

Gerald Corey
Michelle Muratori
Jude T. Austin II
Julius A. Austin

Counselor Self-Care



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

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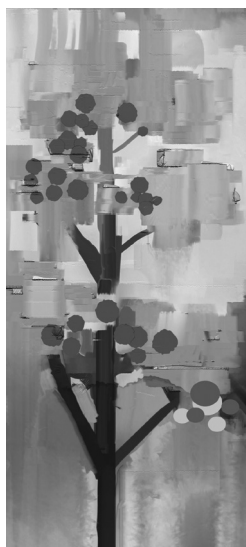
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6101 Stevenson Avenue • Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22304
www.counseling.org



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*To my grandchildren, Kyla, Keegan, and Corey,
who remind me to be in the moment.*

—Jerry Corey

*To the memory of my father, Edmund Muratori,
and in gratitude to my mother, Vera Muratori,
and my extended family.*

—Michelle Muratori

To our parents, for their love, patience, and sacrifice.

—Jude and Julius Austin

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Preface

The topic of self-care for mental health professionals is increasingly in the spotlight. When we attend professional conferences, there is not even standing room in the audience in sessions on self-care. The four of us have a keen interest in self-care for counselors and decided to engage in this collaborative project. We are convinced of the motivational value of presenting these ideas to students and professionals, and we hope you will take an honest look at how you are caring for yourself and providing care for the clients you serve. We offer diverse perspectives on self-care with the objective of encouraging counselors and counselor trainees to evaluate their present level of self-care and consider specific changes they want to make in attending to all aspects of wellness in their personal life. We are all engaged in professional work in different settings and are at different stages in our careers. Individually and collectively we strive to offer a balance of challenge and support as you consider ways to enhance your personal and professional life through self-care.

Rather than providing a reference book focused on an exhaustive review of the empirical and scholarly literature on counselor self-care, our approach is to take you on a personal self-care journey. To speak to you in a personal way, the four of us set the tone by revealing our own self-care journeys, and you will hear our voices throughout this book. In addition we invited 52 guest contributors, from new professionals and graduate students to seasoned professionals, to share their experiences and thoughts about various aspects of self-care, including what challenges them

the most. Our central purpose is a focus on relevant themes in self-care that stimulate thoughtful reflection and encourage discussion of practical and useful ideas. We present the ideas in a conversational and personal way and continually asked ourselves how we could inspire you to want to take positive actions that would lead to building on the resources you already possess and to acquiring a set of self-care practices that will work for you in all aspects of your life. No one person has the ideal formula for optimal self-care; we are unique individuals with varied life experiences. With this in mind, we invite you to take this opportunity to live vicariously through our and our contributors' struggles and triumphs with self-care. Some of these stories and ideas will strike a chord in you, lead to new insights, and inspire your growth (or determination to change). We imagine that the personal narratives included here may evoke a range of reactions including empathy, sadness, laughter, anger, and surprise—all emotions you are likely to encounter on a personal journey. We hope you enjoy reading *Counselor Self-Care* as much as we enjoyed creating it!

This book can be used as a supplement in a wide range of courses in the counseling field and related helping professions. *Counselor Self-Care* is an ideal supplementary resource for both master's and doctoral programs in counseling. It has been intentionally written to be a practical and personal book relevant not only for graduate students but also for professionals at all phases of their career. New professionals and seasoned professional alike must develop self-care practices that will enable them to carry out their professional roles effectively.

Overview of the Book

Chapter 1: Taking Care of Yourself offers a rationale for adopting self-care practices as a requisite for competent professional practice. Self-care as an ethical mandate is emphasized, as is taking active steps to acquire and maintain wellness in all aspects of living. The concept of wellness is presented as a life-long journey that has implications both personally and professionally, and therapeutic presence is discussed with a focus on wellness. A key message of the chapter is how caring for self is a must if you are taking care of others. Empathy fatigue and counselor burnout, managing empathy fatigue, preventing burnout, and happiness as a foundation of self-care all receive our attention.

