



ARSIS, ASSOCIATION FOR THE SOCIAL SUPPORT OF YOUTH



# GUIDE ON STRESS AND SELF-CARE MANAGEMENT

For professionals working with minors and youth on the move survivors of gender based violence

THESSALONIKI, OCTOBER 2020



**BRIDGE**  
**Building Relationships through Innovative**  
**Development of Gender Based Violence Awareness**  
**in Europe**

**GUIDE**  
**ON STRESS AND SELF-CARE MANAGEMENT**  
**FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH MINORS**  
**AND YOUTH ON THE MOVE**  
**SURVIVORS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>1. FEW WORDS ABOUT STRESS</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>2. VICARIOUS &amp; SECONDARY TRAUMA</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>3. ZONES OF ANXIETY</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>4. PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>5. MENTAL RESILIENCE</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>6. SELF-CARE</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>7. RESILIENCE PLAN</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>8. PRACTICING SELF-CARE</u>	<u>41</u>
<u>REFERENCES</u>	<u>57</u>

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# INTRODUCTION



This Guide on stress and self-care management for professionals working with minors and youth on the move survivors of gender based violence, has been developed in the framework of the regional program «BRIDGE - Building Relationships through Innovative Development of Gender Based Violence Awareness in Europe».

«BRIDGE» is a two-year programme implemented under the coordination of the Regional European Office of Terre des Hommes in collaboration with: [ARISIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth \(Greece\)](#), [Defence for Children International - DCI Belgium](#) and [FEDASIL \(Belgium\)](#), [Kopin \(Malta\)](#), and [Terre des Hommes \(Romania\)](#). The BRIDGE project is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

The programme has been developed to strengthen the institutional response to gender-based violence involving children and young people moving to European Union (EU) countries. Existing studies show worrying findings of Gender-Based Violence involving refugees, children and youth moving in the European Union. Human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as forced labour are part of the experiences of people on the move.

This guide is aimed at professionals working with juveniles and young people on the move, whether refugees or migrants, who have suffered gender-based violence and seeks to help professionals cope with the stressful situations they experience, manage stress and finally support them to develop a wellness and resilience plan.

# FEW WORDS ABOUT STRESS...

*“Stress doesn’t come from what’s going on in your life.  
It comes from your thoughts about what’s going on in your life.”*

**Andrew J. Bernstein**



**S**tress is a physical, mental and emotional reaction to situations that cause fear, uncertainty, danger, excitement, stimulation, confusion or change. It is the body's response to a stimulus, it is a state of defence and self-regulation. Whether the stimulus is pleasant or unpleasant, stress requires the body to «respond» in the form of regulation or adjustment. In normal quantities it is a driving force for humans, for survival and creation, but living conditions, negative thoughts and human misconceptions often make the burden of stress unbearable.

The word stress comes from the Latin verb «*stringere*» which means to squeeze, to tighten and conceptually it is quite diverse. It describes the body's reaction to various stimuli, while at the same time it describes the stimuli themselves (noise, trauma, etc.), as well as the psychological factors (confusion, etc.), and also the physiological response. Finally, it indicates mental tension and anxiety. In everyday speech, stress is often equated with anxiety. This identification is wrong and confusing, often to the experts themselves. Anxiety in physiological level may cause the same symptoms with stress, but in psychological level it is a subset of it, as it is the subjective perception of stressful situations, that is, how each person experiences these situations. Instead, stress is an objective and unconscious process. Its goal is to maintain the balance (homeostasis) of the body.

## WHAT IS STRESS ANYWAY?

Simply put, stress is anything that calls us to adapt or cope and can come from our environment, body or mind. Stress falls into the following categories based on intensity:

- **Healthy or normal**, under the influence of which humans mobilize their forces to solve problems. This stress contributes positively to the development of the personality and is a driving force for the individual.



- **Increased**, during which large reserves of strength are spent to solve the problem. In this case the person is usually led to physical or mental damage with long-term or permanent consequences.
- **Extreme**, which is the limit of human potential. These are the situations in which humans lose their ability to solve problems and withdraw.

Stress, depending on the areas it affects can be:

- **Sensory**, due to the requirements of the environment from the peripheral sensory organs and the corresponding structures of the Central Nervous System (CNS)
- **Mental**, created by the processing of information that burdens the mental functions. Specifically, attention, memory, understanding, thinking and decision making.
- **Emotional**, caused by situations that trigger impulsive behaviour.

## THROUGH WHICH MECHANISMS DOES STRESS OCCUR?

The mechanism underlying the occurrence and function of stress is, in simple words, as follows: various stressors influence individually or as a whole and mobilize the body that seeks to respond to stimuli, i.e. to adapt. The response is stress, which causes changes in the structure, the chemical composition and function of the body.

## THREE KEY HORMONES THAT REGULATE STRESS

Stress is a fundamental process that affects even the most seemingly calm people. In stressful situations, what happens is that the body's brain produces a coordinated chemical «response»

to exogenous stressors. Behind the stress of everyday life, there is a «chain» of hormones, which determine how stressed an organism is and how it reacts to adverse conditions.

