

## Self-care: Taking care of the caregiver

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Working with refugees and asylum seekers can be incredibly rewarding. Though it also contains some risks for the counsellor, as working with people who are going through a difficult period and are feeling powerless can take a toll. Some counsellors take their clients' hopelessness home with them, others are so committed they eventually crash or become cynic and numb.

These tips can help:

### 1. Create safety and trust

- Your work should not only be safe physically, you should also feel safe mentally.
- Formulate specific answers to the following questions:
  - Is my role defined well enough that I can summarise it in two sentences?
  - Is the scope of my assignment clear?
  - Who can I turn to if things go wrong?
  - How do I notice whether I am crossing my own boundaries?
- Continue to act ethically. You may put yourself and colleagues at risk when you go beyond the scope of your assignment. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Can I talk openly with a colleague or partner about what I do?
  - Does my organisation risk any reputational damage if my actions were to be published in the media?

### 2. Bring peace

- Dose your work and set your boundaries. You need sufficient mental rest to be able to distance yourself and think straight.
- Look for concrete answers to the following questions:
  - How do I recognise stress symptoms in myself? How do I handle them?
  - Do I have enough time to complete my tasks? Should I revise my goal?
  - What helps me unwind?

### 3. Advise and refer

- The golden rule is to avoid feeling powerless. To do so, always make sure you follow more than one strategy to achieve a goal.
- Look for concrete answers to the following questions:
  - Do I have enough resources to carry out my tasks? If not, specify what is lacking and advocate for more resources, or adjust your ambitions.
  - Do I have enough knowledge to carry out my assignment? If not, read up and inform yourself, or revise your assignment.

#### 4. Connect

- Helping people is not something you do all alone.
- Connect to your workplace and colleagues to help ensure a good working atmosphere. Also network with colleagues outside your organisation.
- Connect with your client. Engage in your counselling without adopting the client's powerlessness.
- Red flags that might signal that you are becoming isolated:
  - Your client tells you: "You are the only one who wants to help me."
  - You don't have anyone to discuss a difficult situation with.

#### 5. Give yourself hope and perspective

- When you're working with refugees and asylum seekers, your commitment is a grain of hope within a much larger story. One intervention by one person can make a world of difference in someone's story.
- Try to sustain a modest ambition enthusiastically.

## Case study

*Patrick works with asylum seekers. The ex-globetrotter once started the job with great enthusiasm and cultural sensitivity. But these days, Patrick goes to work reluctantly. He does not like some of the changes imposed from higher up and feels uncomfortable around his colleagues. To top it all, he recently felt used by a client, which left him utterly disillusioned.*

### 1. Create safety and trust

- Patrick does not feel comfortable around his colleagues, disagrees with some changes made and feels "used" by a client.
- Patrick's physical safety is not at risk, but his psychological safety is.
- If Patrick wants to continue his work, he needs to discuss his role with his supervisor.

### 2. Bring peace

- Patrick's helplessness and resignation indicate stress and frustration.
- In a conversation, he will need enough space to vent.
- Let him talk about his initial motivation and what is getting in the way of it.

### 3. Advise and refer

- What can and should be done?
- What is preventing that from happening?

### 4. Connect

- Is it possible to discuss Patrick's frustrations with the team? Are others feeling the same way? A good conversation seems necessary.
- Can Patrick find additional support elsewhere? With colleagues or his supervisor?

### 5. Hope and perspective

- What does Patrick expect from his job? Are the above-mentioned steps sufficient to improve his situation in the near future?

## Read more?

Managing stress in humanitarian workers: Guidelines for good practice.

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/managing\\_stress\\_in\\_humanitarian\\_aid\\_workers\\_guidelines\\_for\\_good\\_practice.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/managing_stress_in_humanitarian_aid_workers_guidelines_for_good_practice.pdf)