Embracing Self-Care as a Discipline
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NMAIMH competencies addressed:
Working with Others
• Building & maintaining relationships
• Supporting others/mentoring
• Empathy & compassion

Reflection
• Contemplation
• Self-awareness
• Professional/personal development

I ran across an article recently that caught my attention because of its title, “Self-Care Is Not An Indulgence. It’s A Discipline”. The content of the article speaks to a critical perspective about how we understand and practice self-care. “Self-care is...a discipline because it’s not something you do once in a while when the world gets crazy” (Forman, 2017). In order to build and maintain resilience, especially for those times when our world “gets crazy”, self-care needs to be a consistent, everyday intentional practice. So what could that look like? It could include building in time before a home visit or a reflective supervision session to take a few deep breaths and bring your thoughts into the present moment. It could also include creating a reasonable schedule each day where there is ample time for a lunch break, or realistic time allocation to get from one visit or appointment to another. Self-care as a discipline begins with reflecting on those areas of our life where we have control and making decisions that protect us, rather than exhaust our capacity to stay regulated and provide quality services.

Self-care is not an indulgence, especially for all of us working to support and provide home visiting services for families across New Mexico. Jeree Pawl writes, “It is not possible to work on behalf of human beings...without having powerful feelings aroused in yourself.” The occasional evening stroll or annual vacation is not enough to address the daily emotional activation we can experience within home visits or reflective supervision sessions. These feelings can range from the exhilaration of watching a parent put into practice a suggested parent-child interaction, to having to make a call to protective services to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Our focus on developing and maintaining caring, trusting relationships is the foundation of our work. A natural consequence/benefit of being part of these authentic relationships is that we experience authentic, real feelings resulting from our interactions within these relationships. Consistent self-care decisions/practices around reflection and “slowing down the process” enable us to attend to these feelings, giving them the time and space needed to be recognized, experienced, and understood in the context of the work.
Self-care as a discipline includes asking for and receiving help and support. Home visiting supervisors working within the New Mexico Home Visiting system are well positioned to develop relationships with their staff that are safe and supportive, creating an inviting environment for them when they seek support. Within the New Mexico Home Visiting Program Standards, HV Standard 3 requires that home visiting programs are grounded in “Relationship-based Practices” including the provision of “regular ongoing reflective supervision” which includes discussions “about the implementation of relationship-based practice.” The parallel process begins with the supervisor-home visitor relationship. As supervisors, providing a safe, supportive relationship to home visitors, whether within a reflective supervision session or outside of it, supports the discipline of self-care for your staff as they seek your help. This is a foundational responsibility that indirectly affects each family that your program serves.

In order to be fully present for and supportive of your staff, it is the supervisors responsibility to also practice self-care as a discipline. *We teach through example.* In addition, it is worth asking the question, will a home visitor approach you for support if you appear to consistently be overwhelmed with tasks, obligations and responsibilities? Setting boundaries around taking work home on a regular basis, negotiating additional assignments (“If I add this to my plate, what can be taken off?”), and making changes that bring more balance to your job, are all components of your own self-care. Also, by practicing self-care as a discipline, you are helping to maintain your capacity to be present for your staff when you interact with them, as well as simply having the time to do so.

If we are to be true to ourselves as human beings and true to the principles of relationship-based practice, providing high quality services to families, then we are obligated to take self-care seriously, as a discipline, and not as an indulgence.

I will end with the following quote from Parker J. Palmer:

“*Self-care is never a selfish act. It is simply good stewardship of the only gift you have, the gift you were put on earth to offer others. Anytime you listen to true self and give it the care it requires, you do so not only for yourself but for the many others whose lives you touch.*”

**Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…**

- When do you find it hard to ask for help or support?
- Think of an example of when you felt most effective as a home visitor or supervisor. How would you rate your self-regulation and ability to be present at that time? What stressors or lack of stressors were present?
- How are you at setting boundaries and limits? What helps you to set boundaries and limits? What do you find challenging about setting boundaries and limits?
References/Additional Resources


New Mexico Home Visiting Program Standards [PDF]. (n.d.).