### ***Adrenaline, or scientifically «epinephrine»:***

- is secreted by the adrenal medulla, activating the glycogen breakdown mechanism, raising blood sugar levels and causing a wide variety of responses in the cardiovascular and muscular system
- is largely responsible for the immediate responses that the body feels when stressed: muscle tension, rapid breathing, heavy sweating, increased heart rate
- gives a wave of energy and helps attention focus, mobilizes every energy source of the body in cases of intense activity, stimulating the nervous system for some emergency action during the so-called «fight or flight reaction»

Stimuli for the secretion of adrenaline are fear, emotions, emergencies, colds, hypotension and hypoglycemia.

### ***Norepinephrine:***

- is produced by the adrenal medulla, is mainly a vasoconstrictor, with minimal effect on cardiac output
- its primary role is stimulation: when we feel tension and stress, the brain seems to «wake up» and we are more focused, ready to respond to circumstances
- helps blood flow redistribution from areas that may not be as vital, such as skin, to areas that are more basic, such as muscles, so that the body can react and «leave» the stressful scene.

### ***Cortisol:***

- it is considered the primary stress hormone; it is a steroid hormone produced by the adrenal glands

- the body feels the effects of cortisol with a delay, as the release of this hormone is completed through a process with several steps, including two complementary less important hormones
- in survival situations, cortisol helps maintain the body's fluid balance and blood pressure, while regulating certain non-critical body functions such as reproduction, digestion and growth.
- when stress rises above average (for a long time, such as in depression) cortisol levels in the body are high and cause side effects, affecting the body
- Excessive cortisol secretion can suppress the immune system, raise blood pressure and blood sugar, lead to lower libido levels, cause acne and increase the predisposition to obesity.

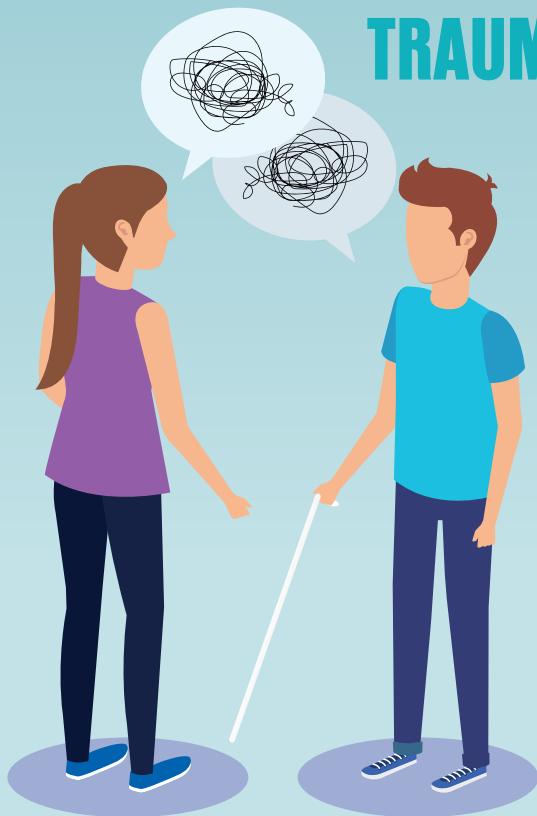
## EFFECTS OF STRESS

Chronic stress can lead to physical health problems (cardio-respiratory disorders such as ischemic attack, myocardial infarction, asthma, idiopathic hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders such as gastritis, stomach ulcer, duodenal ulcer, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel), to psychological health problems, as well as to behavioural problems. Also, problems such as headaches, hair loss, oral and skin conditions, muscle contractions or nerve tics, irritable bladder, amenorrhea, premature ejaculation or impotence are often due to the chronic or extreme effects of stressors.

It is important to understand what stress is and how it works, as the responsibility to deal with it, mainly through prevention, is primarily an individual matter. We must learn to recognize the signs and avoid mental exhaustion, depression, burnout, collapse or illness. A tolerable amount of stress is necessary so that we avoid boredom and be motivated for our activities. Every body has its own resilience to stress and the «tolerable amount of stress»

is something purely subjective. But high stress for a long time can be detrimental to health, so it needs to be monitored and controlled to maintain tolerable levels.

# VICARIOUS AND SECONDARY TRAUMA



## **WHAT IS VICARIOUS AND SECONDARY TRAUMA**

Your wellbeing is essential for you to manage stress and build your resilience. For those working in environments where you are exposed to highly traumatic stories, images or materials, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma are real risks. You may experience trauma symptoms on the same scale as if they had directly experienced the event, creating challenges for both you and your work. The impact of this can be feeling cut off from yourself and the world around you, work related nightmares, feelings of despair and hopelessness and a more negative world view.

