

WE MATTER: A GBV STAFF CARE RESOURCE



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID
actalliance



“In truth, our experiences are real,
our trauma is real, and the healing
we deserve is real.”

- Jacquelyn Iyamah Ogorchukwu



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Norwegian Church Aid identified the need to strengthen staff care for GBV staff working directly with both survivors of GBV and women and girls at risk of violence and exploitation and this resource was created specifically for that purpose. This resource aims to move concepts and theory of staff-care into practical application.

NCA recognizes that achieving its vision for a just world requires empowered, hopeful employees. Staff wellbeing is a crucial component to achieving this vision that NCA holds for all its personnel.

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*Consent was obtained for all photos used in this resource. No photos depict survivors of GBV. Cover photo: Pakistan 2017, Håvard Bjelland NCA.

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

We Matter: A GBV Staff Care Resource contains activities and tools to help Gender Based Violence (GBV) teams manage burnout and vicarious traumatization. *We Matter* contains 8 thematic sections and 25 staff care activities.

This resource is written for all GBV staff, not just for team leaders and supervisors. Staff care requires that every staff member takes up the responsibility to add more dialogue, play and staff care into their team.

It is recommended that this resource be used together with the I Matter: Self Care Journal for GBV Staff. The *I Matter* journal is a personal, private journal that GBV staff can use, on their own, to process and explore how their work is affecting them and to deepen their personal self-care practices.

What is Staff Care? Staff care involves an approach and activities that place the emotional wellbeing of staff in the center of all things.

*For example, imagine it is Thursday morning. Your colleagues are exhausted, yawning and laying their heads on their desks. You are also tired from a week filled with non-stop crises. You are not the GBV team leader, but you know that a small, joyful moment in the morning can change the direction of the day, so, you spontaneously decide to play a song on your phone loud enough for all to hear. It is an upbeat, joyful song and very quickly your whole team is singing and laughing. It only took 5 minutes to transform the mood of your team from exhausted to joyful. It truly is these “little” moments of joy and meaning that matter. **These “little” moments are essential.***

There is a culture of being ‘strong’, also known as “I’m fine, but sometimes I cannot breathe” stance among GBV teams. GBV Staff members often feel they are expected to “sacrifice” themselves for their work. You might even hear that self-care and staff care is selfish, or “a waste of time,” and that you need to “toughen up.”

Unlearning this idea that GBV staff must be “tough” and “invincible” is important. Pretending we are okay when we are not okay leads us on a straight path to burnout.

It is important to state that many GBV staff are female and due to the global prevalence of violence against women, many female staff will have personally experienced or witnessed violence in their own lives. Having preexisting GBV experiences when working in this field, can trigger strong emotional reactions. Thus, having consistent staff care integrated into the workplace can actively prevent burnout.

To conclude, the primary goal of this resource is to provide staff care tools that can be slipped into the beginning of a meeting or at the end of a long crisis-filled day.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource is for any GBV staff member who wants to add more staff care activities into their team. They do not need to have a specialization in psychological techniques or prior knowledge of staff care.

Based on your GBV team needs, you can find the required staff care tools in the Table of Contents (see page 5) or the Staff Care Activities (see page 6).

The 8 thematic areas of this resource, which outline 25 staff care activities, are as follows:

- Implementing Staff Care: *"Where do we start?"*
- Assessing Staff Care Needs: Exploring areas where your team struggles
- Beginnings and Endings
- Getting to Know Each Other: *"I say hi to you every morning, but I do not know you."*
- Joy gives us energy: Play and celebrate together
- Managing Strong Emotions: *"I'm fine, but sometimes I can't breathe."*
- Move Your Body
- Staff Care During Acute Emergencies

PRINCIPLES: THE 6 Cs

These 6 staff care principles can guide how you approach the exercises, activities and ideas in this resource.

CONNECTION

Connection reminds us that we are not alone and that we are important.

COMPASSION

Self-compassion means allowing ourselves to feel whatever we are feeling without judgement and talking to ourselves as we would talk to a friend.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is about setting boundaries, being clear on what we need and want from ourselves and our team.

CREATIVITY

Being creative on our own or with our teams is essential to staff care.

Feel free to creatively alter the activities that are outlined here in a manner that suits your team and your context.

CONSISTENCY

Staff care and self-care must happen consistently. If we see them as only add ons, they are easily forgotten and not practiced.

COMMITMENT

As part of NCA's vision, this principle revolves around committed leadership towards ensuring empowered and engaged employees.



PART 2: STAFF CARE TOOLS

IMPLEMENTING STAFF CARE: 'WHERE DO WE START?'

GBV staff hear overwhelming stories of violence and abuse daily. As one caseworker said, "We are all traumatized from survivors' stories," and another caseworker asked, "Is staff care even possible in a warzone?" Staff care helps staff to care for themselves and find meaning in their role as helpers. When staff are filled with hope and joy, they can transmit these feelings to survivors.

So, where do we start with staff care?

1. **Start with an assessment conversation** with your team. Explore where does your team struggle and what brings your team joy.
2. **Create a list** (in order of priority) of staff care needs.
3. With the team, **brainstorm and agree upon a plan where at least one staff care activity can be practiced by the team weekly.**

Once you understand the team's ideas, you use their ideas to set up a staff care program which is explained below.

How do you add staff care into a humanitarian context? In brief, spontaneous ways as well as creating sustainable systems of care.

When? At the beginning (or end) of a training or meeting. In the middle of back-to-back meetings. At the end of a crisis filled day. In the morning as staff enter the room or on the first day of the month or the last day of the week. Be creative.

Where? Anywhere. Find calm spaces inside and outside the office. Create calm through relaxing music, changing the lighting, adding pillows & blankets, closing the door, or putting a sign on the office door saying, "We are practicing self-care. Do not disturb."



What? Staff care can be any simple activity, conversation or artwork that allows staff to turn inwards to find energy, joy and meaning. It is advised that you invest in a staff care basket or box that can be kept in the corner of your office which includes a few supplies such as: crayons, paper, pillows, blankets, a box of chocolate, a speaker, and 'do not disturb' door signs (see Appendix D).

Who? Anyone can lead staff care. It can be led by senior employees or staff care focal points or committees. These staff care leaders can be created through delegation or through an election process. The goal here is to move away from the idea that staff care is the responsibility of one person but rather the responsibility of the entire team. Peer to peer support can be the biggest factor in maintaining wellbeing at work. Support networks can be driven by the staff and through this, team members feel supported and begin to form relationships of trust and empathy.

