30 Ways to Squash Social Work Burnout

At Work

1. Eat a proper lunch - healthy and not at your desk
2. Create a pleasant work space – consider ways to decorate your office/cube, a peaceful table-top fountain or music, ergonomics, light.
3. Get out of the office - take a short walk, go out for lunch, even running an errand on your lunch break.
4. Seek out supportive colleagues
5. Ask for help
6. Attend a training or conference - I’m energized by learning and meeting new people
7. Use your skills differently, diversify work – either within your employment or elsewhere are opportunities to do something different with your skills – special projects, supervision, teaching or training, quality improvement, research.
8. Attend supervision regularly (at your job or outside) and be honest about your struggles
9. Take breaks - standup, stretch, chat with coworkers
10. Set boundaries for your personal vs. work time - don’t constantly take work home, reply to emails after hours.
11. Create a ritual to symbolize the end of your workday - this could be a mantra, visualization, music for the drive home. I had a supervisee who visualized taking all of her clients’ problems from her heart and brain and placing them on her desk, leaving the office, and saying to herself: “I’m leaving work here. I’ll return to it tomorrow.”
12. Detach your self-worth from the outcomes - your self-worth or clinical effectiveness is not a reflection of your clients’ completing their treatment goals.
13. Adjust your expectations – be realistic. Unrealistic expectations of yourself, colleagues, supervisors, or clients will increase burnout. Identify what you can change and what things you need to accept as is.
14. Think about your future - Is this the kind of work you really want to do? What are your career goals? What are your personal goals and how does this job support those goals?
15. Consider changing jobs – it doesn’t hurt to look at other job opportunities. You may find something better or realize that your current situation is better than you thought.
Outside Work

16. Counseling – most consider your own psychotherapy a must in this field. It’s not a sign of weakness or poor performance. Therapy will provide you with insights to improve your personal and professional life.

17. Practice self-care – the basics include getting enough rest, exercise, eating reasonably nutritious food and plenty of water, get out in nature.

18. Set boundaries – you need to be able to say “no” and not take on more commitments than you want.

19. Limit alcohol, caffeine or other drug use – we all know that overdoing these will only lead to increased mood swings, fatigue, health problems etc.

20. Socialize – see your friends and family, reconnect and have fun.

21. Religious or spiritual practice – pray, attend worship services, sing, chant, etc.

22. Meditation – this is a simple practice of clearing our minds, which can bring clarity, renewed energy and more.

23. Journal – writing down your problems, worries, and feelings is another way to can process, declutter your mind and bring clarity.

24. Spend time with pets – play catch with your dog or pet your cat, slow down long enough to make time for these simple forms of relation and fun

25. Exercise – yes, love it or hate it, there’s no denying that exercise is good for the mind and body. Look for something you’ll enjoy or find a friend to join you.

26. Unplug – not only does technology often keep us connected to work, but it can simply be draining and unproductive when we spend too much time on Twitter or texting. Connect with people that matter by phone or in person.

27. Enjoy a hobby – what do you like to do? Read a good book, paint, play cards, scrapbook, dance, softball, the list is endless. If you’re not sure what you like to do, try a few things and find out.

28. Practice gratitude – create a practice of identifying three things every day that you are grateful for. They can be big or small. This will help shift your focus away from the negative and onto the positives in your life.

29. Take a vacation – a real vacation where you’re not checking email or on-call.

30. Change your thinking - chances are you are stuck in a negativity bias. Try to challenge negative thoughts or assumptions.