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"I'm too tired. I'm not good at taking care of myself ..."

For Adult Literacy Practitioners

One of six info sheets about the effects of violence on learning

- ✓ Learn more about how violence affects learning.
- ✓ Identify approaches to program delivery that promote more effective teaching and learning.

Dealing with the impact of violence on learning is not as difficult as you might think. It may transform some of your most frustrating challenges, and lead to more success for everyone.

Your journal might say ...

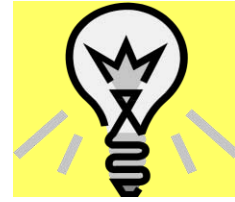
"I wish I had a holiday soon - I'm getting so worn out. When I get close to learners I hear such terrible stories about their lives I can hardly bear it. I try to protect myself by not learning too much about what some of them are dealing with. I don't know how they cope with all that and school.

As if that's not enough I always have to fill in forms and reports to be 'accountable' for the piddly dollars they give me - it takes forever. My administrator doesn't really get why I'm so exhausted or what it is I'm doing when I only work with such small groups. She tells me I get too involved and that I'm not a counsellor.

I'm too tired in the evenings to do much more than slump in front of the TV. And I definitely don't have any time or energy for anybody else in my life who needs much from me. It's not how I want to live. Sometimes I feel I'm just looking for someone to blame and I worry that it may be time to look for a new job."



But did you know ...



- ① When you put out more than you get back, you can quickly and easily feel depleted. Literacy work is very complex, and usually under-funded and poorly paid. You may need to hunt for funds, deal with funders' demands, manage administration, support tutors, and work directly with learners - all at once.
- ① Most programs can't afford to employ as many practitioners or have as large and comfortable a space as they need. Programs rarely have funding for counsellors and other supports for practitioners or learners. Scarcity is a reality of the work and can lead you to feel there is never enough of anything, including time to do a good job or appreciation for your hard work.
- ① The hard times learners have been through can make it challenging for them to learn. And it can leave them and practitioners frustrated with the lack of success.

Learners often struggle with the lack of many resources. They may feel humiliated by workers in many of the services that are supposed to help them. They may live in areas where violence and other problems are widespread, and have few options to get out. They may be terrified for their children and worry about their future.

In this context, practitioners and learners can both find it exhausting to work on reading and writing. Everyone may feel helpless to affect the bigger picture.

- ① Some practitioners get involved in adult literacy work because they're eager to create change, or want to 'help' others. Your own past experiences may shape this desire and contribute to your empathy for others. But it can be exhausting when those you work with either remind you of your own issues, or seem to have such big issues that you feel you can't complain about anything.



- ① Many practitioners just keep pushing rather than finding ways to slow down and take better care of their selves. To hold on to well-being and continue to help yourself and support others, you need to find ways to stop and figure out the best ways to nurture yourself. As Edmonton therapist Heather Bain suggested, we need to “include ourselves in the circle of care”.

What Can I Do to Help Everybody Learn?

1. Address self-care in the program.

- Meet with a counsellor as a group or individually to take care of your own issues and strengthen your work with learners. If your setting doesn't include counsellors, try to find special funding, placement learners, or counsellors who will volunteer their time.
- Talk about self-care in staff meetings. Share ideas and resources, and encourage everyone to look after themselves. Try to shift the common culture of valuing over-work and replace it with one that values self-care, regular rest and food breaks, and good boundary setting.
- Address issues of safety. Make sure everyone is aware of a safety plan and what to do if a crisis erupts, or if anyone threatens the safety of themselves or others.
- Create a culture in the program of acknowledging and valuing the hard work everyone does: the practitioners, volunteer tutors, board members, and learners. Don't ignore the need to value your colleagues and yourself, thinking only about learners and volunteers.

2. Take on self-care.

- Move through hard places. Work with the emotions and feelings of being overwhelmed when they come up - don't stuff them down. If you find that working with people who were mistreated reminds you of your own experiences, or makes you extremely angry or sad, access your supports. Meeting with a therapist or elder might help work through your own issues.





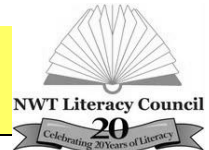
- Gather your strength. Make sure you take time to escape, to play, to have fun, to nurture and to replenish yourself through relaxing, physical exercise, or time spent in nature.
- Be creative and express yourself. Make space in the program and in your life to tell your stories and to create, using whatever media draws you.

3. Help learners take on their own self-care.

- Include self-care as part of the curriculum. Help learners to learn to take care of themselves when they feel bad or overwhelmed. Encourage them to think about how to set their own boundaries and take care of themselves at home too.
- Provide conditions for self-care. Where possible include healthy snacks and drinking water for everyone in the program.
- Create a learning environment which nurtures all parts of the self. For example think about sounds, sights, physical comfort, emotional safety, and ways to provide inspiration and nurture the spirit.



More Information



Go to www.learningandviolence.net

- [Taking Care of Self](#)
- What to do [When you feel bad](#) – easy-to-read list of things to do.
- [Helping others learn](#) – conditions for learning. Video: creating Sacred Space.

NWT Literacy Council

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