Keep in mind. Many female staff who work with GBV may have also experienced trauma or abuse in their own lives. We all walk with a story.

What specific role do senior staff like team leaders and supervisors have in staff care?

This next section is specifically for senior staff, like team leaders and supervisors.

As senior staff, it is essential that you understand what your team's staff care needs are and that staff feel comfortable sharing their feelings with you. You cannot fulfill all your team's needs by yourself. So here are some tips on what you can do to access support:

- Help staff members find balance. When you evaluate the performance of your staff, keep a section for reviewing their: workload, overtime, hours of work, productivity and self-care.
- Create a system of staff care buddies or of informal mentoring.
- Champion the setting up of a staff care program with staff care focal points or committees. A staff care focal point can have this role included in their job description and the 'time allotted' can be mutually agreed upon (i.e. 2 hours a week or 5% of their time could be spent on staff care work).
- Help start up regular support or discussion groups on topics, such as: managing work and home life, being a mother or a sleep hygiene group.
- Create a staff care basket or box for your office that contains blankets, pillows, crayons etc.
- Provide training and development opportunities for building resilience, self-care and staff care.
- Write proposals that include indicators and budgets for staff care.
- Reach out to the NCA Head Office or external counseling and support services if you need additional support.



What does it mean when people say
“You need to psychologically prepare for GBV work.”?

How do you prepare your eyes, your ears and
your heart for painful stories?

ASSESSING STAFF CARE NEEDS: EXPLORING AREAS WHERE YOUR TEAM STRUGGLES

Let us imagine that your GBV team is sitting around the table. The last few months have been extremely challenging for the team due to: ongoing daily conflict, unstable electricity, and a massive increase in GBV incidents. You know your team is struggling, and you ask yourself, "How do I begin to understand my team's staff care needs?"

You ask a few questions to the group: "How is everyone doing with their work? What have been your struggles?"

*The room is silent.
Staff look tired.*

Then, you receive a few responses, "We are struggling so much," and "We are exhausted."

Your team does not know where to even start in beginning to take care of themselves. You realize that your questions are not sufficient. You need to go deeper.

The assessment activities that follow aim to facilitate deep, rich conversations about staff care needs.

Activity 1: HAPPY MEMORIES

Materials: Pens or crayons, paper

Has so much time passed since you took care of yourself and your team that you do not know where to start?

This activity helps GBV teams reflect on fun memories and appreciate each other's contributions and accomplishments.

- Explain the goal of the 'Happy Memories' activity. *"The activity reminds us of past happy team memories and assists us to think about how to create more happy memories with the team."*
- Give 5 minutes for staff members to recall several happy team memories.
- Staff members choose crayons and paper and each draws a happy memory and adds any words connected to that memory.
- When they finish drawing, staff members share their drawings and tell their stories.
- Facilitate a discussion and each person reflects on what made this memory special.
- After everyone shares, place the drawings in a staff care basket or in a staff care folder.
- Together the team decides on 5 possible strategies to enhance their team's staff care.
- Have the team prioritize (from 1-5) which actions should be implemented first.
- Have the team agree to roll out one idea at a time. Identify one person who can take charge in the follow-up and implementation of these ideas.

Activity 2: WHAT DOES YOUR GBV TEAM ALREADY DO?

Material: Flip chart, markers

Explain to the team that you want to have a conversation about what staff care the GBV team already has in place.

Write the diagram below on a flipchart. Ask the team to circle the activity options they already do together and to write in additional new activities on the flipchart.

Eat regular lunch together	Celebrate holiday/religious events together		Play team building games together
Volunteering together for a social cause		Celebrating birthdays of colleagues together	
Team retreats		Organising a potluck	Play sports together
	Play music in the mornings to start the day	15-minute Coffee Chats with the Team lead (Q and A)	Meeting outside the office space for a meal/drinks/activities once a while

After your team does the above exercise, have a candid discussion using the following questions:

- How often does the team do these activities?
- What would the team like to do more of?
- How can the team create more time and space for what they find valuable?
- Is there any staff care activity the team could do better? How?
- Do any of these activities inspire new ideas on what else the team could do to build stronger trust and connection?

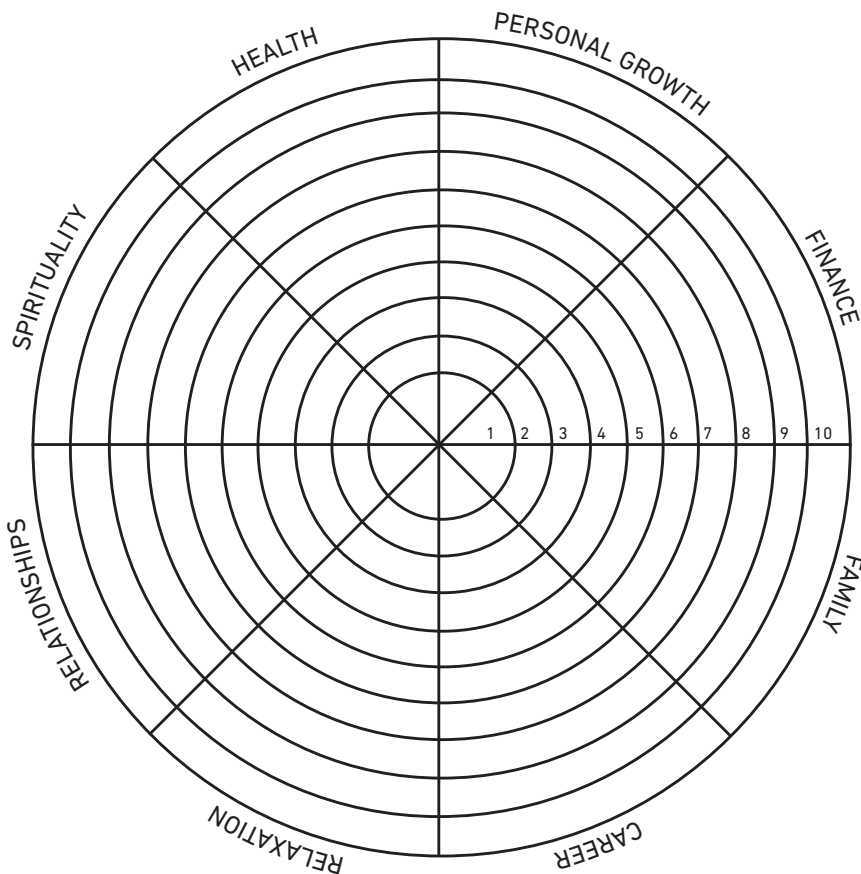
Activity 3: THE WELLNESS WHEEL

Material: The Wellness Wheel handout, a pen

When we take care of ourselves, we are likely to find that our lives are more balanced. Also, we may feel more connected to ourselves, those we care for, and the world we live in.