Chapter 2: Seasons of a Career illustrates how and why self-care is essential at all the stages of one's career: graduate school, early

career, mid-career, and late career. In this chapter, we each describe key experiences at the different stages of our careers.

Chapter 3: Self-Care in Graduate School is written largely from the perspective of Julius Austin and Jude Austin, who discuss their experiences in their master's and doctoral programs and what they learned from their journeys about self-care and becoming counseling professionals. Topics include committing to self-care, setting boundaries, coping with anxiety, reflecting on motivations for becoming a counselor, maintaining self-worth, and practicing self-care during the dissertation process.

Chapter 4: Personal and Professional Stressors addresses how counselors and counselor educators have been affected by and have navigated the personal and professional stressors they have experienced.

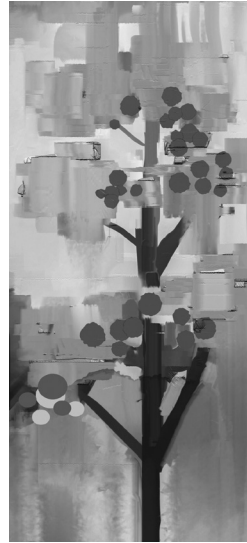
Chapter 5: Managing Stress in a Stressful World presents a wide variety of routes to stress management: meditation, mindfulness, relaxation, yoga, Pilates, tai chi, experiencing nature, sound nutrition, exercise, recreation, and service to others. This chapter is full of ideas for self-care from a holistic perspective. There is no one right way to practice self-care; many different strategies can be used to deal effectively with stress and to achieve wellness.

Chapter 6: Establishing Personal and Professional Boundaries focuses on our successful and unsuccessful experiences setting boundaries at home and at work. Creating healthy work–life boundaries is explored, and our contributors share their ideas on establishing good boundaries, both personally and professionally.

Chapter 7: Relationships With Self and Others focuses on self-compassion, embracing the self, finding ways to nourish oneself through solitude and connections with others, developing forgiveness for self and others, taking time to form meaningful relationships, and mentorship.

Chapter 8: Finding Meaning in Life highlights the relationship between meaning in life and self-care. The existential approach is given attention as a way of finding meaning in life. Several guest contributors describe ways they create meaning for themselves and how this is connected to self-care.

Chapter 9: Creating a Realistic Self-Care Plan highlights the importance of designing a realistic action plan to enhance your self-care practices. The emphasis is on making an honest self-evaluation of your self-care and then deciding how you can make key changes in living. Several guest contributors describe their personal strategies for designing and implementing self-care action plans.



Acknowledgments

Counselor Self-Care is the result of a team effort. It is a collaboration between four coauthors and our guest contributors and reviewers, who have brought their influence to the development of this book. We appreciate the work of Marianne Schneider Corey, who was a reviewer and consultant for us at various stages of development of the book. We also extend our gratitude to the people who read the manuscript and provided us with valuable feedback: Mike Aldrich, Ruth Burton, Jamie Bludworth, Craig Bray, Omar De La Vega, Riley Harper, Robert Haynes, Amanda Johnson, Kim Kabar, Nicholas Lazzareschi, Jeff Markow, Naomi Tapia, and Alyssa Theis.

Special appreciation goes to Carolyn Baker, the associate publisher at the American Counseling Association. Carolyn encouraged us along the way and contributed her expertise by reviewing the entire manuscript, providing insightful comments and suggestions, and offering support and guidance throughout the evolution of this project. A special note of thanks to the manuscript editor, Kay Mikel, who made sure the presentation was clear, practical, personal, and effective. Our gratitude goes out to the 52 guest contributors for their inspiring and honest personal stories about their experiences with self-care. You can learn more about them in the Guest Contributors section.