# ZONES OF ANXIETY



## WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress isn't always negative. Sometimes pressure can be good. It can push us to engage and achieve. We may need this pressure or stress to motivate us. When stress helps us to challenge ourselves and to be active, it can be positive, keeping us in our **green zone**.



## WHAT IS BAD STRESS?

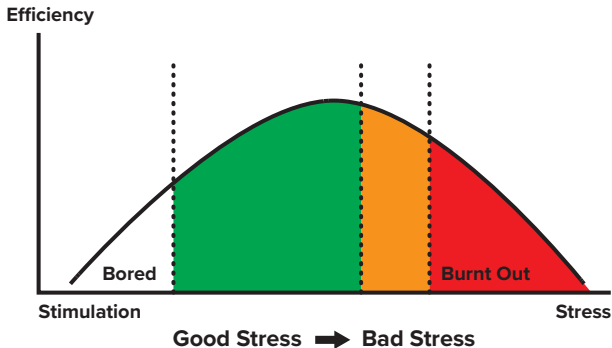
When we have too much stress in our lives, we can feel overloaded, overwhelmed and over-exhausted. This threatens our capacity to cope. We can start to feel depleted (instead of energised) with any the following pressures:

- Hearing traumatic and highly distressing stories
- Witnessing suffering
- Heavy increase in workload
- Further heavy increase in workload
- Working late, especially past midnight
- Tensions in the team
- Departure of a key colleague



- Loss of funding
- Repeated illness or injury
- Worrying about people at home

## GREEN - AMBER - RED ZONES



As already mentioned, when the stress motivates us to be active, it can be positive and keep us in a **Green Zone**.

If stress is prolonged, we can move into an **Amber Zone** where our stress builds.

If we still don't manage our stress, it can move into a **Red Zone** and leave us feeling burned out or ill.

Answer these questions to build a picture of yourself in the **Green Zone**.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What gives me energy is:	
What relaxes me is:	
I take care of my body by:	
What I most enjoy about work is:	
I switch off from work by:	

Answer these questions to get a picture of yourself in the  
**Amber Zone**

QUESTION	ANSWER
What really makes me start to get stressed is:	
The last time I was really stressed was:	
When I'm starting to get stressed, I change in these ways:	
- In the way I think:	
- In my body:	
- In what I do:	
- In my feelings:	
The warning signs that stress is getting bad for me are:	
When I'm stressed, I change towards other people in these ways:	

*If you get into the amber zone you need to do something about it now. Do not wait until you get into the red zone where it is much more difficult to recover.*

Answer these questions to get a picture of yourself in the **Red Zone**.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Have you been experiencing any of the following signs of stress in the last 6 months or more?	
Feeling cynical, pessimist and having a negative attitude towards life, yourself and others.	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling unproductive and ineffective, with the feeling that your work is not making any difference at all.	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling like you have stagnated in all areas of your personal and professional life.	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Treating people who you were affectionate towards with indifference or disregard often.	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Waking up in the morning feeling tired and exhausted even though you had what can count as enough hours of sleep (7-8 hours).	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling disconnected from real issues that in the past could have caught your attention.	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Finding yourself avoiding people you would have enjoyed spending more time with before.	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think that you have or are experiencing a period of burnout?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
What signs of burnout do you think you have experienced?	

*If you are concerned that you might be experiencing these signs, please speak to a line manager or a counsellor about the kind of support that you might need.*

If you find yourself in the **amber zone** or **red zone**, the following are some strategies to help you get back on track:

### **Do:**

- Get some rest – sleep if you can, but if that is difficult at least rest
- Eat healthy food – make a point of it.
- Play some sport, do some exercise, or take the time to walk where you can.
- Keep in touch with family and friends.
- Be realistic about your expectations. Are they too high or too low?
- Check out any areas of uncertainty. Clarify as much as possible.
- Confront work-related causes of stress and get some solutions in place. Tell your line manager clearly that you want to discuss things.
- Look at the picture of yourself in the green zone and reinstate the things that are good for you. Take pleasure in good things again.
- Take some time off work if it will help as soon as you can without causing unfair strain on your colleagues. Do not leave it until you must take time off sick.
- Seek appropriate help from those around you. If your health or wellbeing is deteriorating consult a doctor or other health professional.

### **Do not:**

- Use drugs or alcohol as a way of coping.
- Blame others.
- Take unnecessary or ill-advised risks with yourself or your colleagues.
- Breach security protocols.
- Neglect personal hygiene.

- Withdraw from people who could support you.
- Allow the signs of stress you identified in the amber zone to become entrenched into habits that heighten the risk of burn-out, depression or other.

# PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT SYNDROME



The term Professional Burnout Syndrome was first used by clinical psychologist Freudenberger in 1974 to describe the inability to perform effectively at work or the exhaustion of professionals due to excessive job demands on energy, effort and capacity (Dimitropoulos and Filippou, 2008). Burnout is considered to be the result of exposure to prolonged and chronic occupational stress that gradually leads to the inability of the individual to cope with the symptoms of physical and emotional exhaustion he/she experiences. Also, prolonged contact with situations that require emotional involvement can cause physical, emotional and mental fatigue as well as feelings of failure. In this context, the initial approaches to describing the syndrome as well as subsequent research seem to link burnout mainly to occupations where there is interpersonal communication, such as services provision, education and social services (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005).