This activity is about balance between work, family, friends and things we enjoy. The more well balanced we are, the more we can enjoy all parts of our life. You can explain this activity to the team in the following way:

- *The Wellness Wheel is a circle that shows different parts of our life. On the Wellness Wheel (see below), you will see 10 points from the center to the outside. The center point represents 0 or not at all, and the outer points represents 10 or all the time.*
- *Mark how much time you spend on each aspect of your life with a dot on the line.*
- *After you have finished this, join the dots across the wheel. It is likely you will have a distorted wheel. This exercise helps us to understand what parts of our lives we are maybe not spending enough time on. For example, if you have marked 9 in work but 2 in relationships, you might want to think about how you could bring your time spent on relationships up a bit higher.*
- *Turn to a colleague and share what your wheel looks like. Together, you can talk through some of the challenges and opportunities in making your wheel smoother.*
- *Have the entire team come back together and explore what is realistic right now? Is it 5's? 6's? What feels ok and how can you each support each other to do more of what allows for your wellbeing?*
- *Remember, it is simply not possible to have 10's all round, sometimes 5's all round might be more realistic. That is ok.*



Priority Categories

Notes

Activity 4: A QUICK 10 MINUTE STAFF CARE ASSESSMENT

Sometimes you only have 10 minutes! You can still do a brief assessment conversation about how the work is affecting your team. Try exploring the following:

- How did your work affect you this week?
- Describe one joyful or meaningful experience you had this week.
- Describe one challenging experience you had this week and how you managed it.





Many of us are used to moving from one crisis to the next.

We have become so accustomed to crises and deadlines that we feel almost lost if we are not putting out some kind of fire.

How do you feel when you are not involved in a crisis?

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

Beginning or ending the day or a meeting are great times to slip in self-care and team building activities, whether it be a 5-minute check in or a game that ends the day with laughter and joy.

Let's imagine it is Friday afternoon and your team leader says, "Let's spend 15 minutes together. Make yourself comfortable– on the floor, on cushions or whatever is not your usual way of sitting. Good. Now, let's talk about experiences where we felt stuck this week at work."

Everyone finds a comfortable position and each team member shares a situation where they felt stuck in the past week. One caseworker talks about a nightmare he had about a survivor and your team leader shares feeling overwhelmed yesterday due to 3 consecutive crises.

As everyone shares their stuck moments, you notice that you can breathe deeper and that you feel less overwhelmed. You realize that sharing feelings about your week is calming. You realize how we start and end our workday matters.

The following activities can be done at the beginning or ending of the day or starting or ending a meeting.

Activity 5: TEAM CHECK-INS

A check-in is a simple yet effective way to look out for team members, to check their energy levels, to listen for what is left unsaid and to check on their personal and professional wellbeing.

CHECK-IN QUESTIONS ARE:

- Open ended questions
- Slightly abstract questions
- Not an icebreaker. There is a clear purpose of looking for the unsaid and checking on the team's energy levels

TIPS FOR CHECK-INS:

- Slot 10–15 minutes at the top of the meeting. It is worth it! Make it your own – Participants can draw/ write/ share.
- Go Slow! It is ok if there is silence. Stay with it. Let there be gentle pauses between people sharing.
- This is a space to share, to acknowledge, to see and be seen. It is not a space to agree/ disagree. Make it a safe space by modelling it. Set expectations for sharing.

SOME SAMPLE CHECK-IN QUESTIONS ARE:

- If you had to take an 'Inner Selfie', what would it look like?
- How is your head, heart and body doing?
- What is one interest of yours that others in this group might not know about?
- What is one thing you hope to get accomplished at today's meeting?
- What do you need to be compassionate/loving/productive/resilient right now?
- What is important for you right now?
- What is growing here among us?
- What has been the highlight of your week (or month) so far?
- What is one thing that brings you energy and joy?

Choose one question that you feel will give you an insight into how your team is doing. If you are not sure of how they might respond, you may choose to go first, sharing vulnerably and authentically, and often your team members will follow suit.

Activity 6: STRESS REDUCTION CHECK IN

Let us imagine you want to focus on stress reduction in your check in with your team, you could use the following questions to guide the conversation, asking team members to respond to each prompt below:

- When I am with a survivor, and I feel stressed the first thing that happens is
- When I feel like this, I can reduce my stress by
- People who I can talk to at work are
- People who I can talk to outside of work are
- Activities that help reduce my stress levels are

Additional ideas for ways to begin and end the workday or a meeting.

- Light a candle each morning and have staff choose their word or intention for the day.
- Play a morning song or morning playlist as staff are arriving.
- Say daily meditation or prayers together in the morning time.
- At the end of the week, go around the room and have every team member name one thing they learned about themselves this week.
- Have coffee together as a team several mornings per week together.
- Have the team agree upon an 'end of the day' song.



The little things? The little moments?
They aren't little.
- Jon Kabat-Zinn

What "little thing" matters to you?

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR GBV COLLEAGUES: *“I SAY HI TO YOU EVERY MORNING, BUT I DO NOT KNOW YOU.”*

Knowing who your teammates are can help you to better understand and support them through the difficult situations and the strong emotions that occur in GBV work.

Imagine you have a colleague, Zanile, who is working with a 14-year-old survivor who is in a forced marriage. Zanile finds herself having an unexpectedly hard time working with this survivor, often forgetting what she wants to say and crying after most of her sessions.

After weeks of supervision, Zanile shares that she has a 14-year-old daughter and sometimes the 14-year-old survivor reminds her of her daughter. None of your team knew Zanile had a daughter, and it now becomes very clear that listening to this 14-year-old survivor’s traumatic story triggered Zanile. If the team had known more about Zanile’s life, they might have been better able to support her sooner.

The following activities can be used to cultivate connection and team bonding.

