

The Seven Practices

Self-Care That Actually Survives a Caseload

Attendee handout | IBC C.A.R.E. Conference, West Des Moines, Iowa

Seven portable practices, about twenty minutes total. You already teach most of these — the assignment is to point them inward.

1. Watch the Fish 1 min

Don't try to empty your mind — that isn't the job. Sit at the riverbank and watch your thoughts swim past. Notice one, name it, let it go by without taking the hook.

2. Dropping Anchor (ACE) 2 min

Acknowledge what's here ("I notice frustration"). Connect with your body — feet pressed into the floor, fingertips together. Engage: three things you see, two you hear. Safe for trauma-exposed clients; use it mid-escalation and just after they leave.

3. 4-7-8 Breathing 1 min

Empty the lungs. Inhale quietly through the nose for 4, hold for 7, exhale audibly through the mouth with a whoosh for 8. Three cycles. **Caution:** breath focus can activate panic or restriction-related trauma — if counting spikes anxiety, go back to feet on the floor.

4. Defusion 30 sec

Take the thought — "I should have seen that relapse coming" — and prefix it: "I am having the thought that..." Then once more: "I notice I am having the thought that..." Notice the space that opens — you are not your thoughts.

5. Self-Compassion Break 2 min

Hand over your heart. Three sentences, said inwardly: **"This is hard right now." "I'm not the only counselor who feels this." "May I give myself what I'd offer a client who said this to me"** — then say it. Feeling worse at first is backdraft: go shorter, not harder.

6. Doorway Reset (Three-Step Breathing Space) 3 min

An hourglass, one minute each. **Attend:** what thought, feeling, and body sensation is here? Name it in one word; don't fix it. **Narrow:** gather all attention onto the breath in one place. **Expand:** widen to the whole body, then carry that into the next thing. Built for the doorway.

7. Metta for the One You Dread 2 min

Bring to mind the client you hope cancels. Silently: **May you be safe. May you be free from suffering. May you find your way, whether or not I am the one who gets to see it.** Then turn it around: **May I be safe. May I be allowed to be tired and still be good at this.** It will feel fake at first — you're rehearsing a stance, not a feeling.

Pick one. Just one. Attach it to a cue you already have — hand on the door handle, sitting down in the car, the moment the chart closes. Practices that hang on cues survive; practices that depend on remembering do not. Consistency beats duration: the trials that worked used ten minutes a day, not two hours a week.

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My practice



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Why this is worth your time

Mindfulness programs moderately reduce emotional exhaustion and stress in health professionals and robustly raise self-compassion ($g = 0.61$);^{1,3} a one-day acceptance-based workshop lowered burnout in a room of addiction counselors;⁴ and in a randomized double-blind trial, patients of therapists assigned to meditate improved more.² Caveats: some reviews rate their own certainty as low, and ~8% of participants across 83 studies report an adverse event — screen first.⁵ Low-risk practice; no substitute for staffing.⁶

References

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