

# Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

## 2021-2022 News & Notes



### October 2021 News and Notes

#### Self-Care for Mental Health

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

On their website, under “Caring for Your Mental Health,” the National Institute of Mental Health explains, “Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact.”<sup>1</sup>

These “small acts” involve all aspects of our lives, affecting our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing.

**Address mental and physical health together:** The most obvious measures we can take are maintaining the same healthy behaviors that promote our physical health: Regular exercise, nutritious diet, and sufficient sleep, avoiding junk food, alcohol, and drugs. When our mental health suffers, our physical health declines as well.

One of the most obvious culprits affecting our mental wellbeing is stress, a universal fact of life. While seemingly unavoidable, stress can seriously damage our health if not kept to manageable levels. We can act to minimize its effects on our lives through a variety of ways.

**Time tested antidotes:** Fortunately, some of the most effective strategies for de-stressing are the most pleasurable. In addition to regular exercise, other relaxing activities include taking time for creativity, such as writing, drawing, or playing music; spending time in nature; practicing yoga and meditation; and getting together with friends and loved ones.

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Frequently these activities combine to make especially rewarding experiences: A family hike and picnic, for example; a weekly knitting circle; a date with friends for dinner and a movie.

**Accentuating the positive:** Especially in these uncertain times, it is easy to get caught up in negative thinking, worrying about what is happening in the world, or to focus on our own shortcomings and what we haven't accomplished.

Many studies have shown that consciously identifying what in our lives we are grateful for is an effective means to counter negative thoughts. Some people keep a "gratitude diary," recording what they are grateful for. Similarly, taking time to remember the positive events of the day can lift your mood.

Practicing self-compassion has been shown to enable people to accomplish goals better than self-criticism.

**Connection:** For many, being a part of a faith organization and/or assisting the wider community through volunteering gives purpose and meaning to their lives.

**Taking control:** At times, stress can leave us feeling helpless, as if things are out of control. We can address this by recognizing it and how it is affecting us, and then determining what we can do.

Sometimes, we inadvertently create our own stress by overscheduling and/or taking on more than we can realistically, comfortably handle. It's important, then, to think through your priorities: what is most important? What is optional, and can be changed or let go? Establishing realistic boundaries around your time and energy can make a difference—for example, not letting work take time away from family and friends. Learn to say no to activities when they exceed what you can reasonably take on.

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**Finding our own self-care formula:** Elizabeth Scott, MS<sup>2</sup>, identifies five areas of self-care: physical; social; mental; spiritual; and emotional. She writes, “Self-care isn't a one-size-fits-all strategy. Your self-care plan will need to be customized to your needs and what is currently going on in your life.

“A self-care plan for a busy college student who feels mentally stimulated all the time and has a bustling social life might need to emphasize physical self-care.

“On the other hand, a retired person may need to incorporate more social self-care into their schedule to make sure that their social needs are being met.”

**Get help if you need it:** The National Institute of Mental Health urges people to seek professional help when distressing symptoms last more than two weeks. The earlier mental health problems are addressed, the more easily they can be resolved.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.verywellmind.com/self-care-strategies-overall-stress-reduction-3144729>