Self-Care in Home Visiting
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NMAIMH competencies addressed
Reflection
- Contemplation
- Self-awareness

“If we are to do our work… in a sustainable way, we must understand how our work affects us.” (Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2008)

When you think of self-care, what images come to mind? Does that image differ when you think about self-care from a home visiting perspective? Implicit to the role of being a home visitor is tending to and supporting others. When many families that we support have so many life challenges and have experienced trauma in their lives, how does this impact us? What is the importance of self-care as a home visitor?

Jennifer Rose, MSW, co-facilitator at our most recent regional workshops on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Domestic Violence in Home Visiting, spoke about the difference between being responsive vs. responsible. Being responsible implies that we feel that it is our job to make things better for a family.

Signs that we are taking on the role of feeling responsible may include:
- We tell ourselves things like “this family won’t connect with anyone but me.”
- We find ourselves often thinking about the family after work hours.
- We have anxiety-ridden dreams about a particular family.
Being responsive is distinct in the sense that we are attentive to a family’s needs, but have that awareness that we are not the only ones who could help this family. We are able to separate our work from our personal lives, by mentally leaving our home visiting families and their challenges at work, not thinking about them after we leave the office for the day.

When thinking about self-care in home visiting, we need to be aware of how we respond to stress. Having this self-awareness of what may activate us and where in our bodies we tend to hold stress is the first step to addressing it. For some, hearing a parent recount a domestic violent incident may be activating. For others, it may be stressful working with a parent who struggles understanding what is developmentally appropriate for their child. When we find ourselves in these situations, it is important to have some strategies in place while in a home visit. Maybe it is bringing the awareness back to our breath and consciously breathing slowly and deeply. You may even do this with a parent, as a way to model self-care. Maybe it means excusing yourself to go to the bathroom to run cold water over your hands and collect your thoughts before returning to that parent. Another aspect of self-care that may not seem apparent is trusting your instincts. Anytime we feel unsafe, we need to pay attention to that, and take whatever steps necessary to maintain our safety, including leaving a home visit early if necessary.

Having a self-care plan in place is important to manage every day stressors, in particular, those that come from our roles as home visitors. Self-care may look different from one person to another, but what is crucial is finding what you consider to be centering and calming. One way to make sure you maintain your self-care routine is to partner with someone at work that you could check in with or possibly even do activities together. The key is doing so on a consistent basis to benefit fully.

As the opening quote entails, allowing ourselves to be mindful of how home visiting affects us is the key to our longevity in this work. Creating a space to ponder what a certain experience means, allows us to distance ourselves from the intense emotions of that moment. Reflective supervision could provide such an outlet to further explore this. In closing, if we think about all of what self-care means in home visiting, it would allow us to explore ways to better support ourselves and those around us.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- Would implementing a routine at the end of the day to mentally leave work matters at work be useful? Example: Write down worries about a particular family and put it in the “worry box.”
- Would taking the Relationships and Self-Care Checklist or something similar be helpful as a way to assess where you are at and where you might want to be?
Would taking the Organizational Self-Care Checklist or discussing amongst your program its self-care needs be valuable to gauge where your program is at?

What policies/procedures does your program have in place around Home Visitor Safety Planning?

As supervisors/managers, how are you encouraging home visitors to practice self-care and are you modeling to them through your own self-care that it is okay to do so?

References/Additional Resources
