

HOW YOU CAN
**EMPOWER
YOUR TEAM**
WITH
**SELF-CARE
PLANNING**



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Workplaces often strive to provide their teams with **mental health training and resources to ensure a healthy work / life balance**. It can be beneficial for all parties involved.

But we need to make sure that we are looking through a couple of different lenses: **one for the organisation and one for the individuals in that organisation**.

This is the reason why organisations and individuals alike should think about self-care and how they can build it into their workplace culture.

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WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care has meant different things to different groups of people over time. It had its roots in the civil rights, women's and LGBTQI movements. For members of society, fighting against discrimination and prejudice, the idea of being able to be both physically and mentally healthy was the basis of their fight for equality.

The underpinning thought is that being able to care for yourself, starting with basic body autonomy through to the ability to have the time and money required to care, was a basic human right that should be accessible by everyone.

It was a declaration of intent that said, **“I deserve to not only live, but to live well.”**



In the 60's and 70's, self-care became a concept that was incorporated into preventative medicine, as a way for older and / or mentally ill patients to treat themselves at home and exercise healthy habits which traditionally happened under the guidance of a health professional.

Modern self-care doesn't need to rely on the multi-million-dollar industries peddling gym memberships, spa trips and fad diets. It has instead become a thoughtful, deeply personal and accessible program that any business can adopt and encourage their staff to engage in.

Put simply, self-care refers to the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in, on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing.

BUT WHAT DOES SELF-CARE MEAN IN THE WORKPLACE?

In the workplace, initiatives that focus on maximising employees mental and physical health bring benefits for both the individual and the employer.



From the individual's perspective, this would equate to a healthy balanced lifestyle and psychological wellbeing. From an employer's perspective, this is likely to result in reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, and increased employee engagement and productivity.

The mental health of a workforce can be enhanced by minimising the impact of known workplace risk factors and maximising the impact of potential protective factors. Employees being afforded the time and encouragement to look after themselves is a powerful preventative measure.

To create a more mentally healthy workplace, strategies are needed at the individual, team and organisational level.

It has become common for workplaces to provide organisation wide initiatives to engage their employees and promote wellbeing. Whether that takes the form of yoga classes or resilience training, organisational initiatives are essential in creating a mentally healthy workplace.

It is also absolutely critical that individuals play a role as well. Employees need to understand how important it is that they look after themselves and senior management needs to create a culture in which self-care is prioritised and encouraged. It is a win-win situation with benefits for both the individual and the organisation.

It sounds simple and easy, but in reality when life gets stressful one of the first things that most people sacrifice is the time they allow for self-focused activities. When deadlines are looming and work days are lengthening people don't consider it a good use of their time to take a break or to do something for themselves.

Practising self-care involves recognising when your personal resources are running low and replenishing yourself rather than letting them run down to a point where you face the possibility of illness or burnout.

HOW DOES A SELF-CARE PROGRAM WORK?

When inducting employees into the Black Dog Institute, we try to empower them to look after themselves and encourage them to develop a personal self-care plan which they refer to and review regularly.

It is an individualised approach to wellness in the workplace.

For some people warning behaviours may be that they are not sleeping well, that they are drinking excessively, biting their nails or withdrawing from family and friends.

Next, they are asked to identify their self-care needs across four different areas and given a template to record activities they currently engage in and to choose new activities that will enhance their health and wellbeing.

There are 4 broad areas in which staff consider self-care initiatives:



Physical: eg exercising before work, having a healthy diet, going to the gym

Professional: eg turning work emails off on the weekend, not eating lunch at their desk, going home on time, delegating where they can.

Emotional/Relationships: eg making time for family or friends, going to the movies, recording 3 positive things about each day

Psychological/Spiritual: eg Keeling a journal, going to church/mosque/temple, getting out into nature, learning to meditate



A self-care plan is something that should be regularly reviewed as things may change over time with the changing seasons and work environment. Looking after ourselves should be a priority and necessity, not a luxury in the work that we do.