

Taking Care of Yourself

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What does it mean to "care for myself?" This is an interesting question since most often, we volunteer out of the desire to give to others. Sometimes however that giving can begin to feel like a problem or even a burden for ourselves. You see, our good intentions can easily get diverted if we are focusing on the well-being of others and not our own physical, emotional and spiritual health. You have probably felt really strong in these areas and that is what motivated you to reach out and be helpful to others who are struggling or "less fortunate." This IS a healthy and loving desire to give. So what could make it go wrong?

Sometimes volunteers or human service professionals become overwhelmed or mentally exhausted. Would you notice if you were becoming overwhelmed? If so, do you allow yourself a break or would you keep taking on commitments? Some of us keep going without recognizing our boundaries. It is kind to yourself to recognize when you are feeling physically depleted, emotionally taxed or when it is not a good fit between you and the person you aim to help. Do say 'no' when you recognize that you are not in a position to give further (perhaps easier said than done!) Positive self-care practices that help you to recognize your limits and help to fortify your energy are essential for all those who regularly reach out to others. With the current blossoming of spiritual development and holistic healing practices, it is easier than ever to develop a repertoire of healing practices for self-nurturing and self-awareness. Self-awareness or consciousness of what is going on within is key for anyone in the helping professions.

Another thing that a volunteer can learn from the helping professions is to seek out supervision. Do you reach out for assistance if you are uncertain as to how to be helpful or if you are uncomfortable in a situation? Talking about your volunteer experience is an effective way to help you sort through feelings and reactions that may be confusing. Just as those we help need someone to connect with, sometimes we do too and speaking from your heart is a powerful way to cope with that which seems unmanageable. Avoid trying to volunteer in a vacuum. Be sure that others are aware of what you are doing and what it feels like for you and the person you aim to help. Please be conscious of who you

Speak to about volunteer experiences however, for confidentiality's sake, and know that JFS staff are available to you whenever you have a need.

Here are some things to consider about your volunteer experience that can keep you connected to your purpose and prevent burnout:

Are you aware of how you contribute to the well-being of those you wish to help and our agency mission?

Do you maintain daily practices that remind you of your true purpose in life, that promote gratitude and a sense of well-being?

Do you feel successful in your volunteer role? If not, who can you talk to about the situation?

Many of the people you desire to help may have chronic conditions. Are your expectations realistic?

Are you comfortable in the environment you volunteer in? If not, can anything be done about that?

Do you feel valued by JFS? Please know that you are valued by everyone at JFS, since we know there is a lot to do and none of us can do it all! The perspective a volunteer brings in is fresh and allows for relationships that are truly unique.

All of us who work with human beings need to know ourselves, to do an honest reflection of what motivates the giving....and consider 'what am I getting out of it?' If you feel energized through your volunteer work, that is a good sign. If you have begun to feel burdened in some way, now is the time to reach out for some help.

Peace to you as you share with others the joy and strength that you have found within!