According to Maslach et al. (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001), burnout is a multidimensional concept comprising of three fundamentally distinct but interrelated dimensions:

- **Emotional exhaustion** is characterized by a lack of energy as well as emotional and physical fatigue. The feeling is that the emotional reserves have been over-extended and at the same time there are no sources of renewal.
- **Depersonalisation** refers to the individuals' effort to defend themselves and to avoid the pressure they experience by isolating their emotions and developing a kind of negative or cynical attitude towards their relationship with the recipients of their services.
- **Diminished personal accomplishment** refers to the tendency of the person to evaluate themselves negatively with respect to their work outcome and to experience feelings of pessimism and disrepute.



## FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO BURNOUT

According to the literature, the factors that contribute to burnout fall into two categories:

- **Environmental factors:** related to the work environment
- **Personal factors:** related to the professional as an individual and as a personality. The way each person copes with the challenges of the environment is influenced by the interaction of their personality, their temperament as well as the context in which a state of stress occurs (Maslach et al., 2001; Leiter & Maslach, 2001).

Environmental factors	Personal factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stressful and adverse working conditions</li><li>• Lack of staff and excessive workload</li><li>• The exhausting, demanding and continuous working hours</li><li>• The ambiguity of the employee's role</li><li>• Lack of motivation and development prospects.</li><li>• Rigid and authoritarian administration and non-participation in decision making.</li><li>• Lack of communication and support from supervisors/managers and colleagues</li><li>• Lack of psychological support in the workplace</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The individual's expectations for others and for themselves</li><li>• Personality characteristics (low self-esteem, need for control, perfectionism, competitiveness)</li><li>• The way someone manages stress and reacts to stressful situations</li><li>• The motives for choosing the specific profession</li></ul>

## SYMPTOMS AND EFFECTS OF BURNOUT

The symptoms of burnout have serious consequences on emotional, psychosomatic and social well-being (Maslachetal., 2001), while they build up gradually and are divided in organic, psychological and behavioural level.

Organic level	Psychological level	Behavioural level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intense fatigue/ physical exhaustion</li> <li>• Insomnia</li> <li>• Musculoskeletal pain</li> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Gastrointestinal problems</li> <li>• Weak immune system</li> <li>• Weight gain or loss</li> <li>• Elevated cholesterol levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional exhaustion</li> <li>• Lack of interest / Apathy Pessimism</li> <li>• Decreased self-confidence Irritability</li> <li>• Isolation / Alienation</li> <li>• Feelings of guilt / failure</li> <li>• Mood disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced involvement in interpersonal relationships/ Reduced communication</li> <li>• Reduced work performance / low job satisfaction</li> <li>• Frequent absences from work Inability to concentrate</li> <li>• Tendency to accidents</li> <li>• Increased alcohol use</li> <li>• Increased drug use</li> <li>• Workaholism</li> </ul>

## BURNOUT PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

As burnout syndrome has significant effects on the work life of the individual as well as on his/her physical, psychological and social well-being, it is necessary to prevent and treat it in time with interventions at individual and organizational level.

**Interventions at individual level** refer to efforts that can be made by the professionals themselves and include the following:

- Early recognition of symptoms and signs of burnout
- Reassessment of personal goals and expectations
- Use of short breaks and leave from work
- Engaging in non-work related interests and activities that provide the opportunity for emotional release and promote communication
- Seeking help and support from either friends and colleagues or mental health professionals

**Interventions at organizational level** refer mainly to policies and administrative functions, which are implemented to help the employee cope with work stress. These interventions are divided into three levels of prevention:

- **Primary prevention:** redesign of the work, better organization of the work framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- **Secondary prevention:** stress management programmes (e.g. relaxation techniques, time management, etc.) and opportunities of continuing education and training
- **Tertiary prevention:** employee support programs, implementation of psychological support groups and counselling supervision.



# MENTAL RESILIENCE



**M**ental resilience as a term refers to the positive adjustment of the person after a traumatic event as well as his/her ability to recover. There are two basic conditions for using the term:

- the concept of *adversity*: a framework of difficult situations and experiences for the individual
- the concept of *positive adjustment*: satisfactory management of negative conditions and experiences, resulting in the successful adaptation of the individual to the new data.

