



2.4 STAFF CARE

Supervisors and organizations play a critical role in creating an organizational culture that prioritizes the safety and well-being of its staff. This is particularly critical for organizations that are providing GBV services in humanitarian settings given the exposure of staff to highly stressful situations and the risk of vicarious (also known as secondary) trauma. We often talk about “self-care” in our work—or what an individual can do to prevent stress from becoming overwhelming. On a personal level, not practicing good self-care can lead to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual harm. It can disrupt overall well-being, quality of life and personal relationships. While the emphasis of self-care is usually on the individual, self-care is important for individuals and organizations as productivity and work often suffer when good self-care is not promoted and encouraged by supervisors and individuals alike. For these reasons, organizations, particularly those responding to difficult issues such as GBV, also have a responsibility to provide a level of care for their staff.

Caseworkers are often the people working closest with survivors, hearing their experiences of GBV, and responding with care, compassion, and concern. Over time, without appropriate support and supervision, caseworkers may begin to feel overwhelmed and tired, and may even begin to feel hopeless and helpless. In order to prevent caseworker burn-out and to facilitate caseworkers’ capacity to provide the best care and services to survivors, supervisors (and organizations) need to make explicit a commitment to staff well-being and implement specific strategies for promoting it. While every organization will need to develop its own strategies and approaches for staff care based on resources and structure, below are basic tips for how supervisors can promote the care of GBV casework staff.

Facilitating everyday staff care

- Create a supportive climate – regularly check on the well-being of staff, create an environment where staff feel comfortable sharing information and concerns with you.
- Establish routines – including for supervision and team meetings.
- Regularly demonstrate appreciation for staff. This can be as simple as communicating gratitude or praise for something they did or arranging to have refreshments at meetings to something more elaborate such as a “staff of the month” award.
- Manage information – Routinely share information and create an environment of transparency.
- Monitor the health and well-being of staff. For example, be mindful of how staff are taking care of themselves and encourage them to take lunch breaks, etc., and take note of changes in appearance or health.
- Monitor stress levels – support staff to identify and monitor stressors in their lives and to develop self-care plans.
- Provide opportunities for exercise and access to the outdoors.
- Organize “staff care” days that allow staff to come together to do something fun or relaxing.

- Encourage staff to identify a “self-care buddy” – another staff person with whom they connect on a regular basis to discuss how they are and what support they need from each other.
- Accommodate staff – be flexible with the response of different individuals to personal or work crises (e.g. allow flexible schedules if possible, give time off where needed, provide additional supervision, etc.)

Providing support for staff in crisis

When staff are in crisis either because of a professional or personal experience that may be impacting their work, the following may be important:

- Create opportunities for staff to share experiences and stressors (e.g. through supervision)
- Watch for caseworkers who may be suffering in silence and actively reach out to them.
- Connect them to psychological support – if available in the context, connect staff to mental health professionals on a regular basis.