About the Authors



Gerald Corey, EdD, ABPP, is professor emeritus of human services and counseling at California State University, Fullerton. He received his doctorate in counseling from the University of Southern California. He is a Diplomate in Counseling Psychology, American Board of Professional Psychology; a licensed psychologist in California; and a National Certified Counselor. He is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association (Division 17, Counseling Psychology; and Division 49, Group Psychotherapy); a Fellow of the American Counseling Association; and a Fellow of the Association for Specialists in Group Work. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Mental Health Counselors Association in 2011, the Eminent Career Award from the Association for Specialists in Group Work in 2001, and the Outstanding Professor of the Year Award from California State University at Fullerton in 1991. He regularly teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in group counseling and ethics in counseling. Jerry Corey is the author or coauthor of 16 textbooks in counseling currently in print, along with more than 60 journal articles and book chapters. His book, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, has been translated into Arabic, Indonesian, Portuguese, Turkish, Korean, and Chinese. *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* has been translated into Korean, Chinese, Spanish, and Russian.

Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions has been translated into Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. With his colleagues he has conducted workshops in the United States, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Scotland, Mexico, Canada, China, and Korea—with a special focus on training in group counseling.

The following are a few recent books Jerry Corey authored or coauthored, which are published by Cengage Learning:

- *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions*, Tenth Edition (2019, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Cindy Corey)
- *Groups: Process and Practice*, Tenth Edition (2018, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Cindy Corey)
- *I Never Knew I Had a Choice*, Eleventh Edition (2018, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Michelle Muratori)
- *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Tenth Edition (and *Manual*) (2017)

These four books, authored or coauthored by Jerry Corey, are published by the American Counseling Association:

- *ACA Ethical Standards Casebook*, Seventh Edition (2015, with Barbara Herlihy)
- *Boundary Issues in Counseling: Multiple Roles and Relationships*, Third Edition (2015, with Barbara Herlihy)
- *Clinical Supervision in the Helping Professions: A Practical Guide*, Second Edition (2010, with Robert Haynes, Patrice Moulton, and Michelle Muratori)
- *Creating Your Professional Path: Lessons From My Journey* (2010)

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Michelle Muratori, PhD, is a senior counselor at the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, Maryland, where she works with highly gifted middle school and high school students who participate in the Study of Exceptional Talent and their families. She earned her MA in counseling psychology from Northwestern

University in Evanston, Illinois, and her PhD in counselor education from the University of Iowa, where she developed her research and clinical interests in gifted education. Her graduate research on the academic, social, and emotional adjustment of young college entrants earned her recognition from the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association, the National Association for Gifted Children,

and the Mensa Education and Research Foundation and Mensa International, Ltd. At the University of Iowa, Michelle Muratori also earned the Howard R. Jones Achievement Award, the Albert Hood Promising Scholar Award, and the First in the Nation in Education (FINE) Scholar Award.

Since 2005, Michelle Muratori has been a faculty associate in the Johns Hopkins School of Education and teaches courses in the master of science in counseling program. In 2014, she was honored with the Johns Hopkins University Alumni Association Excellence in Teaching Award. She regularly presents at national conferences in counseling and gifted education and is a member of various professional organizations including the American Counseling Association. When not engaged in professional activities, she enjoys writing, attending concerts, and spending time with her family and friends.

Michelle Muratori has coauthored (with Gerald Corey and Marianne Schneider Corey) *I Never Knew I Had a Choice* (Eleventh Edition, 2018), published by Cengage Learning, and (with Gerald Corey, Robert Haynes, and Patrice Moulton) *Clinical Supervision in the Helping Professions* (Second Edition, 2010), published by the American Counseling Association. In 2007, she authored *Early Entrance to College: A Guide to Success*, published by Prufrock Press. She has contributed to a variety of other publications in the counseling and gifted education fields.