Activity 7: SIX WORDS

This activity brings you and your colleagues together as you share your life story.

- Have team members choose six words that describe their life story: three words that capture the positive experiences in their lives and 3 words that capture the challenges in their lives.
- Ask team members to share their six words with the team and why they chose them.
- Close this activity with a statement like, *“Our life stories are filled with joyful and painful experiences. All of us would not be here right now, doing this work, without these experiences. They help us to empathize with survivors and give them energy and life. Let us not forget this.”*

This is YOUR life map.

Your life map is all about showing what is important to you. Even a seemingly small incident could have been a turning point in your life's journey and does not need to be exciting to others.

Activity 8: LIFE MAPS¹

Materials: paper, crayons, pens

Life Maps are drawings or visual representations of significant milestones that created the person you have become. Life Maps allow your GBV team to tell their life story and to deepen their bonds and trust. This activity requires approximately 2 hours (based on the size of the team).

Gather your team together and hand out paper and colored pens and you can instruct the team with the following directions:

- *Start off by recording the place where you were born, and the date and mark the different places you have lived. Put a date next to each place. Write why you moved to these places.*
- *Think about the different stages of your life. Which stages were happy, and which were times of struggle and difficulty? Think of symbols to represent each phase. For example, a tree might represent a time in which you felt strong and full of growth. A storm cloud might symbolize a time of struggle, and a medicine bottle might speak of illness or wellness.*
- *When on your life map did GBV work come into your life?*
- *Try remembering the first survivor you worked with. How did you feel?*
- *When you look at your journey map, how has GBV work affected your life?*
- *What things have you changed in your life because of doing GBV work?*
- *Think about how you feel now. Look at the journey you have made to get to where you are today. Draw a picture representing how you feel about your life today.*
- *Thinking about where you have come from and where you are now, draw a picture representing your future.*
- *When you think about your life and look at it represented here, what stands out as the most shining moment or highlight for you? Mark this in the right place and right time. Draw a picture that represents this amazing time in your life.*
- Bring the team back and have them sit together in a circle. Have each team member share whatever parts of their life map they feel comfortable sharing.
- To encourage vulnerability and to set the tone, you may want to share first. Your openness and honesty will encourage your team members to share too.
- Discuss the process of creating the life maps and what emotions have surfaced as team members created them.
- After everyone has shared, try doing handshakes, hugs, high fives or namaste (bowing with hands folded) as is culturally and gender sensitive. This simple act signals a closure to the activity.

Remember to:

- Share the time expectations with the team to ensure everyone gets a chance to speak.
- It is recommended to not ask any questions during or after anyone shares as it might be quite difficult for someone to open up and share certain truths of their life.
- Do let your team know that you are available if any of them would like to speak to you or another team member they feel comfortable with about their own sharing.
- If someone cries during this activity, give space for the tears, because crying too, may be healing.

¹ Adapted from https://humanities.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/humanities_uct_ac_za/1380/files/Mapping%20Our%20Lives%20Manual%20-%20-%20April%202007.pdf

Activity 9: DRAWING YOUR EMOTIONS

Material: crayons, paper

This activity demonstrates how we all experience and express emotions in very different ways.

- Hand out paper and crayons. Feel free to play calm, instrumental music. Tell your team: *"We are going to draw 3 pictures. Firstly, a picture when you were angry, then another where you were sad and then a final one when you were happy."*
- Tell your team, *"Start with drawing a picture of yourself when you are angry. You can write or draw. Use different colors to represent your feelings, thoughts, and worries inside or around the picture. Take your time to color or decorate your anger picture however you wish."*
- Give your team 10 minutes to draw.
- Now ask your team to, *"Think about a time when you were feeling sad and draw this. Think about your thoughts, feelings and what else was going on to bring about this feeling of sadness. You can also use patterns or colors to capture how you felt."*
- Give your team 10 minutes to draw.
- Ask your team to think about a time when they felt happy, and to draw this picture, similar to the above pictures. Give your team 10 minutes to draw.
- Separate the pictures of the 3 emotions, anger, sadness and happiness, into 3 piles, in different parts of the room. Create a gallery experience, where all team members have a chance to walk around the room and look at all the pictures.
- Discuss the following questions with the team:
 - What differences do they see between the drawings?
 - What are the different ways that the same emotion is expressed? (i.e. Some people might express sadness through crying, others through anger).
 - What can we learn about our team members through this exercise?

This activity shows the many ways your colleagues can express emotions. Some team members might become frustrated when they are sad, and others might need some quiet time and a solo walk. Knowing that we all express our feelings differently can help us to understand each other, and to give each other space to work through our feelings in ways that suit us as individuals.

Activity 10: SET BOUNDARIES

Learning how to say no and to be assertive about our boundaries is an essential skill when working on a GBV team. If we overstretch ourselves and say yes to everything, we are more likely to burn out.

Read the following scenario to your team.

Let us imagine this scenario. You are working with a GBV survivor, Inna, who shares that her husband hit her last week. You are the only person who she has talked to about this violence.

After this meeting, Inna starts coming to the office daily looking for you. One night your phone rings at 1am. It is Inna. She is crying. You speak with her for an hour. You wake up the next day feeling emotionally drained and empty. You arrive at work and immediately a colleague reminds you that you are late on a deadline. You are annoyed. You do not respond and you isolate and ignore your colleagues the rest of the day.

It is time to set some boundaries.

Divide the team into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- *How would you set boundaries with Inna? What would you say and do?*
- *How could you have better asserted your boundaries and let your needs be known to your team?*
- *How do we assert our boundaries with our colleagues as well?*



What made you smile today?

JOY GIVES US ENERGY: PLAY AND CELEBRATE TOGETHER

Let's imagine your GBV team had an overwhelming day. Deadlines! Crises! Stress!

The end of the day finally arrives, and you want to get your team laughing. You spontaneously start telling some new jokes that you learned. Your team laughs. Everyone is smiling.

Why do these joyful moments matter? They matter because humanitarian work often feels incomplete, like our work is never finished, like we are on a never-ending treadmill. However, when we take time to play together as a team, this can infuse us with renewed energy and resilience.

