Take Care of YOU: Guilt-Free Self Care

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Whether you are considering full-time remote work or you are a remote instructor, instructional designer, administrator, or corporate professional development personnel, understanding the need for self-care in a home-based work environment is important. During this conversational session, participants identified their challenges and benefits to working remotely. What was shared has also been found in research to exist. Additionally, participants shared their strategies for self-care and Dr. Kolski offered from research as well as her own experiences, additional strategies for maintaining physical and emotional well-being when being a full-time remote worker.

Introduction

Transitioning from a workplace office setting to a full-time remote, home-based working environment sounds easy. However, it then becomes more tempting to attend to domestic responsibilities, feelings of isolation can occur, or blurred work-life boundaries exist. Research is lagging on the utilization of effective self-care strategies - specifically for instructors, course designers, or other education/professional development occupations - when the person's work environment is solely remote or home-based. Through this conversational platform, participants shared the challenges and the benefits they find in working full-time remotely from home, as well as the self-care strategies they implement. Dr. Kolski shared self-care tips she has offered to others who have transitioned to full-time remote work.

Challenges when working full-time remotely, from home

Physical and emotional signs of stress and blurred boundaries between work and family roles dominate the challenges when working full-time remotely from home. Regarding physical health, working online can cause an individual to become sedentary. If one does not make intentional efforts to get up and move around, this can result in health issues such as heart disease and high blood pressure (Sprigg, 2020).

Working remotely can cause people to feel isolated when they do not come into an office daily. You miss the water cooler or coffee machine conversations that inherently happen in an office environment. Many people's motivation to

come to work involves social interaction (Cook, 2019). Additionally, when working remotely, you are more prone to working longer hours, which can lead to burnout.

Blurred work-life boundaries, or a lack of boundary setting between work and nonwork roles when working remotely from home, can lead to work or family conflicts and higher job turnover rates (Dahlberg et al., 2021). Difficulties detaching from work when working at home, having a lack of time buffers between role transitions, and having a limited space to create physical boundaries can result in boundary control challenges. Additionally, the technological enhancements lead to an 'always on' feeling (Dale, 2022).

Benefits when working full-time remotely, from home

Participants in the session identified the benefits of working from home as less time spent traveling, having fewer distractions or interruptions, engaging in exercise, and providing them increased flexibility to help with children, home-based chores, or doctor's appointments. Cook (2019) validated these perspectives in sharing working from home helps people manage their domestic responsibilities. However, caution should be taken to avoid these benefits from having a negative impact on their work productivity.

Self-care strategies when working full-time remotely, from home

Self-care refers to "the ability to refill and refuel oneself in healthy ways" (Gentry, 2002, p.48), including engagement in behaviors that maintain and promote physical and emotional wellbeing and that lessen the amount of stress, anxiety, or emotional reaction experienced when working remotely from home (Myers et al., 2012). The term self-care refers not only to an engagement in various practices but also to being caring toward oneself (Kissil & Niño, 2017).

Self-care in relation to physical health encompasses a focus on issues of sleep, exercise, and diet. Stress significantly reduces the quantity and quality of sleep, with poor sleep triggering greater stress the next day (Åkerstedt et al., 2013). Additionally, insufficient sleep is linked to exhaustion and low professional efficacy, and higher levels of stress. Effective sleep hygiene techniques include maintaining a regular sleep schedule, making one's sleep environment restful, and avoiding going to bed hungry or thirsty (Mairs & Mullan, 2015). Dale (2022) also suggested shutting off screens before bedtime and utilizing sleep apps that can help users fall asleep and track their sleep patterns. Regarding nutrition, participants shared their successes with keeping a water bottle at their desks to encourage drinking water during the day. Similarly, participants explained the importance of meal preparation and planning for lunch and snacks during the day.