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Jude T. Austin II, PhD, LPC-R (Va), NCC,

is an assistant professor in the Counseling and Human Services Department at Old Dominion University. He earned his MA in clinical mental health counseling from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, and his PhD in counselor education and supervision from the University of Wyoming. His current research involves exploring counseling students' development of therapeutic presence in session, counselor education pedagogy, political values in counseling, and counselor education faculty's relational dynamics. He teaches graduate courses in professional counseling and ethics, advanced counseling skills, and counseling theories. He has presented at state, regional, and national conferences, guest lectured at various universities, and has been invited to give a keynote address at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's Scholar's Day Research Symposium. He also contributes

to the development of various content for textbooks by Gerald and Marianne Corey, as well as online textbook content for Cengage Learning. Before becoming a counselor educator, he was a collegiate and professional soccer player.

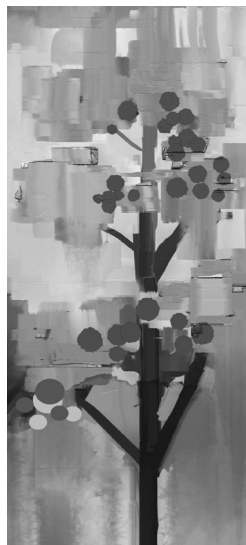


Julius A. Austin, PhD, PLPC, is a former collegiate and professional soccer player who earned his MA in clinical mental health counseling from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, and his PhD in counselor education and supervision from the University of Wyoming. He is currently an assistant professor in the Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling

Studies program at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Throughout this book, he shares his experiences in his previous role as assistant clinical director in the University Counseling Center and adjunct professor in the Department of Psychology, Counseling, and Family Studies at Nicholls State University. In his clinical role, he provides individual, couples, and group therapy to the college population and faculty and staff members on campus. He teaches graduate courses in multicultural counseling, life-span development, and basic facilitative skills. His current research involves building collaborative relationships between graduate counseling programs and collegiate athletic programs and psychophysiological aspects of the therapeutic relationship. He has presented at state, regional, and national conferences, guest lectured for various universities, and has been invited to give a keynote address at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's Scholar's Day Research Symposium. Julius Austin contributes to the development of content for various counseling textbooks by Gerald and Marianne Corey. He is involved in developing the online platforms for these books with Cengage Learning.



About the Guest Contributors



Our guest contributors have added immense vitality and meaning to this book, providing a diversity of thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. The contributors include graduate students in counseling (both master's and doctoral level), counselor educators, licensed professional counselors, social workers, clinical and counseling psychologists, marriage and family therapists, psychiatrists, rehabilitation counselors, and mental health practitioners. We greatly appreciate their honesty, courage, and wisdom in sharing their experiences.

Clara Adkins, BA, is a second-year graduate student at Old Dominion University. She is a research graduate assistant and is beginning a clinical internship at a mental health clinic in the community.

Mike Aldrich, BA, is working as an MFT trainee at a local community agency while completing a master's of counseling from California State University, Fullerton.

Randall Alle-Corliss, MSW, LCSW, was a clinical social worker at Kaiser Permanente for 26 years and recently retired from this position. He is presently on the part-time faculty in the Human Services Department at California State University, Fullerton, and has a private practice as a clinician.

Jasmine T. Austin, MA, is a doctoral student in the communication studies program at the University of Oklahoma. She is a graduate teaching assistant in this department and an adjunct professor in the Department of Human Relations and African and African-American Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

Kent Becker, EdD, LMFT, LPC, serves as dean of the College of Social Sciences at Saybrook University.

Fred Bemak, EdD, is a professor in the counseling and development program and director of the Diversity Research and Action Consortium at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

Dana Blake, BS, received her degree in human services from California State University, Fullerton.

Jamie Bludworth, PhD, is a licensed psychologist, director at the Counselor Training Center, and clinical assistant professor, Counseling and Counseling Psychology Department, at Arizona State University.

Leah Brew, PhD, LPCC, is professor and department chair of counseling at California State University, Fullerton.

Kellin Murphy Cavanaugh, MA, is a first-year doctoral student in counseling and counselor education at Syracuse University.