Activity 11: CELEBRATE LITTLE AND BIG THINGS

- **Celebrate birthdays.** Create a birthday calendar. At the end of the month, celebrate all the staff birthdays from that month and the team will smile!
- **Celebrate staff accomplishments:** Staff feel appreciated when they are recognized for their hard work and achievements. Be creative. Celebrations should not feel like just another meeting. Add music, food, games, even have it off site.
- **Celebrate randomly** for “no obvious reason.” Surprise your team with a cake “because it’s Tuesday” or “because you all work so hard.” Or you could just blow up some balloons and create a party.

Activity 12: TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

This game allows team members to learn unexpected things about each other. Extroverts have no difficulty in making themselves known, but introverts often remain an enigma. This team bonding game gives everyone equal footing to reveal facts about themselves as well as expose the assumptions others have made.

How do you play? Each person takes a turn sharing two true things and one lie. Go around the circle and all team members guess which 2 statements are true and which one is the lie.

Activity 13: BABY PICTURE MATCH (Prior to implementing this activity, ensure that all staff have access to baby pictures. This activity must be accessible to everyone)

Materials: Baby pictures

Ask everyone to submit a baby photo. Create a display of the photos with a number beside each picture. Everyone tries to match the baby picture with the coworker. If you are virtual, you can gather on a zoom call and show one picture at a time and have staff guess who it is.

Activity 14: APPRECIATION WEEK

Choose an annual ‘Appreciation Week’ for your team. Every year, before Appreciation Week starts, every member of your team secretly draws the name of one of their colleagues from a hat.

During Appreciation Week, you are a ‘Secret Angel’ for the person you have drawn from the hat. Your duty as their Secret Angel is to find creative and mysterious ways to secretly show that person love and appreciation during Appreciation Week - without buying any gifts! Do not reveal your identity!

Activity 15: TEAM DAY OUT

A day out of the office can bring the team together in a new setting, such as natural outdoor space or in a beautiful indoor space. This time out of the office could take place once or twice a year, depending on your team's budget and purpose. Be creative. This time away from the office could be as simple as a walk together in the park or by a river, a visit to a café or cooking or eating a meal together.

How can you bring more joy and excitement into your work life?

Activity 16: WHAT THINGS MAKE YOU SMILE?

Some people believe that feeling joy is selfish when there is so much pain and injustice around us. Humanitarian staff help people who are suffering but they do not have to suffer with them. Positive feelings and smiling bring us personal strength. Bring your team together to talk about what makes them smile.

- Ask team members to think of 2 aspects of their work lives that bring them joy and meaning. The list can be little moments, like when a survivor smiles in session for the first time in weeks.
- Divide the team into small groups (2-3 people) and have team members share with each other what makes them smile.
- Each group can explore the following questions:
 - What made you choose those specific memories?
 - What is it about these memories that makes you smile?
 - How can you add more smiles into your everyday life?



You must not be frightened if a sadness rises in front of you larger than any you have ever seen.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Let sadness wash over you, but not become you.

MANAGING STRONG EMOTIONS: “I’M FINE, BUT SOMETIMES I CAN’T BREATHE.”

Everyone has different triggers and reacts differently to traumatic stories, and what is difficult for one GBV staff member may not be difficult for another. Working with survivors can trigger a range of strong emotions in staff. Intense sadness, frustration, and other strong emotions are expected responses to witnessing the trauma of others, however, sometimes our distress manifests itself behaviorally or physically, such as headaches or increased conflict with loved ones.

Vicarious trauma is the cumulative effect of being exposed to someone else’s trauma. When our distress interferes with work, disrupts relationships, or causes distress, we want to slow down and explore what is affecting us.

Let’s imagine, Rena, a GBV caseworker, has met with 9 survivors today. She is feeling numb, and her brain is fuzzy. She is thinking, “*I can’t possibly meet with another survivor.*” Let’s imagine she gets up, closes the door, and takes 5 minutes to listen to her favorite jazz song. She closes her eyes and imagines her mind and heart being filled with music. Then she imagines that the music pushes the exhaustion out of her body.

She then opens the door again and meets with the final survivor of the day. This small visualization is a way Rena can ground herself and get emotionally prepared to work with a new survivor, even when exhausted.

What is traumatic
is personal

The following activities are ways that GBV staff can manage strong emotions. You can use these techniques anywhere, like at your desks or when heading into the field.

Activity 17: THREE MINUTE ACTIVITIES

Sometimes you just have 3 minutes to release strong emotions. With your team, explore short activities, such as the following ones that you can squeeze into your day. Add to the list below!

- In between back-to-back meetings, take three minutes. Take a big breath. As you breathe out, tell yourself, “*I am breathing out and saying goodbye to these feelings...*”. Name the feelings that are making you upset and breathe them out.
- Go tell one colleague whom you are close with how you are truly feeling. Or go to the bathroom mirror and choose one word that captures what you are feeling. Say this word out loud and exhale.
- Walk 1 or 2 laps around your office. With each step, imagine that one big drop of stress is released through your feet and into the floor. Notice yourself feeling lighter with each step.
- Go outside. Look at a tree or a flower or the grass. Take a big breath and tell yourself two reasons why you do GBV work.
- Play your favorite song. Close your eyes. Explore the song by listening to each instrument. Try to separate out each sound in your mind, one by one. Pay attention to the vocals: the sound of the voice, its range and tones. If there is more than one voice, separate them. Listen deeply.
- Open up your [self-care journal](#) and write or draw on one page.

Activity 18: QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORING STRONG EMOTIONS

The following questions (taken from the ITI Peer Supervision manual) explore how this work affects GBV staff. You can slip these questions into meetings, supervision or wherever you see fit.

1. How did working with that survivor make you feel?
2. Do you think how you were feeling this session influenced how you work? If so, how?
3. What have survivors taught you that changed the way you look at something or approached it in future sessions with others?
4. Survivor responses can often make us re-experience painful feelings and thoughts from our own lives. Can you share an example of that happening this week?
5. How did you take care of yourself in the session? After the session?
6. What was said this week that made you happy? Surprised? Nervous?
7. Share one experience that brought you joy or meaning this week in your work?
8. What self-care do you need to practice this week?

Activity 19: INSPIRATION CORNER

Create an inspiration corner! Have the team be creative and turn a regular room, or a corner of the office, into an inspiring, joyful space. Ask staff members to bring in items from their home environment such as plants, photos, blankets, books or whatever team members want to share. Arrange the room with soft lighting, relaxing cushions or blankets, if this is possible.

