
Leading by Example: Self-Care Practices in the Classroom

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had drastic implications for social work in both practice and educational settings. We have seen an increased need for social workers that has been heightened by the global pandemic. Social workers and other helping professionals have high exposure to populations that have experienced trauma. There is a continual need for these professionals to utilize inner and outer resources to do their job effectively. Depletion of these resources can lead to burnout. Social workers who are new to the profession are more likely to experience a lack of learned coping mechanisms that come with experience and practice. Michalopoulos and Auerbach (2012) suggest that newer social workers have a higher risk of developing vicarious trauma and becoming burnt out as a result. The profession has been challenged to include the teaching of professional self-care concepts into social work education programs with the goal of preparing new social workers for the realities of jobs and how they can better take care of themselves (Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2014; Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Specifically, Newell & Nelson-Gardell (2014), propose including self-care as a measure of student's competency in the required learning contract for field placement. Social workers being aware of the challenges they will face in their work as well as strategies that can be utilized to combat these challenges can assist them in being prepared and productive in their careers. Although the importance of self-care practices and utilization is agreed upon among helping professionals, conceptualization, formal discussion, and the use of a curriculum that highlights self-care is minimal (Diebold & Slemmon, 2018; Slemmon et al., 2021). Mindful classrooms have been suggested as a way to help students cope with the stressors of their educational and work/field experiences (Napoli & Bonifas, 2019). The benefits of integrating self-care concepts and exercises into the classroom can lead to increased confidence, competence, and demonstrations of self-care practices among students (Franklin, 2019). This has implications for social work practice as these students prepare for field placement and to be professionals in the field of social work. Making sure that students are adequately prepared for the professional roles they will take on as social workers requires a holistic approach to critical evaluation and the messaging they are receiving during their educational journey.

Keywords: Self-care practice, covid-19 pandemic, classroom