Nancy Chae, MS, formerly a professional high school counselor at a public, magnet, International Baccalaureate World school in Baltimore, Maryland, is a doctoral student in counselor education at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Angela D. Coker, PhD, LPC, is a visiting associate professor of counseling and human development at Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

Amanda Connell, MS, graduated from California State University, Fullerton. She is a marriage and family therapist intern and professional clinical counselor intern for two community mental health agencies.

Rhea Cooper, BS, is a second-year graduate student in the counselor education program at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette.

Jessie Darkis, MA, is a first-year doctoral student in the counseling and human services program at Syracuse University.

Norma L. Day-Vines, PhD, is a professor in and program lead of the counseling and human development program at Johns Hopkins University.

Omar De La Vega, BA, is a graduate student in counseling at California State University, Fullerton.

Debbie Joffe Ellis, MDAM (Medical Doctor of Alternative Medicine), is a licensed psychologist and mental health counselor and an adjunct professor at Columbia University in the Department of Clinical and Counseling Psychology.

Matt Englar-Carlson, PhD, is a professor of counseling and the director of the Center for Boys and Men at California State University, Fullerton.

Andy Felton, PhD, LPC, is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin–Stout.

Sandi Fulcher, MS, MFT, is a certified practitioner of yoga and Pilates in Idyllwild, California.

Shana Gelin, MA, is a doctoral student in counseling and counselor education at Syracuse University.

Aaron Hatcher, BS, is a marriage and family therapist trainee in the counseling program at California State University, Fullerton.

Robert Haynes, PhD, is a clinical psychologist who retired after 25 years as training director of the clinical psychology internship program at Atascadero State Hospital in California.

Marja Humphrey, PhD, is a lecturer in the counseling and human development program in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University.

Thomas Jackson, MD, is a psychiatrist who works with a variety of patients with a wide range of problems at Desert Behavioral Health in Apple Valley, California.

Amanda Johnson, BS, is a graduate student in the counseling program at California State University Fullerton.

W. Brad Johnson, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and a professor in the Department of Leadership, Ethics & Law at the U.S. Naval Academy, and a faculty associate in the Graduate School of Education at Johns Hopkins University.

Jennifer Kordek, BS, is a graduate of the human services program at California State University, Fullerton.

Nicholas Lazzareschi, BA, is a first-year master's student in counseling at California State University, Fullerton.

Crissa S. Markow, MSW, LSW, works at the Summit View Hospice, in Reno, Nevada, and at the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, Reno, Nevada.

Michael Morgan, PhD, LMFT, is an associate professor in the counselor education and supervision program at the University of Wyoming.

Adrienne Naquin-Bolton, MA, LPC-S, is the director of the University Counseling Center and University Health Services at Nicholls State University.

Ed Neukrug, EdD, is professor of counseling and human services at Old Dominion University.

Ariadne Patsiopoulos, MA, is a registered clinical counselor in Victoria, British Columbia, offering private sessions and a variety of workshops and groups to clients.

Gerald Pennie, PhD, LPC, is an instructor of psychology at South Plains College and is the chief strategy officer for Impact Communications LLC.

Aparna Ramaswamy, PhD, EdD, is a visiting assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University and is a performing artist and a clinician.

Sonia H. Ramrakhiani, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Counseling and Guidance Department at California Polytechnic State University.

Stephanie Robinson, MS, LPC, and is a doctoral student in counseling at the University of Holy Cross.

Petra Schoning, MA, is a licensed marriage and family therapist and a board-certified master personal and executive coach.

Ashley Scott, LPC, is a doctoral student in counselor education at Sam Houston State University.

Danielle N. Sirles, PhD, is a counseling psychologist in the Counseling Center at Sam Houston State University.

Justyn Smith, MA, is a doctoral student in the counselor education program at Sam Houston State University.

Mark A. Stebnicki, PhD, LPC, is professor and coordinator of the Military and Trauma Counseling Certificate, Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation, East Carolina University.

Naomi Tapia, BS, is a graduate student in the master's program in counseling at California State University, Fullerton.

Alyssa Theis, BA, is in the master's program in counseling at California State University, Fullerton.