The team can use this space to rest or ground themselves after a hard day. This space can also be used as a breakout area where you meet with your team and talk through your team goals for the year, and the things your team values. Perhaps choose one day a month where your team can gather in the inspiration corner and do fun activities together.

Activity 20: TRAVEL TO A CALM PLACE

Materials: Paper, crayons

Every day, stressful experiences happen that fill up our cup. Eventually our cup becomes so full that it starts to overflow. When this happens, we often start to feel overwhelmed. Practicing simple grounding tools like Traveling to a calm place helps us empty our cup a little bit each time.

Have the team sit in a quiet place undisturbed for 5 minutes. You can read the following text to them:

Place your arms above your head and take 3 deep breaths. If you can, close your eyes, soften your gaze, or focus on a stable object (for example, the floor or a table). Continue with deep breaths. Let your shoulders and jaw relax.

Things to think about. If you have experienced trauma, violence or abuse, sitting with your thoughts can be challenging. If you find this exercise triggering or difficult, or you are not able to identify a safe space, just take some deep breaths. You can build up to this exercise through practice, and when you are ready.

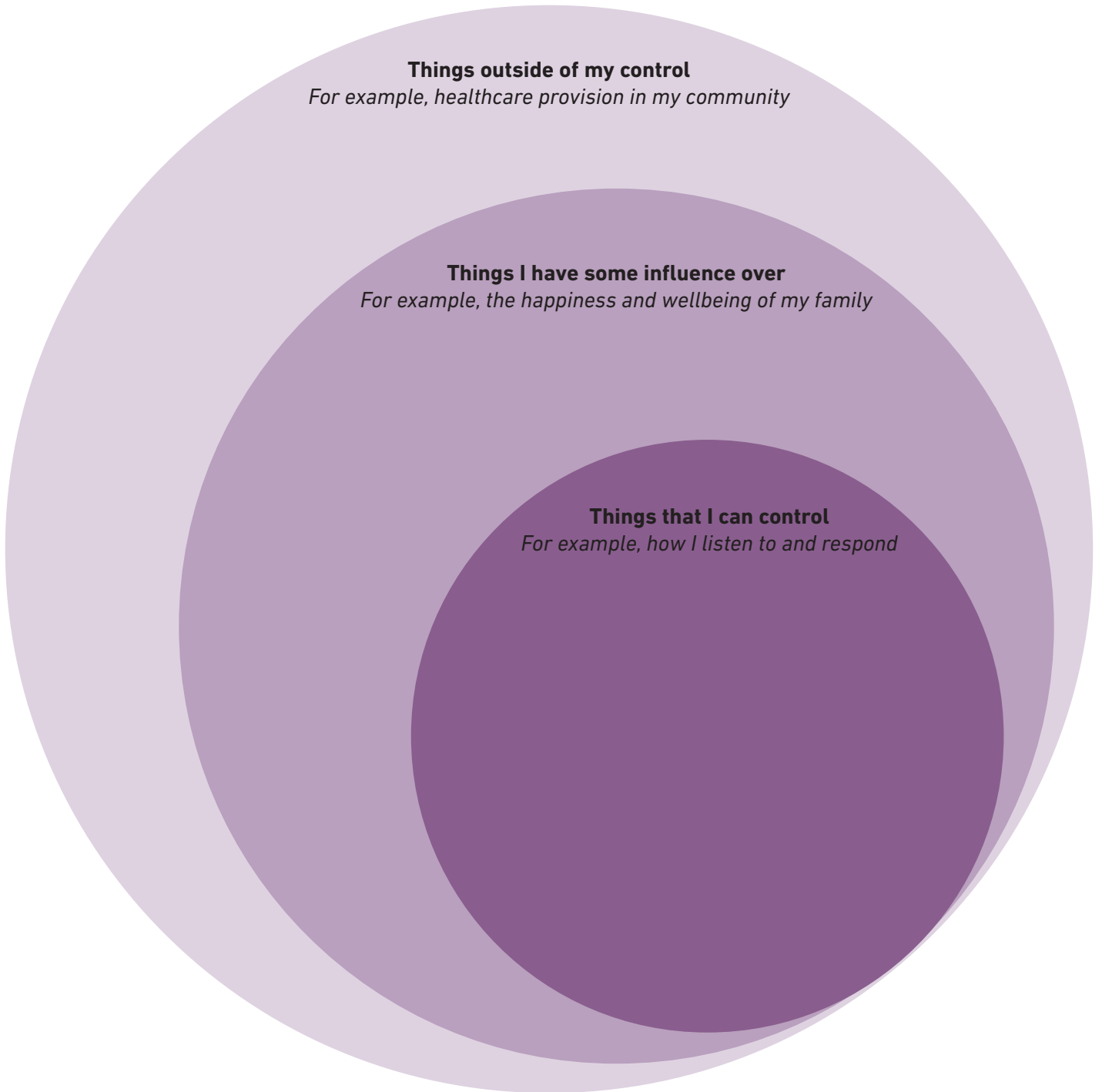
Imagine sitting somewhere that feels safe. This could be real or imagined. What does it look like? Feel like? What is the weather like? Are you on your own? With friends, loved ones, or pets? Breathe deeply for a couple of minutes and try to build up a good picture of what this calm place looks like.

Have team members draw a picture of what they imagined. Have team members share and explain what they drew and why they chose the images they did. Have team members keep this as a reminder of their own private calm space.

Activity 21: FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Sometimes we can feel as though nothing is in our control. Focusing on what you can control means directing your time, energy, and resources towards things you have direct influence over.

When the team is feeling overwhelmed, fill out this diagram together and have a conversation about how they can focus more on the things they can control.





Grateful

Thankful

Blessed

When we feel down, it's the little things that bring us back to ourselves. Like sun, tea, a good book, a special song, a walk, a sunset, laughter.

What brings you back? What makes you feel better?

MOVE YOUR BODY

If you have personally had a traumatic experience, your body may be carrying tension long after that event, and you might find that your body tenses when you listen to survivors' painful stories. Stress provokes tension, most often in your shoulders, neck, back or jaw. If you do not relax these areas, you can create a cycle of tension in your body and mind.

GBV staff can use the following simple activities to release some of that tension:

Activity 22: LET'S DANCE

Put together several playlists together with your team. Create: 1) a morning/beginning of the week playlist, 2) a relaxation playlist, 3) an end of the week playlist and 4) a celebration playlist.