It can be defined as *“the ability of the individual to regenerate, to return, to successfully adapt to the environment, despite adversity and to develop social, academic and professional competence, despite exposure to intense stress or stressful situations that govern and are inherent in the modern world”*.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF MENTAL RESILIENCE:**

- works protectively for people in difficulty
- as a trait it is multidimensional and varies depending on the context, time, age, gender and cultural origin
- a variety of resilient manifestations/ behaviours can be observed in the individuals themselves, as they are exposed to different living conditions
- dynamic and multifaceted process, in which individuals mobilize internal and external resources, use coping strategies to deal with critical issues or daily difficulties
- The psychological dimensions of resilience help to explain certain behaviours of the individual
- as a dynamic process has an impact on the wider social, economic and political dimensions of human experience
- is the result of a dynamic relationship and interaction between risk factors and protection factors while being influenced by

individual response strategies and specific environmental conditions

But what can influence people's mental resilience? To investigate this, we need to look for their positive forces and the so-called protective factors of their life. These factors are divided into three categories: individual characteristics, family characteristics and community/ society characteristics.

## INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Indicative protective factors related to individual characteristics are: intelligence, self-knowledge/ self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation skills (impulse control), flexible temperament, hope, positive outlook on life and belief that life has meaning and finally sociability (Masten & Powell, 2003).

- *Intelligence*: is associated with ingenuity, critical thinking and insight, with problem-solving skills (data collection, planning, choosing the right strategy to deal with an adverse situation). The person feels capable facing difficulties, understands what is happening and what is expected to happen, what needs to be done to deal with these difficulties.
- *Self-knowledge* and *self-esteem*: according to Daniel Goleman, is an important source of emotional intelligence, it is a mental act of reshaping one's experience to see oneself and one's life in new ways, the transformative power of self-knowledge is the essence of resilience.
- *Positive self-image*: plays a very important role in building resilience, when a person knows their positive elements and at the same time has an internal locus of control, i.e. they feel that they have control over their life and their future acknowledging at the same time the occurrence of unexpected events, they can recover more easily after a difficulty.

- *The existence of meaning and purpose*: when people discover what fills and gives meaning to their existence, they manage to endure adversity while keeping their hope alive. Also, religious belief, spirituality and belief in moral values, such as altruism, help people to interpret in a more positive way the difficulties they face and ultimately overcome them. In this way they manage to reduce the discrepancy between the desired and the traumatic event.
- *Positive emotions*: people with positive emotions, optimism, humour manage to see difficulties from a different perspective, while a positive attitude gives a more positive sense to their traumatic experience, compensating for the mental pain and suffering.
- *The ability to regulate negative emotions, behavioural control*: related to the locus of control and the belief that situations are controlled by the actions of the individual and that he/she can successfully meet the challenges presented to him/her.
- *The existence of a supportive social network*: the existence of people who understand us, the sense of belonging enables us to express our feelings, to receive support and acceptance.

## FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

Some family environment characteristics with protective function are the following:

- good relationships between family members
- Involvement of parents in the learning and socialization of the child
- positive family atmosphere and organized environment
- good educational level of the parents, socio-economic level of the family



The above characteristics create an important supportive environment for the child (Chatzichristou 2015). The individual characteristics of the child in relation to a healthy supportive family environment and a positive parenting style have been found to be able to compensate for the negative effects of stressful situations.

## COMMUNITY / SOCIETY CHARACTERISTICS

The protective factors related to the characteristics of the local and wider community are those that can act protectively for all its members. Indicatively, some characteristics are the following:

- organized public services, mainly at the welfare level
- sufficient resources in education
- prevention and protection from any form of violence (Matso-poulos, 2011)
- organized provision of mental health services and inter-connection with the service system within a collaborative network of institutions (Chatzichristou, 2011)
- organized and supportive school environment

All the protective factors that have been mentioned above, interact with each other and the result of this interaction determines the level of resilience of the individual in each situation, which is related to the risk level of adversity - whether the risk concerns continuous adverse experiences or one individual experience, the time when the traumatic event occurs and the person's previous experiences.

We should not forget that the existence of a traumatic event is not enough for us to collapse mentally. It is very important how we interpret this fact. So the question is: **Could we see adversity as a challenge and a test? And what could we learn from it?**

Here are some questions you could ask yourself to get information about your own mental resilience:

- What was the most difficult event(s) I have experienced in my life?
- How did this affect me?
- What helped me to endure?
- Were there people who supported me?
- What did I learn about myself and how I handle such situations?
- What gives me hope and optimism for the future?

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR BOOSTING MENTAL RESILIENCE:

1. **Recognize that the battle you are fighting is important, no matter what you are struggling with:** You should not be ashamed of what makes you anxious, the most common worries are the most stressful.
2. **Realize how you are already resilient:** ask yourself which have been the most difficult situations in your life so far and how you have managed to deal with them.
3. **Do not wait for the problem to resolve itself:** activate defence mechanisms, think about what you can do for what concerns you and look for ways to get rid of it, reminding yourself that it may not be solved overnight, but all problems have their ways to approach them.
4. **Recognize and use your strengths:** each person has unique strengths, and you are asked to use these and cope with any difficulty that may arise in your life.
5. **Activate your support network:** seek support from the Important Others in your life, such as family, friends, colleagues. The sense of belonging is one of the most important protective factors for dealing with difficulties.