Patricia A. Thomas, PhD, LPC-S, is an assistant professor in the counseling program at the University of Holy Cross in New Orleans.

Judy Van Der Wende, PhD, is a licensed psychologist with a private practice in Simi Valley, California.

Brandon Wildish, MS, received a master's degree in counseling at California State University, Fullerton, and is a professional musician.

Susannah M. Wood, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Counselor Education at The University of Iowa.

Robert E. Wubbolding, EdD, is the director of the Center for Reality Therapy in Cincinnati and professor emeritus of counseling at Xavier University.

Mark E. Young, PhD, is professor of counselor education at the University of Central Florida and is a Fellow of the American Counseling Association.

Chapter 1

Taking Care of Yourself



• • •
*It's not selfish to love yourself, take care of yourself,
and to make your happiness a priority.
It's necessary.*

—Mandy Hale

• • •

Whether you are a student in the helping professions or a seasoned mental health practitioner, taking care of yourself is critical to your professional success. Incorporating self-care in our lives is a prerequisite to being competent mental health practitioners. Although we are indoctrinated with this advice early in our professional training, many of us say we simply do not have time to take care of ourselves. This begs the question, “Can we afford *not* to take care of ourselves?” To successfully meet the demands of our professional work in an increasingly stressful world, it is essential that we attend to our physical, psychological, intellectual, social, and spiritual needs. Ideally, our self-care should mirror the care we provide to others. Having knowledge about self-care is important; putting what we know into action can be challenging.

Counseling professionals are compassionate people who are good at taking care of others, but we may fail to treat ourselves with the same level of care. We must remind ourselves that it is not possible to provide nourishment to others if we are not nourishing ourselves. Similar to the flight attendant’s instructions to put on your oxygen mask before helping others, if we don’t heed this

requirement, we will run out of “oxygen” and not be able to help anyone else.

When I (Michelle) was teaching an introductory counseling course several years ago, I assigned a self-care project to underscore the importance of practicing good self-care from the very beginning of counselor training. I hoped my students would formulate individual self-care goals that they were invested in pursuing and that they would be inspired to continue after the semester ended. I believed I was teaching my first-year graduate students something valuable, but they taught me something unexpected and fascinating: this “self-care project” was more stressful for many of my students than any of their other assignments! A number of them struggled with identifying or formulating an achievable self-care goal, and the scope of their ideas varied widely. Some plans seemed too ambitious; one student aspired to challenge himself to climb a mountain during the semester. Others seemed stunningly lacking in ambition; one student wanted to exercise *one* minute a day! What I recall most about that assignment is that something intended to be enjoyable proved to be burdensome for a number of students. Based on this experience and others, including my own resistance to certain forms of self-care, I wondered, “Why is it so hard for us as helpers to take care of our ‘selves’ when we are so passionate about helping others to take better care of themselves?” In working on *Counselor Self-Care*, the four of us have spent much time reflecting on this question. Our hope is that you will engage in introspection regarding your own self-care successes and struggles as you read this book.

Relevant literature is cited throughout the book, but you may notice that the text is not particularly citation heavy (as you might expect in a textbook). This is by design. As noted in the Preface, rather than providing an exhaustive review of the scholarly literature and research on topics related to self-care, we take a more personal approach to support you in your own self-care journey. No one model will work for all counselors, so we showcase a collection of experiences and highlight literature that can help you develop a model and plan for self-care that works best for you. We discuss self-care for helping professionals from many different perspectives in the hope of inspiring you to improve your commitment to and practice of self-care. Each chapter is filled with firsthand accounts of the many ways counselors and counselor trainees successfully (and sometimes not so successfully) take care of themselves.

Take a few minutes right now to think about the things in your life that threaten your wellness and your effectiveness as a counselor or a graduate student. Identify what you need in this moment to feel healthy, both personally and professionally. As you read, be mindful of how the stories in each chapter influence your feelings, your thoughts, and your behaviors related to self-care.

