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IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE IN SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY

Most of us would generally agree that self-care is an important part of successful recovery from addiction and substance abuse. What can be more challenging is appreciating the role that self-compassion plays in creating a foundation for self-care. Having compassion for others is something we experience when we notice their suffering, feel moved by it, and desire to help relieve the suffering in some way.

Self-compassion, on the other hand, is the willingness to grant to ourselves the same feelings of care, empathy, understanding, and acceptance that we grant others. Often, this is no easy task. We may feel undeserving of such compassion; we may criticize or judge ourselves about our substance use or our inability to maintain our recovery as well as we would like. Self-compassion may seem like a luxury for which we are personally ineligible.

Elements of Self-Care in Recovery

1. Physical – Physical self-care means caring for our body internally and externally. Our physical self-care could be ensuring we get eight hours of rest every night, taking a long walk, or preparing a healthy meal for ourselves. By prioritizing things like sleep and nutrition, we can optimize our energy levels and improve our ability to maintain focus on our recovery.

2. Emotional – Emotional self-care is also important for our internal and external health. We can take care of our emotional well-being by processing and

verbalizing feelings with trusted friends, family members, or a therapist. We can also release negative emotions through an expressive art form, such as listening to music, singing, drawing, or dancing.

Additionally, it is important to avoid situations and people that cause us undue emotional distress, practice setting healthy boundaries, and learn to be in touch with our thoughts and feelings. By releasing our emotions rather than bottling them in, we can move through painful experiences that may otherwise threaten our recovery.

3. Mental – We can practice mental self-care by trying new activities that challenge and stimulate us mentally. Engage in an inspiring, philosophical, or meaningful conversation with a friend; try a puzzle; or delve into a new book. It's common to get caught in stagnation traps and stick to what's familiar, so trying a new activity or hobby can help shake off mental cobwebs and further our recovery efforts.

4. Spiritual – Spiritual self-care can often be achieved through activities such as meditation or yoga or by donating time to a worthy cause or spending time in nature. For others, spiritual self-care can be found in books, in a wilderness environment, or in quiet contemplation. Our spirituality is uniquely personal. This aspect of self-care can help create feelings of connectedness, oneness, and universality and thereby diminish the feelings of isolation and loneliness that often can lead to relapse.

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5. Social – Social self-care means taking time to nurture our important relationships. We can practice social self-care by spending quality time with individuals who uplift us and are supportive. These might include family, friends, close colleagues, and others in recovery.

If we are trying to escape negative social circles that don't support our sobriety and recovery, social self-care might mean looking elsewhere to create new friendships and connections. This could include attending community-based recovery meetings; volunteering our time helping others; offering pro bono legal services; or generally engaging in some new, healthy, and recovery-consistent activities. Getting outside ourselves in a way that is of service to others is one of the best ways to build strong recovery.

6. Practical – Practical self-care involves caring for the necessary, but routine, aspects of life – things we may have let slide before we got into recovery – such as housework, finances, grocery shopping, office organization. Many of these tasks may feel like mundane chores – that's because they are! These basic tasks of daily living as a responsible adult, when done consistently, are rewarded with a sense of accomplishment that reinforces in us the value of living a life in recovery.

Self-care is a product of self-compassion, of accepting ourselves and our imperfections, of honoring the fact that we are worthy of being cared for, and of making meaningful efforts to nourish ourselves in recovery. When we learn to attend to our needs in recovery, we eventually come to realize that only through healthy self-care can we truly be of service to our family, friends, and others.

This article was adapted with permission from www.chopratrementcenter.com/blog/2017/02/12/self-care-priority-recovery-and-important-all. Adapted by OAAP Attorney Counselor Douglas S. Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I.