6. **Take time for yourself:** pursue a hobby, read books, use your creativity and imagination, use the company of friends, allowing yourself to take a break from a situation you can not solve in one night.
7. **Be compassionate with yourself and realize the ways in which you become stronger through adversity:** we are often trapped in negative feelings, in the pain we feel or in the fear, when we experience a difficulty, ignoring at the same time all our positive elements and what we have achieved so far.



# SELF-CARE



The World Health Organization defines self-care as «the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health and to cope with illness with or without the support of a healthcare provider» (<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-national-health-systems/en/>).

Self-care is a broad concept that includes areas such as hygiene, nutrition, lifestyle (sports, hobbies, etc.), environmental and socio-economic factors (living conditions, income, cultural beliefs). It concerns both the individual level (e.g. self-efficacy, autonomy, strengthening) and the community level (participation in the community and in community structures). It is a daily and long-term process which is a personal issue as each person has different needs, capabilities and limitations.

Self-care can help the professional in:

- **Recognizing and managing general life challenges** such as stress, burnout or interpersonal difficulties.
- **Recognizing personal vulnerability**, such as the possibility of traumatisation, secondary trauma and compassion fatigue.
- **Achieving a greater balance between personal and professional life.**
- **Increasing resilience** which refers to the ability to cope with adverse conditions and significant stressful situations. (Alkema, Linton & Davies, 2008)

## AREAS OF SELF-CARE

The literature suggests a range of self-care activities and practices with an emphasis on a holistic stress management approach that should address six key areas of need: physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social and work needs (Alkema, Linton & Davies, 2008). According to the different areas of meeting needs, the respective areas of self-care are presented:

- **Self-care in the workplace:** Activities that help us cope with professional obligations (e.g. breaks, participation in training programs, supervision)
- **Physical self-care:** Activities that help us stay healthy and give us enough energy (e.g. adequate sleep, exercise, healthy eating)
- **Psychological self-care:** Activities that help us feel calm and able to deal with the challenges of our professional and personal life (e.g. relaxation techniques, walking, counselling, hobbies)
- **Emotional self-care:** Activities that allow us to safely experience all our emotions (e.g. meetings with friends, reading, enjoyable activities)
- **Spiritual self-care:** Activities that enhance the sense of perspective and meaning in life (e.g. meditation, yoga, contact with nature)
- **Social self-care:** Maintaining healthy, supportive relationships and ensuring diversity in relationships with people beyond the work environment

## DEVELOPING A SELF-CARE PLAN

A self-care plan is a carefully designed guide to promote one's health and well-being. To create it, the individual takes on the role of lifelong learner, who uses their knowledge and skills to create and modify the self-care plan.

The initial step in developing a self-care plan is the person to evaluate, how they cope with the stress they are experiencing in the present and in what ways they take care of themselves.

**1) Evaluation of ways to manage stress:** ways in which the person manages stress in everyday life and copes with the demands of life. The Lifestyle Behaviours Assessment Scale

is a tool to help identify stress management strategies (<http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-kit/lifestyle-behaviors.pdf>)

**2) Evaluation of self-care:** the person evaluates the self-care practices they already follow, focus on their needs in everyday life as well as on what they do to holistically support their well-being on a daily basis. The Self-Care Assessment Worksheet is a tool that helps identify good practices already used for self-care, as well as recognizing a balance between different areas of self-care ([https://www.mentoring.org/new-site/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/MARCH\\_2015\\_Self\\_Care\\_Assessment.pdf](https://www.mentoring.org/new-site/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/MARCH_2015_Self_Care_Assessment.pdf))

**3) Maintaining self-care:** includes activities that the person has recognized as important for their well-being and has decided to follow on a regular basis. At this stage, the development of the self-care plan is completed. The My Maintenance Self-Care Plan Worksheet is a tool that helps the individual identify what new activities they would like to add to each self-care area as well as identify potential barriers and limitations to implementing and maintaining new activities. (<http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-kit/my-maintenance-self-care-worksheet.pdf>)

For a self-care plan to be effective we need to be able to commit to its implementation and maintenance in our daily lives and in this area it is important to seek support from available social support networks (family, friends, colleagues).



# RESILIENCE PLAN



## RESILIENCE PLAN

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	

Our resilience is enhanced when we take good care of ourselves, in all aspects of our life. It is also enhanced when we have a strong self-awareness about our mental health, our triggers, our coping mechanisms and what supports us to stay healthy.

Please answer the following questions and keep it on-hand for times when you need a reminder about how to look after yourself and what support you may need to seek from others.

Activities I'll commit to in order to stay in the green zone are:	
When I'm in the Amber zone I will...	
When I'm in the Red zone I will....	
What support do you need?	

# PRACTICING SELF-CARE



## *Help yourself so you can help young people*

It is normal for anyone working with children and youth on the move to potentially be overwhelmed by the problem of gender-based violence. Any adult who cares and wants to help may experience stress and potentially despair at the extent of the problem and how powerless we often feel about preventing it.