This chapter is devoted to some key topics at the heart of counselor self-care, such as the importance of adopting a wellness perspective and its influence on maintaining therapeutic presence; wellness and self-care as buffers against empathy fatigue; and the pursuit of happiness as a foundation of self-care. This discussion provides the foundation for the chapters that follow.

First, however, we turn our attention to the fundamental principle that self-care is not a frivolous indulgence. It is, in fact, our ethical duty to take care of ourselves so that we will be well equipped to put the metaphorical oxygen mask on our clients and students who need our assistance and who are depending on us to be well for them.

Self-Care as an Ethical Mandate

Self-care is the collection of positive actions that promote wellness and effective coping. Stated broadly, “self-care includes routine positive practices and mindful attention to one’s physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual selves in the context of one’s personal and professional lives” (Wise & Barnett, 2016, p. 210). Self-care is not a luxury; it is an ethical mandate. If we neglect caring for ourselves on a regular basis, our professional work suffers, so self-care is a basic tenet of ethical practice (Barnett, Baker, Elman, & Schoener, 2007). If we are drained and depleted, we will not have much to give to those who need our time and our presence. Wise and Barnett (2016) emphasize that we must be willing to take steps to protect our effective functioning if we are to provide our clients with the competent services they deserve. Wise, Hersch, and Gibson (2011, 2012) describe a developmental perspective on ethics and self-care for psychologists and examine the stress–distress continuum.

Amanda Connell, a counseling intern, took to heart the advice she received in graduate school about viewing self-care as an ethical mandate. Although Amanda has multiple demands on her personal and professional life, she is finding a way to *make time* to care for herself.

A Lifelong Struggle for Self-Care

Amanda Connell

Despite my clear understanding of the importance of self-care, achieving my goals in this area remains a lifelong struggle. My life circumstances and schedule create conflict in achieving the level of self-care that I would prefer to experience. The majority of my time is spent being a caregiver for my daughter, who is severely disabled. I also work for two agencies, and I just passed the law and ethics exams for MFT and LPC licensure. My newest venture is part-time teaching of a practicum in human services class at a university, which I find challenging and greatly enjoy.

Although finding sufficient time is difficult, I have worked self-care into my life. My absolute favorite form of self-care is taking vacations. I generally take two vacations each year, and occasionally I add a third vacation when I find myself particularly in need. Long ago I figured out that my true nature is an introvert. What that means for me is that I need time alone to “recharge my batteries.” A large part of my life is spent in serving others, so when I take vacations, I go alone. It is the best and most freeing feeling to have a whole week to do what I want when I want to do it. When I return from my trips, I am a more effective mother, counselor, and teacher. Without these vacations, I would be encountering burnout.

A newer self-care strategy for me is saying “no” more frequently. Also, I ask myself if the new commitments are sustainable. I have been blessed in my life with offers for many wonderful professional opportunities. It has been challenging for me to turn down these opportunities because I really want to do these things and would thoroughly enjoy them. The problem is that there are only so many hours in a day, and when I stretch myself too thin, my health and overall well-being suffer. My schedule is demanding, but it works for me because I have found and pursued my passions in life. All that I do is meaningful and fulfilling for me, and as a chronic overachiever, saying “no” takes work. I noticed that I had been making commitments in the mornings when I feel energetic. My strategy today is to delay commitment decisions (even smaller social commitments) until the evening hours when I am most tired. It is easier to say “no” when my energy is already at a low point in the day.

Another extremely helpful aspect of self-care has been engaging in my own therapy and actively working toward self-actualization. Words I live by are “just because I can do something does not mean I should do it.” I have learned to be emotionally kind to myself, and I strive to live a life of congruence and self-awareness. Many of the methods I suggest to my clients are incorporated in my own life, such as replacing negative self-talk with positive affirmations, regularly engaging in meditation and relaxation exercises, giving myself gentle reminders to return to my self-care plan as needed, and being vigilant about eliminating self-judgment as it arises. Laughter, joy, appreciation, and an innate trust that life will work out are all daily ingredients of my self-care plan.