

Psychological Self-Care: Enhancing Mental Health and Wellbeing

Some general tips for performers to help keep us mentally healthy, enhance our wellbeing and achieve our goals:

1. Remember the basics: take care of your diet, exercise/fitness, weight, and sleep. Avoid smoking and alcohol/substance abuse.
2. Identify and keep close to your core values and priorities in the way you act at work, in partnerships, with family and friends, in your hobbies and interests, etc.
3. Treat yourself compassionately and value yourself, regardless of what you have achieved and your circumstances. Set achievable goals in both the short and long term for technical skill development. Other performers may seem far more proficient but be confident you can get there in the end through measured progress.
4. Remember that we have choices and can make changes in our lives and to ourselves. We can escape the past, learn to welcome the uncertainties the future might bring and act effectively in the present.
5. Recognise what 'pushes your buttons' and 'pulls your triggers', and if there are emotions you find hard to manage – maybe anger or anxiety or sadness or frustration. Try opening up to some of these unwanted emotions, thoughts, memories and images, rather than avoiding, suppressing or attempting to reduce or control them to develop greater acceptance. Finding a therapist may help you on your journey.
6. Practise ways of reducing excessive levels of tension, panic, anxiety, anger and other negative reactions. Learn relaxation skills and practise doing them regularly. Remember to use them when you really need to.

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7. Practise your self-regulation skills as well: controlling impulses to do, feel, think and attend (or not) to certain thoughts, emotions, bodily reactions and events by monitoring, regulating and modifying your responses to them.
8. Have clear marked 'boundaries' between work and other aspects of life, so that you can give full attention to what you are doing in the present and can keep separate issues relating to one domain while being in another. Try not to bring actual work 'home' with you!
9. Cultivate moments of mindfulness, being fully in the present, maybe using your breathing or a word or a sound as an anchor. Become familiar with and charitable towards the wanderings of your mind and enjoy the long-term health benefits of regular daily mindfulness practice.
10. Practise communicating assertively so that your intentions and messages are clear and direct. Other people are not mind-readers and may not react in the same way as you. Practise giving and receiving complaints, comments and criticisms in a constructive way. Avoid blaming and shaming.
11. Recognise and challenge habits of negative thinking and negative assumptions and beliefs. Begin to break down any 'negative filters' you have in place which may be preventing you from moving forward.
12. Make a point of noticing any good, positive and uplifting events, situations and things that happen. Keep a record of them in a positives diary each day.
13. Recognise which factors you are able to control and which you aren't and concentrate on working on the former and trying to let go and accept the latter.
14. Organise your time, so you can make space for what you want and need to do. Be realistic about what is achievable. Suit your schedule to your body clock and be aware of your daily energy expenditure and what your energy needs are and regulate your intake and output of energy.
15. Be able to say 'no' to requests, and to delegate whenever necessary. Accept 'no' for an answer when someone says it to you.
16. Remember to include 'down-time', time to relax, to unwind, and time to socialise. Remember that results come from the quality of work done in a given time not the total time spent doing it.

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17. Be aware of any tendencies to procrastinate and develop appropriate strategies for dealing with these.
18. Show compassion and tolerance towards yourself, especially if you have been through or are going through a difficult time or are under pressure. Compliment, reward and 'treat' yourself when appropriate: you deserve it!
19. Always make and take time to cultivate and develop your relationships however busy you are. Family contact, friendships, social contact and support are important for well-being.
20. While it is helpful to strive to improve and get better, it is unhelpful and unrealistic to expect perfection in yourself or in others. Challenge and talk back to your 'inner critic'.
21. Everyone is a mixture of qualities and traits, strengths and weaknesses. Know yours: both your strengths and your weaknesses. Are there any strengths you can use and transfer to help you cope with your difficulties and weaknesses?
22. Your confidence will grow as you stop judging and criticising yourself and just do the best you can.
23. Remember: nobody is perfect and bad things will happen to all of us sometimes. The more we accept this and the better we learn to cope, the easier it will be to bounce back and even learn to gain wisdom, understanding and strength from our experiences.

Basic stress management:

1. Recognise your stressors and develop proactive strategies for dealing with them. Recognise your effective and less effective coping strategies and work to improve them.
2. Be aware how stress affects your body, your thoughts, your feelings and your behaviour so you can recognise and manage these aspects.
3. Be aware of any circumstances in your past that may be contributing to present difficulties, such as difficult relationships or events and any recent circumstances which may have triggered difficulties such as changes or losses. There may also be current situations making things worse: look out for any signs of self-neglect, self-harming or self-sabotage, however small. Find effective ways of coping better.

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4. If stress levels lead to extended and extensive symptoms of distress and anxiety, periods of absence from work, inability to cope with daily living, and serious problems in your relationships, it is time to seek further professional help. Recognise if this happens and act.
5. Be aware of any unhelpful habits, patterns or addictions, and once you have decided to tackle them, then try to develop a realistic strategy for change. Seek help and support to keep you on track.

BAPAM deliver expert health and wellbeing services for those working in the performing arts, including training, information resources, and free clinical advice from healthcare experts who understand the demands of a career in the sector. We quickly set people on an effective path to recovery and a healthy and sustainable career.

For more information give us a call on **020 8167 4775** or visit www.bapam.org.uk.

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