That's why part of responding to GBV is to **practice self-care**.

Anyone who has flown on a plane knows that in the event of an emergency, you have to put your own oxygen mask on before you help a child with theirs.

This strategy can and must be applied to working with children who are experiencing trauma.

You cannot help a child in need if you are burnt out or experiencing vicarious or secondary trauma.

Signs of burnout include, but are not limited to:

- Working relentlessly (i.e. not taking breaks)
- Disengaging emotionally from the people you work with (youth or adults)
- Difficulty feeling connected to what's going around and within you
- Feeling immense pressure to fix things beyond your control
- Difficulty making good decisions
- Increased consumption of alcohol or drugs as a method of coping
- Feeling constantly fatigued
- Difficulty accepting or feeling okay about yourself
- Physical problems such as aches & pains, illnesses, and accidents
- Loss of meaning and hope

## Important

None of this is to say your job will ever be stress-free. Moderate stress can be beneficial when it comes to getting work done, and can motivate us to be vigilant in our response to GBV.

But when the stress becomes overwhelming, it becomes harder to do your job. Moreover, when stress becomes severe and on-going, it can have a severe impact on you, as well as the children you work with.

## MANAGING STRESS

Take care of yourself and address your stress so that you can support the children you work with. You cannot help a child in need if you burn out before you meet them.

Here are some tips to help manage the stress resulting from working with children and youth on the move experiencing GBV:

### **Cycle through the tips using the green arrows**

#### **Be aware of your personal stress level**

Monitoring your stress is the first step towards alleviating it.



#### **Rely on your personal network**

Talk with your friends and colleagues. It's alright to feel overwhelmed. Just make sure you have people you can go to when you need to talk.



### **Schedule breaks in your day**

Sometimes just taking a ten minute walk can help make things seem more manageable. You may find that listening to music helps, or even doing yoga or having a cup of tea.



### **Be honest with your supervisor**

Be realistic about what you can accomplish during the course of your day.



### **Ask for help**

You do not have to do everything on your own. Reach out to your colleagues if you need support.



### **Seek professional help if you need it**

## **Remember...**

It's normal to feel upset and overwhelmed at the challenges children and youth on the move face. It's even normal to feel guilty at feeling stressed when the children you work with seem to be under much worse circumstances.

*Know that practicing self-care is part of your job.*

*Your health and well being are crucial to the health and well being of the children you work with.*

## ACTIVITY

### Fill out the self-assessment on burn out.

After you are done, write down the names of three people you feel comfortable going to if you need to talk.

And remember that you cannot affect change when you are burnt out and exhausted. Practice self-care, take breaks when you need them, and use your personal support network to alleviate stress.

### Burnout Self-Assessment

Below are indicators of burnout. Read each of the following and check the relevant box according to how frequently the burnout indicators apply to you. At the end of the self-assessment, add up your score to see your level of burnout.

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes
4	Most of the time
5	All the time

	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that I am out of energy					
I feel emotionally drained					
I get easily irritated by team members					
I get easily irritated by small problems					
I feel unappreciated at work					
I feel there is no one to talk to about problems					
I feel like I am not achieving enough at work					
I feel I am under a tremendous amount of pressure					
I feel I am not getting what I want from my job					

I feel there is more work to be done than I can realistically do					
I feel I don't have time to do good quality work					
I feel depressed when I think of work					
I feel I am not competent in my work					
I don't see the significance in my work					
I don't care about what happens to the people I am supposed to be helping					
I can't control my emotions at work					
I find it difficult to wake up in the morning and go to work					
I feel that my work is a waste of time					
I feel that there is no hope in anything					
I feel I can't relax because of my work					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

### Results indicator

20-40	41-60	61-80	81-100
No signs of Burnout	At Risk of Burnout	Significant Burnout	Severe Burnout

### PERSONAL NETWORK

Write down the names of three people you feel comfortable going to if you need to talk.

1.
2.
3.



## IS YOUR LIFESTYLE CAUSING YOU STRESS?<sup>1</sup>

The way you live your life can have a big impact on your health, well-being, and how well or poorly you handle stress. Below are lifestyle behaviors that affect stress levels. Please check the boxes that apply to you. Doing an honest assessment of how well or poorly you take care of yourself can help you manage your stress in the future.