Have random, spontaneous 5-minute dance parties in your office. Have fun with it!

Activity 23: PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Stress builds up in our bodies. Progressive muscle relaxation focuses on key areas where stress can build up, such as the neck and shoulders, hands and your forehead.

Tell your team:

- *Tense and relax each area I mention. Tighten only until you feel tension. If you feel any discomfort, stop or ease up.*
- *The first area is your neck and shoulders. Raise your shoulders up toward your ears... tighten the muscles there.... hold..... and now release. Let your shoulders drop.*
- *The next area is your hands. Tighten your hands into fists. Very, very tight... as if you are squeezing a rubber ball very tightly in each hand.... hold... feel the tension in your hands and forearms..... and now release. Shake your hands gently, shaking out the tension.*
- *Now, your forehead. Raise your eyebrows, feeling the tight muscles in your forehead. Hold that tension. Now tightly lower your eyebrows and scrunch your eyes closed, feeling the tension in your forehead and eyes. Hold it tightly. And now, relax.... let your forehead be relaxed and smooth, your eyelids gently resting.*
- *Breathe in deeply and hold that breath. Feel the tension as you hold the air in. Hold.... and now relax. Let the air be released through your mouth. Breathe out all the air.*

Remind your team that if they are experiencing high levels of stress, it is likely they are experiencing high surges of adrenaline. When this happens, sitting still and doing reflective exercises is challenging, and one way we can manage that excess adrenaline is through physical activity. Thus, the following exercises involve physical movement and activity.

Things to think about. Walking or other outdoor activities may be unsafe for women, LGBTQ+ people, people with oppressed identities, or others living in conflict zones. So, be creative. How can you create a feeling of freedom when you have limited movement? A dance party in your office? Creating an obstacle course and teams in the office? A weekly stretching group?

Activity 24: WALK AND LOOK AROUND YOU

During lunch or on a break, take a short walk. Turn off your phone and music, and simply notice what is happening around you. What season is it? What colors can you see? What can you hear?

Take the time to notice what you see around you, whether it is people, trees, music, or the pavement beneath you. You can do this on your own or with other people. Try to look at things as if you are seeing them for the first time.

Activity 25: LET'S STRETCH

- Draw large circles with your nose, looking up to the ceiling at the top of your circle, and down to your feet at the bottom, breathing in as you circle up, and out as you circle down. Reverse your circle and repeat for a few breaths.
- Now, shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, breathing in and releasing back down, breathing out. Place your hands on your shoulders and circle your shoulders around a few times.
- Try more exercises using the chart below.

Office Stretches and Exercises





**“Resilience is the ability to fall 7 times
and stand up on the 8th fall.”**

- Japanese proverb

STAFF CARE DURING ACUTE EMERGENCIES

During an acute emergency, supporting your staff is a priority. It is important to consider the different needs and situations of various members of your team, including:

- Staff members who are isolated, living on their own, without a good support network or who have certain vulnerabilities.
- Staff members with caregiving responsibilities at home or in their communities.
- Staff members who are grieving and struggling to perform mourning rituals.
- Staff who are particularly overworked or overburdened, such as those with extremely challenging cases or those who have particular emotional connections and responsibilities towards the communities they are working with.
- Yourself! You cannot take care of others if you do not take care of yourself, so start with maintaining your own health and wellbeing in challenging times.
- Encouraging staff to take the time to slow down, process information and manage stress.

Tips and techniques for team leaders during acute emergencies.

- Model healthy work behaviors, if possible, take short breaks and avoid working overtime.
- Share your own self-care strategies and do not be afraid to show your own vulnerabilities.
- Communicate clearly and frequently about: staying safe during the crisis, any changes to roles and responsibilities, and any support services that are available.
- Avoid introducing new roles or projects during acute emergencies.
- Focus on wellbeing and productivity equally.
- Create a culture of staff care: Create opportunities for staff to share how the emergency is affecting them and the importance of self-care.
- Set up buddy systems among GBV colleagues or create a 'wellbeing and staff care check-in call system' for staff.

GBV staff from oppressed or minority communities may face barriers to self-care and additional stressors impacting their well-being. These stressors may include experiences of oppression, colonialism, displacement, poverty, and discrimination.

Emergencies create additional work, stressors and needs for a GBV team, but it is incredibly important for team leaders to focus their attention on humanity over productivity while trying to work out how to provide GBV services.

Comforting language to use during a crisis

It can be difficult to know how to respond if your team is experiencing difficulties. Consider using messages and questions such as:

- *You are not alone.*
- *We think about you and your loved ones often.*
- *I am sorry this is happening/has happened.*
- *Is there anything we can do?*
- *We are with you. Many people are with you and want the best for you.*

Take time to recognize staff members' contributions and thank them for their work. Look for smaller, less obvious qualities and strengths in staff members, such as how they always bring joy into the room when stress levels are high or their creativity during crisis situations.

CONCLUSION

Earlier this year, in Ukraine, a warzone, GBV staff were asked: "What does it mean to you to emotionally prepare yourself for GBV work?" Oleksandr Kusyk, a psychologist shared how he uses water to give himself inner peace and strength. He said:

"Water is something that is good for me. I feel good around water. Normally, I like to swim, especially to dive but it is impossible now during this war time. So, what I do in the morning, when I come to the bathroom, I imagine myself in front of the sea, just about ready to dive. Then, I turn on the water, hold my hands under it and I imagine the sea is filling me. I even have the feeling that I can smell the sea.

Then I imagine I am diving as I wash my face. Diving deeper and deeper. And this "diving" makes me feel like I am at home. Like I'm full. This makes my whole day. It makes me go to work with a light heart and ready to do my job.

And then tomorrow in the morning, I will dive again."

