling. A simple routine you can use to release some of that tension is;

- Find somewhere safe to lie down, such as a bed or the floor. Put a cushion or pillow under your head, and stretch your body out like a starfish. Take up as much space as you can.
- After you've stretched out like this, bring your feet together, then your arms together and take a big long stretch lying down. Point your toes and hold your right wrist with your left hand.
- Slowly come to sitting cross legged, and place your hands on your knees. Draw large circles with your nose, looking up to the ceiling at the top of your circle, and down to your feet at the bottom, breathing in as you circle up, and out as you circle down. Reverse your circle and repeat for a few breaths.
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, breathing in and release back down breathing out. Now place your hands on your shoulders and circle your shoulders round a few times.
- If you're able to, move to a space where you can put your legs up against the wall, with your head on the floor. Breathe deeply for a few seconds, taking long breaths in and out. Place your hands on your stomach. Sit like this for as long as feels comfortable, and afterwards stretch out.

You can take a selection of these activities, or run through as a routine. It's useful to stretch out at the end of each day to help release any tension you've built up, and help you to rest when you can.

Things to think about

If you've experienced violence or abuse, you may see your body as a source of pain or oppression. Reconnecting with it in a way that feels safe, compassionate and kind through movement can help us to recover.

Mindful rest

There may be times when you're struggling to sleep well and deeply, and as a consequence your emotions will feel much rawer. You might feel more vulnerable, stressed and overwhelmed. Resting, even if we can't sleep, can help ease those feelings and revitalise you.

Mindful rest means dedicating some time to close your eyes and breathing deeply. One tool you can use is breathing in for the count of 7, holding for a second, then breathing out for the count of 5. Repeat this 10 times.

This can also be used as a group activity to help you "arrive" at meetings together, or to close group activities outlined elsewhere

Naps

If your sleep is disturbed or you are struggling to sleep for long periods of time, if you're able to, you might find it useful to schedule naps for when you're at home. For no more than 20 minutes, find a spot you won't be disturbed. Using some of the stretching or breathing techniques might help you to drift off for a while, if you're not able to sleep, use the time to sit with your eyes shut, relaxing as you can.

Happiness

If you're working in stressful environments, it can be hard to reconnect with things that bring us joy. We might feel that it's not important, or selfish, to be happy when there's so much pain and injustice around us. But reminding ourselves of what brings us happiness, reconnects us with our whole personality and other parts of our lives that we may be neglecting. Joyful resistance, hope, happiness and compassion not only support your self-care, but the care of others around you.

For individuals

Write a list of everything that makes you happy. In the middle of a piece of paper write or draw one thing that brings you happiness. Doodle round this word, colouring in, making sketches, scribbling, whatever works for you until you fill the page. Whenever you feel unsettled you can return to this piece of paper to remind yourself of activities that make you happy. If you can, try and find a way to do at least one thing on your list each week. If you're not able to; what are the workarounds?

For groups

In your group, you have a couple of minutes to write down as many things as you can that bring you happiness. This could be food, drink, people, art, sport, whatever makes you happy. After writing these down, in small groups of two or three, share with the other people two things in particular that make you happy. Take turns to listen to each other, asking questions as you go. What is a good memory associated with this? When was the last time you got to do this? How can you do this now? For example, if good food is something a team member enjoys, could you share a recipe or memory with them? If you can, make a commitment to yourself to try and do at least one thing off your list by the end of your week.



2.8 HELPING YOURSELF AND OTHERS WHEN THINGS HAPPEN

If something has happened that has made you fearful, overwhelmed, anxious or stressed it's likely your body will react. You might experience a rush of adrenaline, gearing you up to fight or run away. You might freeze, and not be able to move or think clearly. These are all normal responses to stress, and are built into us to protect us from danger. If you've experienced something that has triggered your flight, fright or freeze reflexes you might feel panicked, distant from yourself, nauseous or have headaches and migraines. You might lose your appetite, have trouble sleeping, or have lots of unhelpful thoughts. Some of the ways you can take care of yourself in these situations is finding tools that work for you to build self-compassion and connect with yourself and others. In this section, you'll find activities you can draw on.

Calming anxiety

For individuals

If you're feeling overwhelmed, panicked, frightened or scared, you can draw on this grounding exercise to help you slow down, re-connect and take care of yourself.

Find somewhere you won't be disturbed for 5 or 10 minutes. When you're comfortable, take some big deep breaths. Look around you and try and focus on 5 things you can see; what shape are they? What colour are they? Next, think about 4 things you can touch; how do they feel? Are they soft? Hard? Textured? Is it with your hands or feet? Now think of 3 things you can hear, are they loud or quiet? Then think of 2 things you can smell, is someone cooking nearby? Then, think about 1 thing you can taste; what do you last eat? Did you enjoy it?

Take one last big deep breath in and out, and stretch your arms above your head. Think about how you feel.