### LIFESTYLE BEHAVIORS

<b>When you are under stress, do you:</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Smoke/use tobacco		
Drink alcohol (more than recommended levels of 1-2 per day)		
Drink a lot of coffee or caffeinated drinks (more than 2-3 cups per day)		
Overuse over-the-counter medications		
Overeat or under eat		
Abuse/overuse tranquilizers or other over-the-counter medications		
Spend too much money (e.g., do you have a lot of credit card debt and have trouble making payments?)		
Watch too much television (more than 3-4 hours per day)		
Have angry outbursts		
Take illegal drugs		
Withdraw from people		
Ignore or deny stress symptoms		
Engage in self-destructive relationships		
<b>These are negative self-care behaviors.</b>		

<sup>1</sup> Source: Unknown

<b>When you are under stress, do you:</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Engage in physical activity at least three times a week for 30 minutes each day		
Get six to eight hours of sleep every night		
Maintain good eating habits		
Make time to relax		
Maintain a sense of humor		
Play		
Maintain healthy rituals and routines		
Be optimistic. Engage in positive thinking		
Spend time with family		
Spend time with friends		
Make plans for the future		
Figure out ways to manage stress		
Reward yourself for your accomplishments		
<b>These are positive self-care behaviors.</b>		

## SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET<sup>2</sup>

This assessment tool provides an overview of effective strategies to maintain self-care. After completing the full assessment, choose one item from each area that you will actively work to improve. Using the scale below, rate the following areas in terms of frequency:

**5 = Frequently**

**4 = Occasionally**

**3 = Rarely**

**2 = Never**

**1 = It never occurred to me**

### Physical Self-Care

- Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch and dinner)
- Eat healthy
- Exercise
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when needed
- Get massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other physical activity that is fun
- Take time to be sexual-with yourself, with a partner
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes you like
- Take vacations
- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time away from telephones
- Other:

<sup>2</sup> Source: Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization. Saakvitne, Pearlman & Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton, 1996)

## **Psychological Self-Care**

- Make time for self-reflection
- Have your own personal psychotherapy
- Write in a journal
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which you are not expert or in charge
- Decrease stress in your life
- Let others know different aspects of you
- Notice your inner experience - listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings
- Engage your intelligence in a new area, e.g. go to an art museum, history exhibit,
- sports event, auction, theater performance
- Practice receiving from others
- Be curious
- Say "no" to extra responsibilities sometimes
- Other:

## **Emotional Self-Care**

- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life
- Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself
- Love yourself
- Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places and seek them out
- Allow yourself to cry
- Find things that make you laugh
- Express your outrage in social action, letters and donations, marches, protests
- Play with children
- Other:

## **Spiritual Self-Care**

- \_\_\_ Make time for reflection
- \_\_\_ Spend time with nature
- \_\_\_ Find a spiritual connection or community
- \_\_\_ Be open to inspiration
- \_\_\_ Cherish your optimism and hope
- \_\_\_ Be aware of nonmaterial aspects of life
- \_\_\_ Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- \_\_\_ Be open to not knowing
- \_\_\_ Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
- \_\_\_ Meditate
- \_\_\_ Pray
- \_\_\_ Sing
- \_\_\_ Spend time with children
- \_\_\_ Have experiences of awe
- \_\_\_ Contribute to causes in which you believe
- \_\_\_ Read inspirational literature (talks, music, etc.)
- \_\_\_ Other:

## **Workplace or Professional Self-Care**

- \_\_\_ Take a break during the workday (e.g. lunch)
- \_\_\_ Take time to chat with co-workers
- \_\_\_ Make quiet time to complete tasks
- \_\_\_ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
- \_\_\_ Set limits with your clients and colleagues
- \_\_\_ Balance your caseload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”
- \_\_\_ Arrange your work space so it is comfortable and comforting
- \_\_\_ Get regular supervision or consultation
- \_\_\_ Negotiate for your needs (benefits, pay raise)
- \_\_\_ Have a peer support group
- \_\_\_ Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest
- \_\_\_ Other:

## Balance

- \_\_\_\_\_ Strive for balance within your work-life and workday
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play and rest

### MY MAINTENANCE SELF-CARE PLAN WORKSHEET<sup>3</sup>

Consider what you do now for self-care and list those activities within each dimension of self-care on this worksheet (or you can add new dimensions at the end that represent other aspects of your life). Identify new strategies that you will begin to incorporate as part of your ongoing maintenance self-care plan - pay particular attention to domains that you have not been addressing in the past. On the last page identify barriers that might interfere with ongoing self-care, how you will address them, and any negative coping strategies you would like to target for change.

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<sup>3</sup> (Adapted by Shirley Reiser, LCSW and Lisa D. Butler, PhD from materials provided by Sandra A. Lopez, LCSW, ACSW, University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work.)

**MIND**

Current Practice

New Practice

**BODY**

Current Practice

New Practice

**EMOTIONS**

Current Practice

New Practice

**SPIRIT**

Current Practice

New Practice

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WORK</b></p> <p>Current Practice</p>    <p>New Practice</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <p>Current Practice</p>    <p>New Practice</p>
<p><b>OTHER:.....</b> Current Practice</p>    <p>New Practice</p>	<p><b>OTHER:.....</b> Current Practice</p>    <p>New Practice</p>



<p>Barriers to maintaining my self-care strategies</p>	<p>How I will address these barriers and remind myself to practice self-care</p>
<p>Negative coping strategies I would like to use less or not at all</p>	<p>What I will do instead</p>



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