Working remotely involves active time management and requires self-discipline. Creating work boundaries and setting boundaries when working from home to allow for a healthy work-life balance is an important self-care strategy. When working remotely, the volume of email traffic that you receive increases (Cook, 2019). Prioritize your reading and responding to email. Be realistic in what you can accomplish in eight hours. Use a schedule or hourly planner and designate time to completing tasks, then stick to your timeframe. Include in your schedule dedicated time for taking breaks. Take a three-to-five-minute break every hour by standing up and physically moving around. Other forms of exercise incorporated throughout the day could include walking, yoga, running, or stretching. There might be the temptation to take one's lunch break or snack breaks whenever it seems convenient, but it is a better practice to be intentional in preparing food to be consumed, scheduling snacks, movement breaks, and lunch breaks before beginning the workday. Create a shared household calendar, allowing all household members to be on the same page about meeting times and when quiet time is needed. Lastly, to establish work-life boundaries, it is important to turn off work computers outside of regular work hours.

Having a dedicated, private workspace that is also organized, clutter-free, and distraction-free is imperative when setting work-life boundaries while working from home (Dale, 2022). Create an office environment in your workplace area

of your home (i.e., put out family pictures, use ergonomic support products, have adjustable heights of desks and screens). Have a dedicated work space at home and the technology available to support remote working.

Establish a workday support network and an after-work support network and strive to maintain connections with bot. Connect with colleagues by engaging in and/or creating virtual coffee hours. It is also important to spend free time with household members, friends, community groups and organizations outside of work hours. Social support is a valuable element of self-care and a way to promote individual well-being (Barnett & Homany, 2022). Having a satisfying social support system is linked to greater self-esteem, lower anxiety and depression, and less use of avoidance coping strategies.

Emotional expressions and practicing mindfulness techniques are additional effective self-care strategies when working full-time remotely, from home. Emotional expression can include talking or writing about your day (i.e., in journals or through creative writing), having a good scream, cry, or creative expression (i.e., painting, coloring). Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations (Cook, 2019).

To truly engage in self-care, we must also consider how congruent our values are with our actions in all the other areas of our lives. A lack of congruence between personal and work values can be tied to burnout, while living according to one's personal values has clear implications for well-being (Veage et al., 2014). When we spend even just a few moments with what we value and take a break from our busy minds, we offer ourselves a small act of self-care. Even in small amounts, acts of self-care contribute to our overall sense of well-being and resiliency over time (Neff, 2023). Specific domains of self-care practice, include awareness, balance, flexibility, and spirituality.

Awareness

Awareness involves having knowledge about what is taking place around you, monitoring one's own needs, and being aware of work stressors (Lopez, 2017). Self-monitoring and awareness have also been related to experiencing lower levels of emotional exhaustion, burnout and compassion fatigue, a greater sense of gratification in one's work, and an ability to maintain emotional balance in difficult situations (Sansó et al., 2015).

Balance

Balance refers to distributing one's attention to various aspects of life, ensuring not to neglect important facets, and to maintaining a sense of equilibrium in both personal and professional realms (Sirgy & Wu, 2009). Strategies to achieve balance include leisure time, engaging in a variety of professional and personal activities, and cultivating non-work-related passions, interests, and relationships.

Flexibility

Flexibility includes finding ways to internally manage and externally respond to the varying demands of your work (Posluns & Gail, 2020). Having an inflexible coping response style can have a negative impact on ones' well-being. Attending to and regulating your emotions and setting and reappraising goals are practices that can promote flexibility (Miller & Sprang, 2017).

Spirituality

Posluns and Gail (2020) defines spirituality as a search for the sacred in one's life that encompasses aspects of connection with self, others, and the divine, as well as purpose and ultimate meaning. Experiencing a sense of spiritual connection dispels feelings of isolation and contributes to the belief that you are a part of something larger, more meaningful. Spiritual practices include prayer, meditation, and spending time in nature.

Self-Compassion

Self-care also includes the practice of self-compassion. Self-compassion is a practice of goodwill, not good feelings (Neff, 2023). The friendly, supportive stance of self-compassion is aimed at finding control over the situations we can

influence, focusing on our breathing, the sensation of the soles of your feet on the ground, or taking deep, cleansing breaths or petting the cat. By doing so we give ourselves what we need in the moment and is self-compassion that will allow us to move forward more effectively.

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