For other people

If a member of your team is struggling with panic, overwhelm or fear and begin to become short of breath, have difficulty swallowing or feel overwhelmed by anxiety, you can help to guide them through and out of an anxiety or panic attack using this short sequence.

Ask them to take some deep breaths if they're able to, and if they can, find a place to sit down. Ask them to feel their socks or shoes on their feet, and the ground beneath them. Remind them to take some slow breaths. Now ask them to feel their clothes or breeze on their legs, and take some long deep breaths with them. Now ask them to feel where they are sitting, is it hard or soft? Breath with them again, and ask them to feel their hands, can they feel a breeze there? Is it warm or cold? Can they wiggle their fingers? Breath with them. Sit with them, breathing long and slow breaths until they're able to breathe normally. Remind them it's ok to feel how they are feeling. Ask how they are feeling now. Remember to take some time to process this yourself, and check in with the person afterwards to see how they're doing. How can you help?



2.9 SELF-CARE DURING COVID / PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

The outbreak of COVID-19 has created concern, uncertainty and worry across the world. Just as happens in other crisis events, COVID-19 has disrupted everyone's social and support networks, and it is likely that you are facing many new demands on your time and energy, as well as new feelings of anxiety. These might include:

- Longer working hours and working from home
- Worries about your own health and your loved one's health
- Additional caring responsibilities at home or in your community
- Feeling powerless to help others, or feeling trapped
- Signs of stress, exhaustion and burnout

While the situation may feel very different to normal, many of the ways to maintain self-care during a public health emergency remain similar to those outlined above. Here are a few additional self-care tips and a number of activities that might help - choose those that would work best for you personally and give them a try!

- Stay up to date with accurate information about the public health emergency, but make sure to take substantial breaks from the news and the media
- Keep as much social contact as you can, even if it is at a physical distance. Take five minutes out of your day each day to talk to a friend, family member or colleague about how you are feeling about the situation
- Maintain a sense of meaning, purpose and hope. Set a short list of small daily, achievable goals and enjoyable, relaxing activities.
- Make sure you take time off from work, including setting aside days for national and religious holidays and weekends. Talk to your team leader about scheduling in annual leave.
- At the end of each day, make a short list (in your head or on paper) of ways you were able to help others or things you are grateful for, such as "I helped by being kind to someone who was upset" or "I'm grateful for support from my friend".
- Make a list of times in the past you have managed a problem or overcome and adversity: what did you learn from these experiences? What could you draw on now?
- Try out one of the activities from above! Breathing and visualization can be really helpful to calm our nerves and build self-compassion

Most importantly, it is important to recognise that feelings like anger, frustration, sadness, anxiety, guilt are all very normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Give yourself time and space to feel your feelings.

¹² Adapted from [Basic Psychosocial Skills- A Guide for COVID-19 Responders](#)

3 CONCLUSION

Staff care and self-care are vital to our wellbeing and the sustainability and impact of our work. They remind us that we are all connected as human beings with thoughts, feelings and experiences. We all deserve compassion inside and outside of our work lives. When we prioritise staff care and self-care we acknowledge that whilst stress can be part of life, excess, long term, unmanageable stress shouldn't be. Creatively working together in your teams, with friends and loved ones, or on your own to practice staff care and self-care will help to prevent and manage excess stress.

Whilst many of the activities are designed to prevent excess stress, you can also turn to them in times of need. You can recover from burnout and compassion fatigue, and you can manage stress compassionately.

Staff care and self-care is an ethos. It is a commitment that says that your wellbeing matters, and the work that you do matters. Activities alone are only part of the self-care and staff care journey. We hope you take this ethos forward, and explore ways to embed compassion into your everyday life.

4 FURTHER RESOURCES

Feminist self-care

<http://preventgbvafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Self-and-Collective-Care.pdf>

Guide for COVID-19 responders

[Basic Psychosocial Skills- A Guide for COVID-19 Responders](#)

Integrated Security: Kvinna till Kvinna's [Integrated Security: The Manual](#)

Mental health First Aid

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/save-children-psychological-first-aid-training-manual-child-practitioners>

Organisational culture: <http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-for-web1.pdf>

Psychological first aid

https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/

Self-care journaling

https://pscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/14-Day-Well-Being-Kit_ALL_English_HKRC_202003.pdf

Stress management

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003927>

Self-care for activists: Self Care and Self Defense Manual for Feminist Activists: <https://www.genderit.org/resources/self-care-self-defense-manual-feminist-activists>

Wellbeing during COVID

[Basic Psychosocial Skills- A Guide for COVID-19 Responders \(available in multiple languages\)](#)

Wellbeing during COVID and other crises – for team leaders

<https://cdn.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/10094717/PE-guide-for-leaders-wellbeing-through-COVID19.pdf>

https://headington-institute.org/files/vicarious-trauma-handout_for-managers_85189.pdf





NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

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