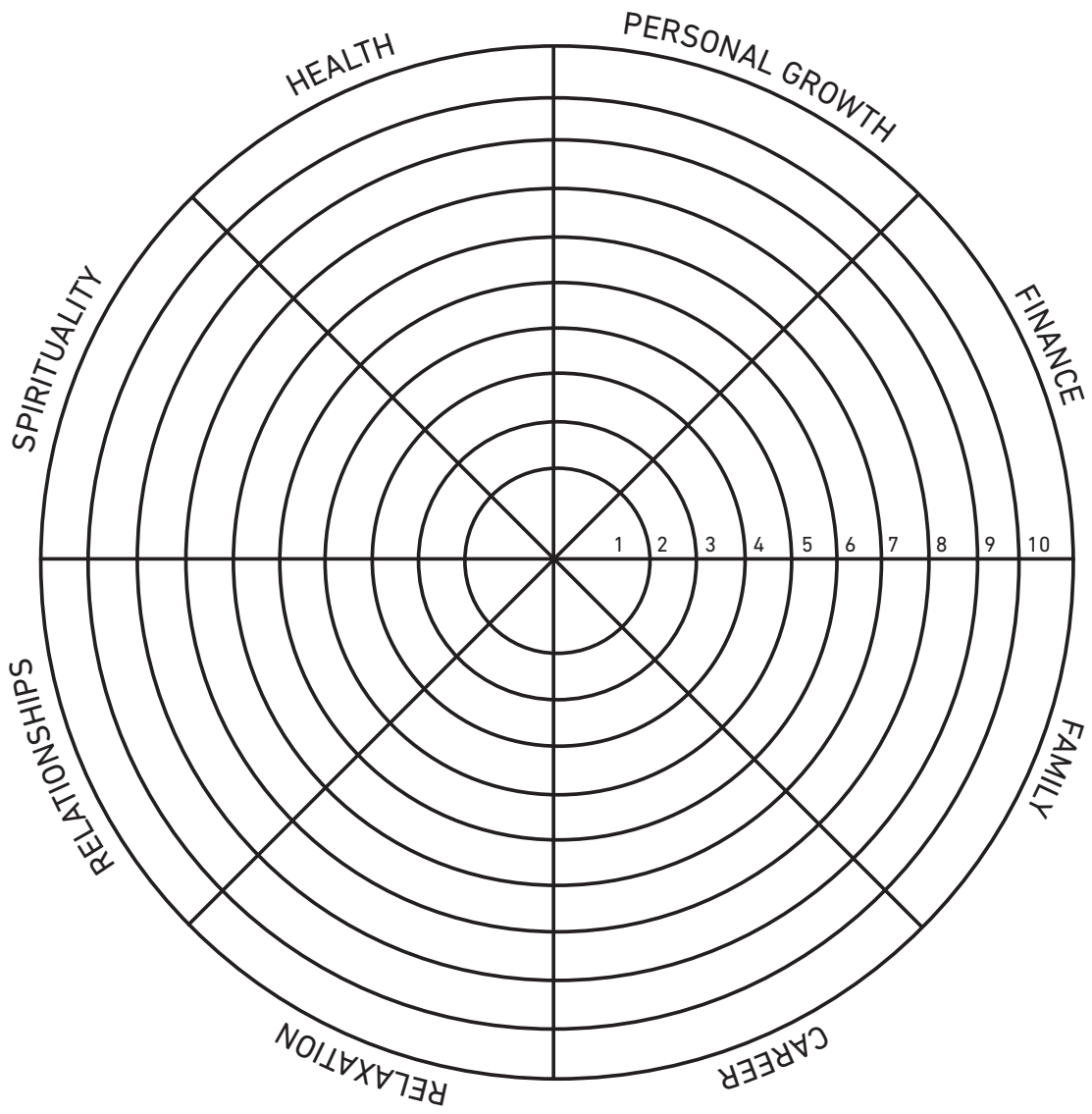
We Matter. We must do the things that fill us up with joy and energy. We all deserve compassion inside and outside of our work lives. When we prioritize staff care we acknowledge that whilst stress can be part of life, excess, long term, unmanageable stress should not be. Work with your teams to make the tools in this resource fit your team, cultural context and needs.

Staff care and self-care are vital to our wellbeing and the sustainability and impact of GBV work. Staff care is a daily practice. It is a commitment that says that your wellbeing matters, and the work that you do matters.



PART 3: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE WELLNESS WHEEL



Priority Categories

Notes

APPENDIX B: TRACKING MY EMOTIONS

TRACKING MY EMOTIONS

Observe your emotions, thoughts and physical state. Record all of your observations below. | Month: _____

Emotions and thoughts

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Joy																																
Calmness																																
Anxiety																																
Anger																																
Gatitude																																
Love																																
Excitement																																
Sadness																																
Peace																																
Appreciation																																
Bliss																																

Physical state

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Sleep																																
Physical Activity																																
Nutrition																																
Body Care																																
Walk																																
Happiness																																
Creation																																
Books																																

Reflections and goals

PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE (ProQOL)

*Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue
(ProQOL) Version 5 (2009)*

When you [help] people you have direct contact with their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you [help] can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences, both positive and negative, as a [helper]. Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these things in the last 30 days.

	1 = Never	2 = Rarely	3 = Sometimes	4 = Often	5 = Very Often
_____ 1.					
_____ 2.					
_____ 3.					
_____ 4.					
_____ 5.					
_____ 6.					
_____ 7.					
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_____ 30.					

© B. Hudnall Stamm, 2009. Professional Quality of Life: Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue Version 5 (ProQOL). / www.isu.edu/~bhstamm or www.proqol.org. This test may be freely copied as long as (a) author is credited, (b) no changes are made, and (c) it is not sold

APPENDIX D: DO NOT DISTURB SIGNS (15 MINUTES, 30 MINUTES, UNLIMITED)

Here are 3 different Do Not Disturb signs for your GBV team to use: a 15 minute sign, a 30 minute sign, and an unlimited sign. Enjoy!

Self Care Time

Please Come Back
in 15 minutes.

SINCERELY, THE GBV TEAM

Please do not disturb

Ats our Team
Self-Care time

FROM THE GBV TEAM

Self Care Time

Please Come Back
Later.

SINCERELY, THE GBV TEAM

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.headington-institute.org/resources/>

<http://preventgbv africa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Self-and-Collective-Care.pdf>

<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/8bf8-Vicarious-Trauma-Toolkit-2020.pdf>

<http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-for-web1.pdf>

https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/

https://pscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/14-Day-Well-Being-Kit_ALL_English_HKRC_202003.pdf

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003927>

<https://www.genderit.org/resources/self-care-self-defense-manual-feminist-activists>

https://headington-institute.org/files/vicarious-trauma-handout_for-managers_85189.pdf



“When your world moves too fast and you lose yourself in the chaos, introduce yourself to each color of the sunset. Re-acquaint yourself with the earth beneath your feet. Thank the air that surrounds you with every breath you take. Find yourself in the appreciation of life.”

- Christy Ann Martine